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College Students' Views about the Journalism Education in Spain
Valoración de los estudiantes sobre la enseñanza del Periodismo en España

Abstract

The paper presents the results of a survey with a sample of 1,552 journalism students from five public universities during the academic year 2011-12. The research addresses two objectives: how students evaluate the journalism studies and to know if they believe the studies are necessary to purpose of exercising the profession. The results indicate that most students believe appropriate the journalism studies, but almost but almost 25% considered them unnecessary. Students assess the quality of the training received in schools with an approved. There has been a multiple linear regression to find which variables explain this evaluation. The most influential is the course you are enrolled, followed by functions that respondents give to faculties. The paper presents the advantage of working with data from the largest sample used so far, which also includes all courses and the first promotions of students in the undergraduate studies according to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). It can be a valuable starting point for further researchs to make decisions on the academic. The study is part of the Sudents Journalism Project with journalism students in seven countries: Australia, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Spain, Switzerland and the United States.

Resumen

El artículo presenta los resultados de una encuesta realizada a una muestra de 1.552 estudiantes de Periodismo de cinco universidades públicas durante el curso 2011-12. La investigación aborda dos objetivos: conocer la valoración de los estudiantes respecto a la titulación y averiguar si consideran necesarios los estudios de Periodismo para ejercer la profesión. Los resultados indican que los estudiantes creen apropiados los estudios de Periodismo, pero casi una cuarta parte los considera innecesarios. Los estudiantes valoran la calidad de la formación recibida en las facultades con un aprobado, por debajo de la opinión de la mayoría de los estudiantes de los otros países del estudio. Se ha realizado una regresión lineal múltiple para encontrar qué variables explican dicha valoración; la más influyente es el curso matriculado, seguida de las funciones que los encuestados otorgan a las facultades. El trabajo presenta la virtud de haber contado con datos a partir de la mayor muestra utilizada hasta el momento, que además incluye todos los cursos y datos para las primeras promociones de alumnos de Grado según el Espacio Europeo de Enseñanza Superior (EEES). Puede ser un punto de partida valioso para posteriores estudios que permitan tomar decisiones a los responsables académicos. El estudio forma parte del Journalism

Sudents Proyect con estudiantes de Periodismo de Australia, Brasil, Chile, México, España, Suiza y Estados Unidos.

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1. Introduction and state of the question

University courses in Journalism have been an integral part of higher education in Spain since the 1940s. At present, some 80% of working journalists in Spain have a qualification in the subject (Farias, 2011). Yet there is still controversy over the educational model and its usage, how long the course should last, the direction and quality of study programs and the end result. Courses have gradually updated to respond to market demands, professional associations and society needs in general. However, it is difficult to evaluate the success of such measures over the past decade, especially those linked to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), due to the lack of empirical research. This study aims to provide empirical data for an assessment of the suitability of the current course model for Journalism in Spain and the quality of teaching in the faculties, based on the attitudes and perceptions of a sample of students (n > 1,500) from five public universities.

1.1. Journalism at universities in Spain

There is overall consensus on the dilemma facing journalism between the type of training proposed by academics and by press corporations. The response has generated five different training options: university, a mixture of professional schools and universities, professional schools, in-house training and university courses, and other media institutions and trade unions (Deuze, 2006: 22). In Spain, Pestano, Rodríguez and Del Ponti (2011) have identified four models: traditional, company-school, totalitarian interventionism and university. The latter is studied in this research.

A ministerial decree in 1971 authorized Journalism to be incorporated as a university degree course. The Information Sciences faculty of the University of Navarra was formally recognized, and faculties in Madrid and Barcelona were established. The return of democracy in the late 1970s saw the creation of a different framework for Journalism which now required a new type of professional. In the 1980s, seven more centers opened, 12 faculties were set up in the 90s and the new millennium brought 16 more. By 2013, 37 faculties (44% private) were teaching Journalism as a degree subject (ANECA, 2013). In 2011, there were around 19,000 Journalism students, with 2,640 new graduates joining the

74,923 who had graduated between 1976 and 2011 (INE, 2013). Although the number of graduates is deemed excessive in terms of demand (Farias & Roses, 2009), it is still one of the most popular courses among undergraduates and the academic entry requirements are high.

1.2. Evolution of the teaching model
Faculties in Spain initially adopted a humanistic teaching model (Cantarero, 2002) rather than the professional approach based on practical experience, as occurs in Anglo-Saxon countries. Since the majority of teachers came from areas such as Sociology, Philology and the Political Sciences, early study plans prioritized theoretical over practical content. In the 90s, with the emergence of new faculties, these study plans were modified partly as a result of criticism from other academics. Galdón (1992: 11) mentions the «educational nonsenses generated by a positivist bureaucratic conception of education». Later, courses acquired content that was closer to the reality of professional journalism (López-García, 2010), which included practical work experience based on agreements between universities and press corporations, a development which has also been analysed (Lamuedra, 2007). This transition also had to cope with overcrowded lecture halls, low investment and the use of didactic methods that left much to be desired (Ortega & Humanes, 2000). This context only partially improved with the reforms carried out in accordance with the EHEA. A framework was established based on the recognition of professional profiles, as demanded by many academics (Real, 2005), and on learning practical skills instead of accumulating knowledge. «The White Book on University Degrees in Communication» (2005) set out two important objectives: professional competences for compiling, selecting and transmission of information in different journalistic genres and formats; and, what Reese calls, «habits of mind» (1999: 75), knowledge and the logics of thought that enable a journalist to report, analyze and interpret social and political events to contribute to citizens being well-informed. The combination of these two necessities influenced the development of study plans, which became a mixed model with faculties combining theoretical training in Communication Sciences with a practical orientation. So, current study plans enhance practical training, with the subsequent effect on content and methodologies, and are more tailored to the needs of society (Vadillo, Lazo & Cabrera, 2010; García & García, 2009). Yet, every now and then universities question the evolution of such reforms (Aunión, 2011) and point to the lack of government investment.

1.3. The point of view of students and professionals
There has been some research on the level of satisfaction among journalists regarding the training they received at communication faculties in Spain. Canel, Sánchez and Rodríguez (2000: 2) reported that 60.3% of journalists believed it was important to get a degree in the subject, yet the perception among graduates of the quality of the teaching was far from positive. The White Book (ANECA, 2005) compiled data from two studies carried out at the University of Santiago de Compostela (USC) and the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). Half the graduates at the USC polled from 1995 to 2002 stated that their education had

been «mediocre» although 40% classified it as «good», whereas 64.7% of Journalism graduates at the UAB were moderately satisfied with their course in 2000. Although the samples were small, later studies based on bigger samples corroborated this trend. About 40% of journalists surveyed in subsequent polls (Farias, 2008-2011) classified faculty teaching in the subject as «mediocre». Gómez and Roses (2013) found similar tendencies in journalists' assessment of their training across the generations; graduates in 2011 classified their courses in equal measure as those who left university in 1976. However, the younger journalists were less critical of their practical training than their older colleagues; so, the reform of study plans in the 90s did not improve the general outlook on training but it did reduce concerns over the diminished proportion of time given to practical work in the degree course among younger journalists.

Other studies have examined the assessments made by Journalism students during the course. Academics in Spain tend to ignore this area of empirical research, but when they have ventured to do so, they have only taken small samples or carried out particular case studies that do not allow us to generalize. A 1999 study by Ortega and Humanes found that only 39.2% of students (n=189) stated that their faculties provided them with the best possible training to be a journalist (2000: 162). A later study showed that students (n=137) defined their ideal profile of a journalist as a person with experience, with good sources of information, audacious and with an easy social manner, while the specialist knowledge and formal education provided by the faculties was deemed to be secondary. The White Book (ANECA, 2005) includes a survey of students but the sample size (n=51) (ANECA, 2005: 29) negates the validity of the results as a generalization of student beliefs (ANECA, 2005: 118). Sierra (2010) found that satisfaction with their course among final-year undergraduates in Journalism at the University of San Pablo CEU (n=40) was 6.9 out of 10, similar to another study (Sierra, Sotelo & Cabezuelo, 2010) at the Cardenal Herrera CEU University in Valencia (n=40) which scored 7.4. In the case of on-line undergraduate Journalism students (n=121) at the Rey Juan Carlos University (URJC), 65% rated their educational experience as «positive» (Gómez-Escalonilla, Santín & Mathieu, 2011). Given that previous studies neither provide sufficient nor recent empirical data, this article refers back to two basic questions: whether it is necessary to take a graduate course in Journalism in order to work as a journalist, and the evaluation of the quality of teaching.

1.4. Research questions and hypotheses

In line with trends mapped out in previous studies based on small local samples of students (ANECA, 2005; Sierra, 2010; Sierra, Sotelo & Cabezuelo, 2010) and working journalists (Canel, Sánchez & Rodríguez, 2000; Farias, 2011), we set out the following hypotheses:

H1: Journalism students in Spain will continue the trend to rate the teaching received at the faculty favourably.

As a strategy to better interpret the results of the students' assessments, we also need to consider the following research question:

RQ1: Compared to other countries, do students rate the university education in Journalism received in Spain better than their foreign counterparts?

H2: Journalism students will express their need to study Journalism in order to work as journalists.

We also analyze student evaluation of teaching based on a search for statistical relations with a set of individual variables. No previous study in this area identified the possible individual factors that enable us to predict a positive or negative assessment of the teaching received at the faculty. So, we need to ask:

RQ2: What are the individual variables that predict a negative evaluation of the training imparted at Spanish universities? We wish to clarify if the type of profession chosen, the acquisition of practical work experience and the importance given to theoretical and practical training are factors that predict the outcome of the students' assessment of the training received at Journalism faculties.

The identification of individual predictors is useful in that they enable us to locate the groups that are most critical, and to explain the motives for such concern about the teaching of Journalism at universities.

2. Material and method

This work is part of an investigation that compares Journalism students' opinions in seven countries: Australia, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Spain, Switzerland and the USA (Mellado & al., 2012). It is a cross-sectional survey, and the questionnaire includes the dependent variable «the evaluation of the teaching received at the faculty», as well as demographic information and other indicators which this study analyzes as independent variables.

The study population consisted of Journalism students in Spain who, in 2012 when the field work was carried out, numbered some 19,000. For convenience, based on our network of academic collaborators around the country, we selected the following five public universities for the survey: the Complutense University of Madrid (UCM), the Rey Juan Carlos University (URJC), the University of Sevilla[1], the University of Málaga and the Jaume I of Castellón University. The characteristics of the survey mean that the results cannot be totally generalized since private universities or universities in other regions of Spain, such as Catalonia with a considerable number of Journalism students, are not represented here. Nevertheless, this is the biggest and most heterogeneous sample used for empirical studies on this topic comparing Spain to other countries (Splichal & Sparks, 1994; Sanders & al., 2008).

In order to get the biggest sample possible, we polled students in each year of the Journalism courses, and the field work was carried out in the early weeks of the first semester in 2011-12. Students were given a printed copy of the questionnaire during a timetabled class. Students who do not complete the questionnaire were either not interested in taking part or were absent on the day the survey was presented. The number of completed questionnaires was 1,552. Table 1 shows the basic characteristics of the sample.

Table 1. Sample characteristics						
	Jaume I (244)	Málaga (355)	UCM (275)	URJC (209)	Sevilla (469)	Total
Gender (women)	68.6%	63.7%	63.8%	62.1%	62.0%	63.8%
Ideological tendency	46.4% (left)	49.3% (center-left)	48.5% (left)	45.6% (center-left)	45.4% (center-left)	41.8% (center-left)
Mean age	20.21	20.37	20.27	19.56	20.85	20.37

n=1.552

We used descriptive statistical techniques to verify or refute H1 and H2. The dependent variable –Evaluation of teaching received– was activated from a five-point variable (1=Very bad. 5=Very good). RQ1 was resolved via the application of the ANOVA[2] technique to a factor for the comparison of the dependent variable averages. Finally, we used multiple linear regression to answer RQ2. The possible predictors were added to the model in two blocks via the «Introduce» technique.

- Variables included in the first block:

- *Faculty*. Since it was the teaching at each of these universities that was the reference point of the attitudes we studied, it was convenient to control the effect of this variable on the model to be able to examine the effect of the individual factors in an independent way. The original categorical variable came into operation in five dummy[3] variables. SPSS automatically extracted one of the faculties from the equation to avoid collinearity problems.

- Variables included in the second block:

- *Gender*. Dummy variable (1=Man).
- *Year*. This indicates if the participant is studying[4] at the (1) Start, (2) Half-way point or (3) End of the course at the time of the survey. Of those surveyed, 28.1% were at the beginning of the course, 52.5% half-way through and 19.4% were in the final or penultimate year of their studies.
- *Previous Studies*. This dummy variable indicates whether the student had already studied for another qualification (1=Student has already got another qualification). Only 9.2% had studied for another qualification.
- *Professional experience*. The dummy variable indicates those students who have already done paid work as journalists during their course (1= Professional experience). 10.2% had already acquired professional experience.
- *Reasons for studying Journalism*. This categorical variable has 13 response options (1=I could not complete my studies in another subject. 2=I could not get on the degree course I wanted. 3=It is an easy degree. 4=I have journalistic talent / I like to write. 5=I like Journalism as a profession. 6=To change society. 7=For the money I can earn as a journalist. 8=The opportunity to cover scandals. 9=To be famous. 10=Because I like to travel. 11=To meet interesting people. 12=Other. 99=No answer given). This was transformed into 11 dummy variables which included only those variables that represented at least 4% of cases, in order to avoid collinearity problems. A total of 49.6% decided to study Journalism because they liked it as a profession; 24.1% took it up because they believed they had a talent for

reporting or because they like to write, and 7.1% said they studied Journalism as a means to change society. The remaining options scored under 5%.

- *Career paths*. This categorical variable has five options: 1) News media; 2) Entertainment news: 3) Teaching and Research; 4) Public relations /Corporate communication; 5) No response. This was transformed into five dummy variables, with 69.9% of students stating they would like to work in news media; 16.9% preferred entertainment news, 7.2% corporate communication and 6% teaching or scientific research. The variable «I would like to work in news media» was extracted from the equation after it was found to cause collinearity problems.

- *Importance attached to theory in the course.* Two variables were used from a set of 20 factors that refer to teaching functions in the communication faculty (Mellado & Subervi. 2012). The first uses a five-point scale (1=Not important. 5=Very important) to indicate how important it is for the student that the faculty prioritizes theoretical training. The mathematical average (M) of the scores shows that students consider theory as no more than quite important (M=3.25. Standard Deviation [SD]=1.054). The second variable demonstrates the importance it has for the student that the faculty helps them to develop critical thought and reflection. The average score reveals that students consider this to be very important (M=4.43. SD=0.850).

- *Importance attached to work practice on the course.* Three variables were used to refer to teaching functions at the communication faculty (Mellado & Subervi. 2012). The first showed how important it was (1=Not important. 5=Very important) for the student that the faculty prioritized practical work experience as a fundamental tool for training them as journalists. The students considered this to be very important (M=4.33. SD=0.892). The second variable referred to the importance attributed to the fact that the faculty develops practical journalistic tasks in real settings (M=4.29. SD=0.861). The third variable indicates the importance the faculty gives to perfecting professional techniques during the course, which the students considered to be very important (M=4.03. SD=0.918).

3. Results

The students do not have a high opinion of the Journalism courses they are studying. The notion that their training is «Mediocre» is widespread in the survey (M=3.23. SD=0.855). And although the number of students who have a positive opinion of their training was almost double those who were highly critical (Table 2), the evaluation was less positive than that in previous studies (Sierra. Sotelo & Cabezuelo. 2010). On the other hand, the evaluation in our study is on a similar level, although somewhat more benevolent, to that made by graduates in the previous decade (M=3.21. SD=0.927. n=221), according to a study by Gómez and Roses (2013). In line with the data collected, we can say that H1, which established that the students would tend to evaluate teaching at the faculty positively, is proven.

Table 2. Evaluation of the academic training received	
Very bad	4.46%
Bad	10.62%
Mediocre	45.05%
Good	36.39%
Very good	3.48%

N=1,525

This assessment by Spanish students of Journalism can be better interpreted when compared to the evaluations of other Journalism students in foreign countries regarding their training to enter the profession. In response to RQ1, which asked if Journalism training in Spain was rated better or worse than in other countries in the study[5], the ANOVA test revealed some significant differences, Welch's F [F(5. 1244.074)=83.29. p<0.001] representing the variances between statistically different groups. In addition, post-hoc tests confirmed that the evaluation of Spanish students was significantly more negative (p<0.001) than that in Mexico, Australia and the USA, according to data obtained from the Dunnet T3 test. The highest evaluation came from Australia (M=3.93) followed by the USA (M=3.78) and Mexico (M=3.52), while the worst assessment was given by students in Chile (M=3.18), then Spain (M=3.23) and Brazil (3.29).

H2 is proved by a large margin, since 81.9% of students polled stated that they believed they needed a qualification in Journalism to work as a journalist.

RQ2 asked about the individual variables that would predict the rating given by Journalism students of the training they received at faculties in Spain. Regression analysis indicated that the model had only a modest predictive capability since the predictors included could explain no more than 22.1% of the variance. The final model is statistically significant in line with the ANOVA F statistic [F(21. 1450)=20.898. p<0.001], which reveals that the relation between the evaluation of the teaching and the set of predictors tested is statistically significant (see Table 3). The analysis clarified that the faculty where the student studies influences the assessment of the training received. Students at the Jaume I University had a more favourable opinion of their course than those at the other four universities in the study. With the organizational level controlled, it was shown that the individual variables included in the final model had a greater influence on the criterion variable than the faculty where Journalism was studied. The regression analysis specifically proved that the most important predictor is the course, showing that the students at the start of the course have a more positive outlook with regard to the training received. The analysis also showed that those who had decided to study Journalism because they are attracted by the profession give a higher rating to the quality of instruction received. However, those who had decided to do this degree in order to cover scandals gave it a lower rating. Another aspect was that the variable in which students expressed a preference for a certain career path also generated a negative evaluation of the training. This refers to those students who want to go into teaching or research, and those who want to develop a career in entertainment news reporting, both of whom were unimpressed by their training. The regression analysis showed that the students who

attached greater importance to the development of critical thought and who emphasized the importance of theory stated they were happy with their training, whereas those for whom practical work performed within real journalistic settings was important rated their education poorly. Students who had had previous work experience were the most critical of standards at the faculties.

Table 3. Regression analysis for the evaluation of teaching received in Spain[a]		
	Model	
Predictors/ Blocks	I	II
Organizational level		
Studied at Jaume I	0.082*	0.081*
Studied at UCM		
Studied at URJC		
Studied at U Sevilla	-0.066*	
Individual level		
Gender (male)		
Year		-0.385**
Studied other university courses before		
Has work experience		-0.051*
Motives for decision to study Journalism		
Could not get on to preferred course		
Because he / she likes Journalism as a profession		0.077*
Because he / she believes he / she has a talent for Journalism		
To have the opportunity to change society		
To be able to cover scandals		-0.086**
Chosen career path		
Teaching or research		-0.050*
Corporate communication		
Entertainment content		-0.067*
Importance attached to the educational functions at the faculty		
Development of critical thought and reflection		0.116**
Emphasis on theory in the training of journalists		0.070*
Development of practical journalistic work in real settings		-0.084*
Priority given to practical work as fundamental for training		
Importance attached to acquiring professional techniques		
Change in R-squared for each block	0.016	0.217
R-squared corrected total	0.013	0.221
Change in the F value for each block	5.830	24.077
p value for each block	<0.001	<0.001
[a] The columns show the beta standardized coefficients * Significant to a level of <0.05 **Significant to a level of <0.001		

4. Conclusions

The examination and analysis of the study data have provided us with some clear conclusions:

- Although the majority of students state that the quality of their Journalism courses is adequate in terms of preparation for working in the profession, we note that almost a quarter consider it unnecessary to actually finish the course in order to start work as a journalist. These results are consistent with the opinions of a large number of working journalists in Spain who have a degree in the subject.

- Spanish students acknowledged the quality of the training received at Journalism faculties, but by a very small margin. So, although the average evaluation can be classified as a «pass», it is hardly a ringing endorsement. This is more significant when compared with the assessments of students of Journalism in the six other countries in the survey. Spanish faculties are rated second lowest of the seven countries, only slightly better than Chile, which should encourage debate in Spain as to why this evaluation is so low and the changes that could be made to improve study programs and teaching methods.

- The regression analysis revealed the scant explanatory capacity of the center where the student studied, which underlines the generalized nature of the students' evaluation of the study programs they follow. Significant among the individual variables is the increasingly negative assessment given by students the longer they study the course, which had the most relevant coefficient (-.385). Equally significant was the collinearity of this variable when referring to experience gained in the working environment, as it seems that students tend to finish their academic training with a feeling of disappointment that builds up during the course.

In a similar vein, we have the data covering the importance attached to the teaching functions of the faculty. For although those who give more importance to theory and academic input look more favourably on these functions, others who demand that their study plans adapt to the needs of the current professional profile of journalists are not so positive. So, these students see that the difference between the training at university and the realities of professional journalism is still considerable, which affects the evaluation of the education they receive at the faculty. The results for Spain are similar to those in other contexts with models that resemble the Spanish model, and there are also similarities in other models of a more practical orientation (Skinner, Gasher & Compton. 2001; De-Burgh. 2003; Nolan. 2008; Vlad & al., 2013).

It is also significant that those students who want to go into teaching or do research are also negative about the quality of instruction received. Perhaps the study plans of the faculties in the survey do not match the expectations of those who wish to follow this career path.

- Regarding research reach, this is the biggest survey sample taken so far, which also straddles students in each year of the course and uses data for the first graduates in Journalism within the new European Higher Education Area (EHEA). So, this could be a valuable starting point for future stu-

dies to help decision-makers in the academic setting. Two factors need to be taken into account for future research: the sample design, so that data is more representative, and the construction of new variables to improve the explanatory capacity of the multiple regression analysis.

Notes

[1] The sample from the University of Sevilla was not used in the corpus of the working data of Mellado and colloborators (2013) but it was added later to the database for use in this analysis of Journalism students in Spain.

[2] The ANOVA variance analysis of a factor is a type of bivariate statistical analysis for contrasting, if there are differences in the average scores in the dependent variable of the groups formed on the basis of an independent variable with more than two categories.

[3] Dummy variables with dichotomic variables with values of 0 and 1, in which 1 represents the presence of a quality. They are useful for multiple regression analysis when the original variable is not dichotomic.

[4] Some universities in the simple offered four-year degree courses, others five, so the course variable was recoded. In the four-year courses, the first two years were coded as «Start», the third year as «Half-way point» and the fourth year as course «End». In the five-year courses, the first two years were classified as «Start», the third and fourth year as «Half-way point» and the fifth year as «End».

[5] The students in Switzerland did not answer the question on the evaluation of the quality of the teaching received.

Acknowledgements

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