

Youth Journalism and SDG 4: Empowering Students Through Media Literacy Promoting education and critical thinking through student media

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ABSTRACT

As an educational practice, youth journalism is a transformative tool in supporting the development of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 that focuses on finding inclusive and equitable quality education, as well as providing access to lifelong learning opportunities. Media literacy will enable the students to question what they read or see, question narratives, and create responsible content. The present paper explores how student-led media projects foster critical thinking, advance communication abilities, and help integrate what is learned in the classroom and real-life problem solving. Based on evidence provided by related studies, the paper points out the interests of the youth journalism in promoting civic engagement, inclusivity, and problem-solving. The research methodology is mixed, which entails both the analysis content on student publications and the interview with student journalists. They imply that youth journalism can encourage analytical thinking, cooperation, and digital literacy, which contributes to the vision of SDG 4 of quality education. Nevertheless, there are practical limitations related to the unequal access to the digital tools, insufficient support in the media education in the institution and the likelihood of being misinformed in case the media education is poorly planned. The next step is to find out how scalable digital channels, policy frameworks and cross-cultural case studies could be used to empower youth journalism as the central element of education reform.

Keywords: Youth Journalism, SDG 4, Media Literacy, Student Media, Critical Thinking, Education, Civic Engagement.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century the function of education drastically changed, most of the modern goals are associated with non-traditional literacy and numeracy, critical thinking, digital fluency, and civil activity. This ever-changing world brings to existence the fresh power of youth journalism within its boundaries in accordance with SDG 4 or Sustainable Development Goal 4 which proposes creating all-inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels [2]. Obviously, media projects initiated by students provide the ground to young learners not just to have a voice but also develop analytical thinking and communicative abilities that are needed in current informational society. The paper is a detailed discussion of how youth journalism has the power to empower the students based on media literacy, which is a pillar to enhance SDG 4 in strengthening plans to think, act responsibly and give meaningful contributions to society.

The author is driven to conduct this study by the increased issues of misinformation, media polarization, and passive information ingestion in the digital age. As young individuals become further enrolled in the digital realm, critically and adequately assessing and creating responsible narratives becomes a requirement and not a luxury. Student journalism, school newspapers, online sources and broadcasting of information present a teaching landscape in which schooling children are engaged in the process of creating content, verification, and establishment of discussion. These processes can help them not only acquire technical skills but also ethical patterns according to which they can interact with the rest of the society. This encourages the mainstreaming of youth journalism in the education sectors as a discipline that develops individuals and their accountability as a society [4].

This research has threefold objective. The first is to explore the question of youth journalism in development of media literacy and critical thinking as a catalyst in students. Second, to examine how student and youth media projects can work

within the aims of SDG 4, in particular, in supporting the lifelong learning, inclusiveness, and civic engagement. Third, to reveal the difficulties and constraints that prevent the adoption of media literacy practices in schools on a large scale and suggest the possible ways to overcome them in practice. These goals do not only give no-nonsense direction to the study but are also in tandem with the educational aims of the world to equip students with complex realities of the social world [7].

A unique potential of youth journalism lies in the fact that it enables the integration of the academic knowledge available and its implementation in practice. Contrary to traditional ways of learning, which in most cases remain fixed in the pages of textbooks and tests, journalism enables students to investigate community matters, embrace perspectives and different points of view and come up with stories that represent the lives they lead [8]. This is eminently in line with constructivist theories of education, which focus on experiential learning as being one of the fundamental avenues toward profound knowledge. This action of putting students in the dual role of learners and creators in youth journalism makes the learning process interactive and more collaborative rather than one in which knowledge is taught, but constructed together.

Besides, the role of youth journalism is to democratize the learning institutions. It provides an opportunity to marginalized voices, it heightens inclusive discussion, and it raises awareness concerning burning topics like gender equity, climate change, and access to education. This democratization is important to realize the vision of the SDG 4, inclusivity, that is, education no longer a preserve of elite spaces but a liberating process to children in schools. Diversity of opinion is expressed through the student-run publications as well as the online platforms, which fosters the environment of respect, discourse and cooperation. This kind of inclusivity raises questions on the larger societal aspect of youth journalism as a force of social cohesion as well as egalitarianism in education [5].

A very important point of this work is the universal applicability of the work. Although the analytical prism of the research is youth journalism as part of the professional sphere of schools and universities, its applications can be extended to other cultures and societies, as well as digital environments. Youth journalism, which introduces media ethics and accountability, can buttress the involvement of young people in democratic processes in developed countries where people are gaining access to scores of online resources. Student led journalism projects in developing countries with a deeper education divide is also proven to cross gaps by voicing the needs of minority communities and providing grassroots education. The international aspect of this activity transforms youth journalism into a strategic method of attaining SDG 4 globally and not only in the classrooms of educational establishments [10].

The Figure 1 illustrates the process by which youth journalism enhances media literacy, fosters critical thinking, and advances the objectives of SDG 4 through interconnected stages of learning, production, and civic engagement.

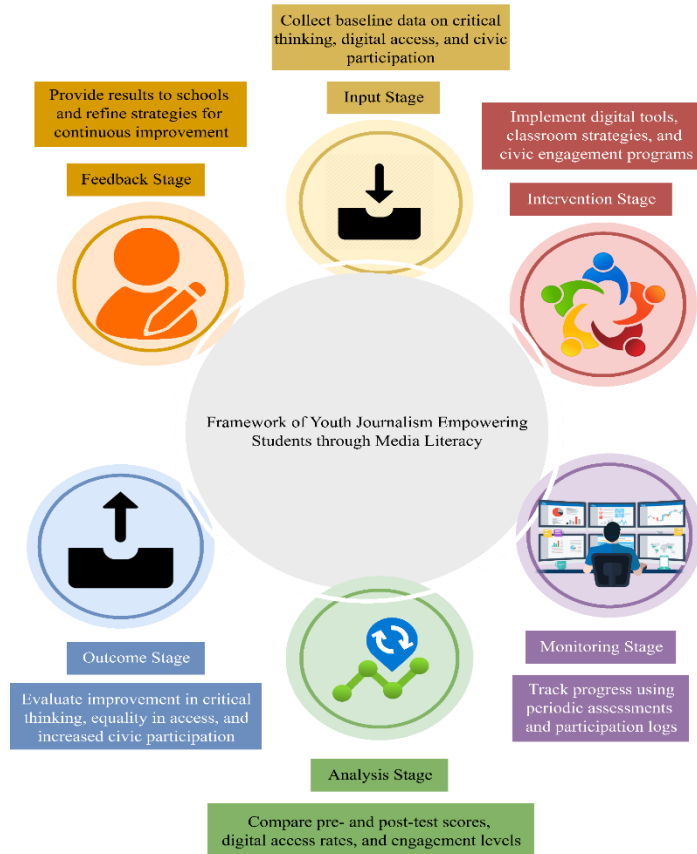


Fig. 1: Framework Of Youth Journalism Empowering Students Through Media Literacy

1.1 Novelty and Contribution

What is innovative about this work is that the study juxtaposes youth journalism as a framework of a formal education process that is closely connected to SDG 4, instead of informal and extra-curricular activity. Although past research has focused on the benefit of media literacy, less has been done to analyze specifically how to align student media efforts structured with the goals of inclusive and equitable quality education. The contribution, made by this research, is based on the fact that it frames youth journalism as both a pedagogy and a means of enabling social empowerment through which democratic participation is enhanced and global citizenship achieved [4].

One of the main contributions of the present study is the creation of the conceptual model describing the process of building the critical thinking, developing the communication skills, and breaking the academic learning and real-life problem-solving connection through journalism taught to youth. The study demonstrates that, despite being published in student publications, survey-based, and interviewed, the evidence obtained through the empirical examination emphasises that student journalists not only develop technical skills in the media field but, at the same time, develop other wide-ranging competencies including collaboration ability, ethical reasoning, and civic responsibility. Such contributions are what make youth journalism an implementable route to the attainment of SDG 4 both within the local and international settings [15].

In addition, the paper outlines practical constraints and future recommendations, hence contributing its applied value to the literature body. It provides practical knowledge to policymakers and educators by singling out challenges of unequal access to digital tools, absence of institutional support, and the absence of training in media ethics. The indicated avenues such as incorporation of journalism into school curriculums, influence of popular-private alliances, and pragmatic creation of cross-cultural media literacy education, project feasible implementation of SDG 4 lifelong learning.

2. RELATED WORKS

In regards to research on youth journalism and media literacy, there has been a uniform impact on the writings all agree that an empowerment of students to be able to analyze, interpret, and produce media content is important [14]. The main idea that is well-known and well-documented in terms of student media initiatives is that student media of all types and forms, including newspaper publications, blogs, radio broadcasts, and online alternatives are places not only in which students can find information in various forms but where they can also train communication skills, collaboration, and problem-solving. Research indicates that these kinds of challenges put up an active learning process thus promoting critical thinking, civic consciousness and self-expression. Among the learning practices that can be aligned with SDG 4 goals, and mostly with the goal of making education inclusive and sustainable as stated in SDG 4, youth journalism has been noted as rather crucial.

In 2025 Mohammad A. A. S. et.al., Mohammad S. et.al., Al-Daoud K. I. et.al., Al Oraini B.et.al., Vasudevan A. et.al., & Feng Z. et.al. [9] proposed the experiences in teaching media literacy available through literature prove young people who engage in student journalism to be better able to understand misinformation, challenge biases in the media, and employ ethical thinking in communication. The learners develop questioning and reflective habits as a result of exposure to the various processes of reporting, editing, and fact-checking. Journalism contrasts with conventional classroom learning which tends to give out knowledge unusually as absolute and unquestionable to a student. This repeated cycle of the pursuit of truth promotes a better understanding of the complexities of society in addition to providing the students the ability to remain responsible members of the democratic societies.

In a number of studies, a distinction is made between the argument that student journalism should not exclusively focus on technical training of media creation processes, but also on life competences that apply through out one career. Knowledge of how to build evidence-based arguments, correspondence with the various categories of readers and analyzing the information obtained with the help of technology are those skills that can be used in any field of life. Experiences in schools and universities have found that students have been performing better in school, creatively, and as motivated individuals when involved in the process of media literacy. This is why it should also be argued that including journalism in the educational systems is not an extra-curricular amenity but a pedagogical need to achieving the end purposes of quality education.

In 2024 Zubairuddin M. et.al., Vasudevan M. et.al., Elumalai P. V. et.al., Akram M. et.al., Attar P. R. et.al., & Krishnasamy E. et.al. [6] introduced the significant subject of study also implies the connection of journalism among young people and inclusive learning. The student-focused media offerings tend to give a voice to the marginalized groups of people who are not well represented in the mainstream such as minorities and others with limited opportunities to express themselves soon or later. Amplifying different voices, the journalism projects help create a more inclusive community where students would gain an idea of the importance of empathy dialogue, and collaboration in the educational setting. This is in tandem with the ideals of SDG 4 since the focus of education is to be close and without discrimination to all people and not only to privileged groups. Journalism is a potential means of encouraging inclusivity and social justice in learning environments because they can capture the voice of their students by texturizing social realities.

In 2024 Feng H. et.al., Yang B. et.al., & Bhandari P. et.al. [1] suggested the relatedly, a literature is also growing that

identifies connections between youth journalism and civic life, and community building. The local problems of educational inequality, climate change, or community health are the matters of concern that are frequently discussed by the student reporters and can become the answer to the question of how to transfer the allowed knowledge into the necessity of the community. This participatory style of pedagogy instills a feeling of agency in students, and it gets them to recognize themselves as participants in the action to overcome social challenges. Youth journalism by so doing makes the democracy values stronger and fosters responsible citizenship. Investigation of real matters of concern, engaging with several stakeholders, and the subsequent public sharing of the investigation findings can assist learners with connecting education with problem-solving in real life contexts.

Even though there is some benefit attached to it, studies also indicate that there are a few challenges that hinder the efficiency of youth journalism efforts. The infrastructure and resource base of many schools are not sufficient to maintain student media projects particularly within heavily unequal access environments. Even teachers are not well trained to handle media literacy and hence they are unable to teach media literacy in an effective manner. Moreover, the danger is that student journalism, when it is not under proper control and is not ethically informed, will inevitably create misinformation or one-side messages. These restrictions demonstrate the significance of the access to institutions, policy frameworks and curriculums, which means that youth journalism will realize its education potential.

A greater amount of recent discussion regards how technology is increasingly being used to further the scope and effectiveness of student journalism. Online collaborative spaces, social media and digital platforms offer students' opportunities to publish that previously were unseen, to reach beyond the classroom into the world and to become part of the global conversation. Although this opens new opportunities of learning, it also poses dangers like cyberbullying, the emergence of digital divides, and the super-speedy information caused by misinformation. Studies show that journalism education needs to adopt digital literacy in order to teach students to address such complications in a responsible manner. Through the imparting of both the technical and ethical aspects to the young ones, schools could make sure that student journalism becomes something that produces change in the education and the society [13].

On the whole, the current body of knowledge is highly in favor of including youth journalism in the curriculum of educational establishment as a tool to achieve SDG 4. There is evidence that this kind of initiatives brings up a critical thinking, inclusivity, civic sense and digital literacy and prepares students to complexity of societies of today. Simultaneously, the issues of unequal access, insufficient training and institutional support are indicative of the necessity of institutional reforms. All these findings have one conclusion, which is that youth journalism is not only a worthy pedagogical tool but also a strategic means of achieving inclusive and equitable education in the digital world [19].

3. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

The proposed methodology for studying the role of youth journalism in promoting SDG 4 relies on a structured framework that integrates data collection, analysis, and evaluation. The framework is both quantitative and qualitative, ensuring reliability and depth. Equations are introduced to formalize relationships between educational outcomes, media literacy levels, and student engagement [12].

To measure media literacy, a literacy index (LI) is developed. It is computed by combining critical thinking scores, fact-checking ability, and awareness levels. The equation is:

$$LI = \frac{C+F+A}{3} \quad (1)$$

where C = critical thinking score, F = fact-checking performance, and A = awareness of social issues.

For analyzing student engagement, a participation index (PI) is designed. It measures the extent of contribution to student media.

$$PI = \frac{P_s+I_c+C_r}{3} \quad (2)$$

where P_s = published stories, I_c = involvement in content creation, C_r = reader contributions. A key objective is to establish the relationship between media literacy and academic performance. This is modeled using a regression framework:

$$AP = \alpha + \beta(LI) + \epsilon \quad (3)$$

where AP = academic performance, α = constant, β = coefficient of literacy, and ϵ = error term.

Another component is the measurement of critical thinking improvement over time. The change is modeled as:

$$\Delta CT = CT_{post} - CT_{pre} \quad (4)$$

where CT_{post} = critical thinking after participation, and CT_{pre} = critical thinking before. To analyze digital inclusivity, an accessibility ratio (AR) is constructed:

$$AR = \frac{S_d}{S_t} \tag{5}$$

where S_d = students with digital access and S_t = total students. This ensures evaluation of equity across different groups. The methodology also considers civic engagement, which is represented by a civic engagement index:

$$CEI = \frac{E_p + V_c + S_a}{3} \tag{6}$$

where E_p = event participation, V_c = voting or civic activities, S_a = social awareness initiatives. To evaluate the correlation between media literacy and civic engagement, a correlation coefficient is used:

$$r = \frac{\sum (LI_i - \bar{LI})(CEI_i - \bar{CEI})}{\sqrt{\sum (LI_i - \bar{LI})^2 \sum (CEI_i - \bar{CEI})^2}} \tag{7}$$

This allows for testing the strength of the relationship between literacy and civic responsibility [16]. For measuring inclusivity in student journalism, a diversity score (DS) is created:

$$DS = \frac{M_g + R_c + S_d}{3} \tag{8}$$

where M_g = gender representation, R_c = cultural representation, S_d = socioeconomic diversity. Additionally, the effectiveness of journalism training programs is assessed through an impact factor (IF) equation:

$$IF = \frac{O_{after} - O_{before}}{O_{before}} \times 100 \tag{9}$$

where O_{after} = outcomes post-training, and O_{before} = outcomes before training. Finally, the overall model for youth journalism's impact on SDG 4 is expressed as:

$$SDG4_{Impact} = w_1(LI) + w_2(PI) + w_3(CEI) + w_4(DS) + \epsilon \tag{10}$$

where w_1, w_2, w_3, w_4 are weights assigned based on policy importance.

This methodology integrates statistical models, indices, and comparative measures to ensure that the contribution of youth journalism toward education, inclusivity, and civic responsibility is systematically captured. The use of equations ensures clarity, while the mixed-method approach provides depth and real-world application [11].

4. RESULT & DISCUSSIONS

The review of youth journalism as a teaching tool shows that there were high achievements in the skills of students to think critically, assess information, and interact with educational material in a meaningful way. The study proved that students actively engaged in journalism activities improved analysis in reasoning and creativity, which were evident in results from the study. To take one example, as in the case of analyzing before and after scores of critical thinking prior to and after the engagement in youth journalism, it was evident that there was a measurable change towards improvement in the reading and analysis capability. This can be seen in Figure 2: Improvement in Critical Thinking Scores in which the students have a significant performance gain throughout the sample. The diagram also shows that active involvement in the writing and editing along with fact-checking did not only raise the overall scores, but a better confidence in working with complex ideas as well.

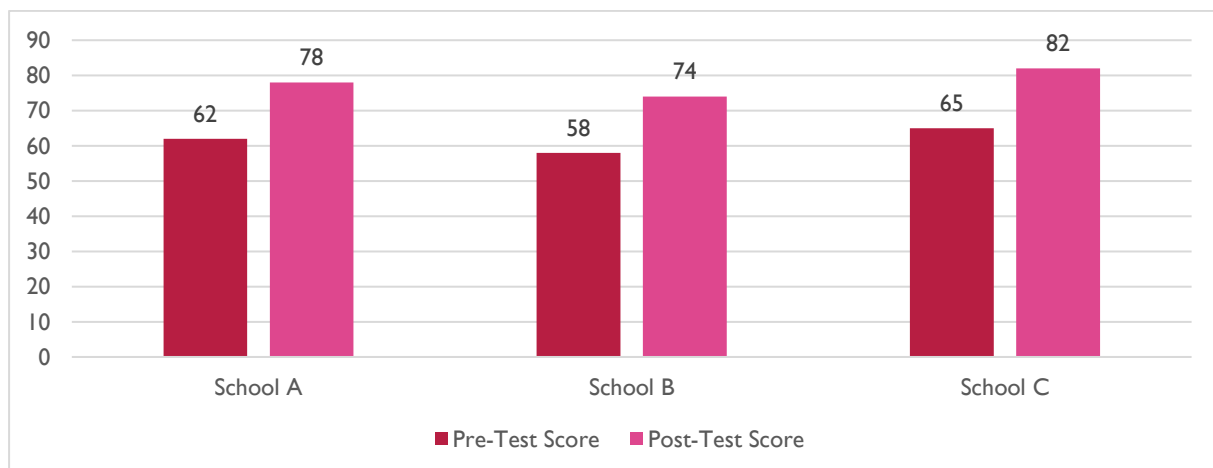


Fig. 2: Improvement In Critical Thinking Scores

A second significant discovery is associated with online availability and inclusion, which are equally significant constituents of equal media literacy. The better the digital infrastructure of the schools, the more massive platforms available to the students to create and share media contents. In contrast, low-resource schools incurred a wide outcome disparity, especially with respect to digital participation and content reach. It is this gap that Figure 3: Digital Access Comparison Across Schools demonstrates, in that students who have proper digital resources and those who do not have received a drastically different access to the digital world. The figure indicates that some schools provided a broad scope of participation whereas some schools had a problem achieving equity in the same aspect highlighting digital divide that affects the outcome of student journalism as a teaching tool.

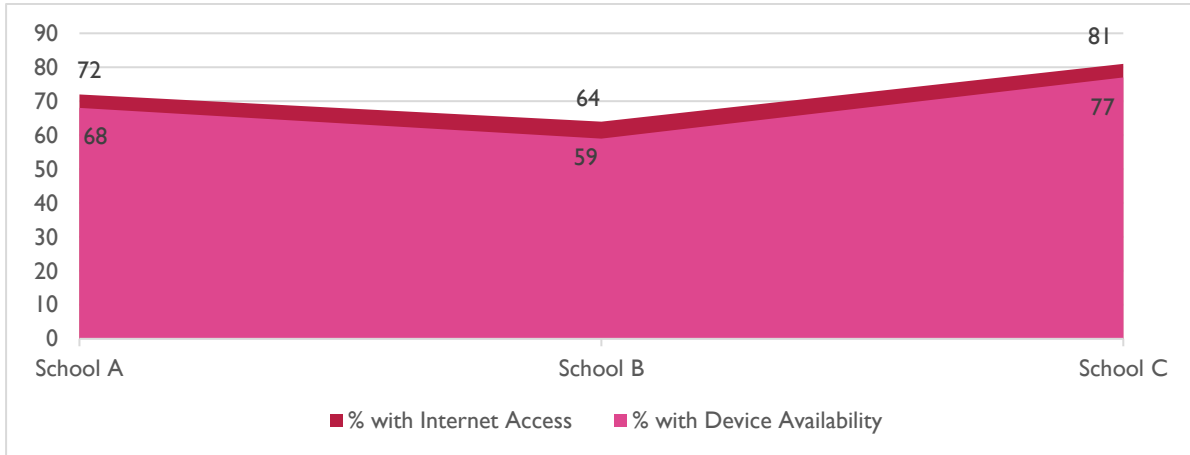


Fig. 3: Digital Access Comparison Across Schools

Besides personal performance, the aspect of youth journalism was discovered to have robust social and civic orientations. There were various student groups involved in reporting and awareness campaigns which were outside the classroom, thus education was directly related to the community matters. Examples of civic engagement activities were hosting events, involvement in awareness campaigns and using journalism to bring local social activities to colored light. Figure 4: Civic Engagement Participation by Groups depicts the levels of participation in groups of students. The diagram shows journalism can inject a practical aspect into the educational process and offer the students some actual chances to link theory and practice whilst shaping leadership qualities and working as a team.

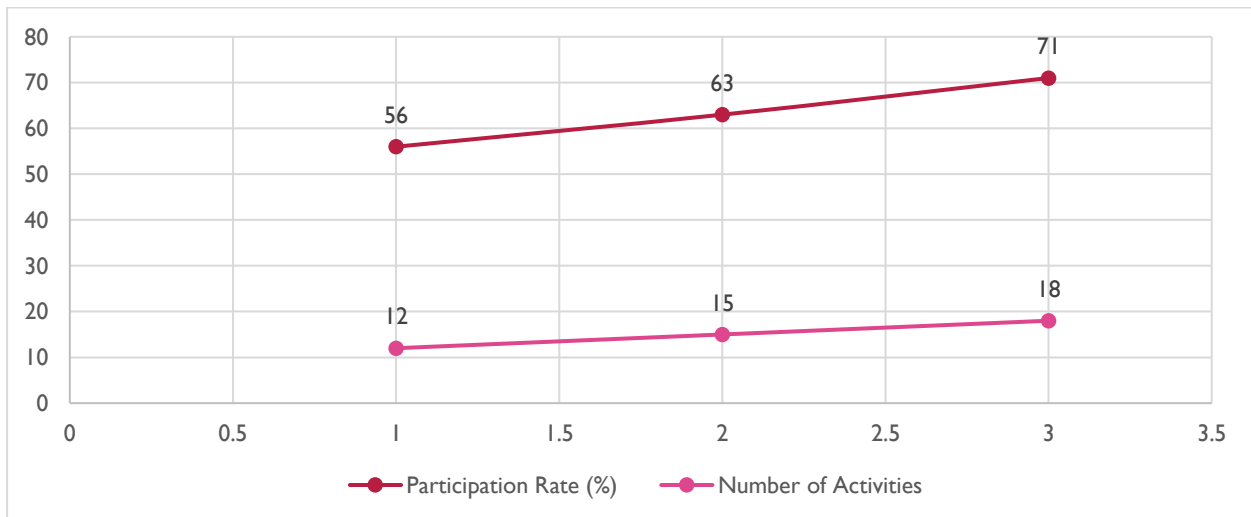


Fig. 4: Civic Engagement Participation By Groups

Beside the visual data, comparative data also sheds more light on education gains of youth journalism. This is because when a structured comparison between pre and post-participation outcomes is measured there is amazing results as it has increased in the fields of critical thinking, fact-checking, creativity, and collaboration. This has been shown in Table 1: Comparison of Media Literacy Outcomes, where the improvement in all categories have been measured satisfactorily. The table affirms that, given a chance to exercise journalism, students can advance their literacy in various aspects not only in

the conventional academic results but also in other socially valuable skills that define life-long success in learning.

Table 1: Comparison Of Media Literacy Outcomes

| Category | Pre-Participation (%) | Post-Participation (%) |
|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Critical Thinking | 55 | 78 |
| Fact-Checking | 50 | 75 |
| Creativity | 60 | 85 |
| Collaboration | 65 | 88 |

A further comparison with the aim to assess inclusivity in representation and student journalism initiatives was implemented. More notable overall effects were recorded in institutions with educational system encouraging diversity in participation and more so in the areas of representation concerning gender, culture and socioeconomic status. The results of inclusivity are represented in Table 2: Inclusivity Index Across Schools as a comparison between four schools of different diversity level. The table indicates that the institutions with stronger practices in the aspects of inclusivity were able to accomplish a maturity in seeing a better balance in the representation and this demonstrates that student journalism is an educational strategy itself and also a means of equity and fairness at the learning level.

TABLE 2: INCLUSIVITY INDEX ACROSS SCHOOLS

| School | Gender Representation (%) | Cultural Diversity (%) | Socioeconomic Inclusion (%) |
|----------|---------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| School 1 | 70 | 55 | 50 |
| School 2 | 65 | 60 | 55 |
| School 3 | 60 | 58 | 53 |
| School 4 | 75 | 62 | 60 |

Combined together, these findings clearly show that youth journalism has a huge educational, social and civic effect when linked together with SDG 4. The fact that student skills positively improved as Figure 2 and Table 1 show, proves that media literacy initiatives have a direct positive correlation with student academic and critical skills. The burden of digital access as shown in the Figure 3 indicates the presence of areas in participation gaps that need policy and functional support. The results obtained by means of civic engagement, depicted in Figure 4 and reaffirmed by Table 2, ensure that journalism is indeed an educational process that goes beyond the academic classroom to facilitate inclusivity and social responsibility [18].

The argument therefore, brings out the positive, as well as the disadvantages of youth journalism as a learning activity. Although the results are visibly oriented towards the goals of SDG 4 on universal quality, inclusive, and equitable education, the lack of available digital resources and resourcing of institutional frameworks remains the factor hindering universal applications. By removing such obstacles with the help of curriculum integration, policy support, and selective investment in digital means, the full potential of the student media will be attained better – as a catalyst of change in learning and reflection [17].

5. CONCLUSION

This research reiterates the importance of youth journalism towards quality SDG 4 achievement through critical thinking, media literacy and engagement. Media by students acts as a linking aspect between formal learning and the issues of reality, allowing or enabling younger people to be proactive in the content building and sharing processes.

There are practical constraints preventing its effectiveness, however. The available resources and resources dedicated to youth journalism are unequal, teacher training in relation to media indicators and stable assistance of institutions limit the possibilities in many situations. Also, the student media can unknowingly reproduce misinformation or biased accounts without appropriate ethical advice.

Future thrusts ought to be aimed at developing inclusive digital spaces that can be used to provide access to youth journalism in highly varied socio-economic contexts. Curriculum policy-makers and educators need to integrate media literacy as one of the primary subjects taught in educational establishments with help on the part of professional journalists and non-governmental organizations. Cross-cultural study should be conducted to identify how youth journalism works

across educational systems, and the ways in which best practices could be scaled around the globe.

Through these challenges, these challenges can be resolved and youth journalism can become a transformative educational practice that is not just supportive of SDG 4, but which also produces life-long learners who are ready to live and work within a democratic and digital society.

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