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Educational Management and Leadership: Communication strategies for academic performance based on a gender approach and in Ecuador

Gestión educativa y liderazgo. Estrategias de comunicación para el rendimiento escolar basado en enfoque de género y en Ecuador

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this review article is to carry out an analysis derived from educational management and leadership, as transmission mechanisms in the formulation of communicational strategies that articulate better school performance without disregarding the gender approach. A review study was carried out in the Scopus, Web of Science and Scielo databases, based on a qualitative approach with a hermeneutic design. The most relevant findings are framed in the leading role of teachers, their leadership to communicate effectively in educational environments and the ways to apply strategies that pursue communication with a gender approach in the classroom. Four data matrices were generated representing the main categories and codes by theme. The main conclusions focus on the dimensions of communication and its role in the understanding between actors in different school spaces. It is vital for the teacher to be an example in the community and to dynamize the relationship with the family for the formation of values with a gender approach.

Keywords: communication process, intercultural dialogue, interpersonal communication, leadership, management by objectives.

JEL Classification: I2, I20, I21

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RESUMEN

El propósito del presente artículo de revisión es realizar un análisis derivado desde la gestión educativa y el liderazgo, como mecanismos de transmisión en la formulación de estrategias comunicacionales que articulen un mejor rendimiento escolar sin desestimar el enfoque de género. Se llevó a cabo un estudio de revisión en las bases de datos Scopus, Web of Science y Scielo, sustentado en un enfoque cualitativo con diseño hermenéutico. Los hallazgos más relevantes se enmarcan en el rol protagónico de los docentes, su liderazgo para lograr comunicarse efectivamente en los entornos educativos y las vías para aplicar estrategias que persigan la comunicación con enfoque de género en las aulas. Se generaron cuatro matrices de datos que representan las principales categorías y códigos por tema. Las principales conclusiones se centran en las dimensiones de la comunicación y su papel en el entendimiento entre los actores de diferentes espacios escolares. Es vital que el docente sea ejemplo en la comunidad y que dinamice la relación con la familia para la formación de valores con enfoque de género.

Palabras clave: comunicación interpersonal, diálogo intercultural, dirección a través de objetivos, liderazgo, proceso de comunicación.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the teaching career has acquired great influence and relevance in Ecuador's public life. Numerous initiatives and training programs have emerged specifically aimed at teachers without teaching degrees. At the same time, a convergence of educational discourses and policies has been observed aimed at prioritizing and strengthening teacher training. These discourses and precedents are promoted by both the Ministry of Education and universities, which play a fundamental role in creating academic communities (Bastidas, 2020).

Likewise, other antecedents to the dynamics of education in Ecuador must be addressed and understood to achieve



true development of the educational system (Guijarro-Garvi et al., 2022). As this process of expanding the teaching profession progresses, it is crucial to consider both the efforts to professionalize teaching and the complexities that arise in daily practice. Continuing education, knowledge updating, and consolidating an academic community with up-to-date skills are key elements to strengthen the scope of teachers' work and ensure quality education.

Furthermore, the specific needs and challenges of each educational level and socioeconomic context must be considered (Houtepen et al., 2020). It is important to focus on the relevance of inclusion, equity, appreciation, and equal access to education, as well as on the recognition of culture and diversity, respect for gender, and the linguistic diversity of our country. By extension, for Pirela Espina (2022), it is essential to consider educational practices and the challenges that arise in reality, as well as to address the specific needs of each educational level and social context. Progress can be made toward a strong and equitable education system through a comprehensive approach involving the different stakeholders intrinsically involved in education.

In this sense, educational management, according to Canaza-Choque (2022), is debated in the extensive research literature, and its theoretical contributions are considered an important field of scientific production. There are several variables in the existing definitions, but there is a clear consensus that educational management refers to the administrative and organizational activities necessary to direct and program formal or non-formal education within the broader educational system at its different levels, whether in educational establishments or educational entities (Hallinger, 2020). Educational management, according to Apaza and Rivera (2022), can be approached from the dual perspective of the school leader and their influence on strategic decisions made at the institutional level.

Therefore, it is essential to understand that educational management goes beyond simple administration, as it implies a comprehensive and strategic leadership vision to achieve educational excellence and student development (Donkoh et al., 2023). Currently, Hasek and Ortiz (2021) recognize that educational management plays a key role in achieving educational goals and ensuring high-quality processes. Furthermore, international literature indicates that educational leaders with managerial and pedagogical skills are required to promote inclusive learning environments, encourage the academic community's participation, and ensure equitable access to education (Óskarsdóttir et al., 2020).

In response to these needs, a significant gap is identified in the study of the intersection of the three categories examined. Therefore, a literature review was conducted in three of the most important databases to identify relevant, significant, and influential sources. After this, a hermeneutical and thematic analysis was conducted, focusing on key concepts in communication, its characteristics in school contexts, its relationship with academic performance, and the details for adopting an appropriate gender approach.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Gender equality and the scope of educational management

Gender equality not only implies being similar in all aspects, subject to duties and rights, but also recognizing and valuing the differences that each individual brings to social life (Sarsons et al., 2021). Therefore, it is crucial to break down the barriers that affect people's lives based on gender and provide them with diverse opportunities for individual, group, and social development. This benefits the heterogeneous community and promotes greater personal balance and well-being.

Currently, increasing importance is placed on emotional intelligence and the need to educate students in the development of emotional competencies (Bru-Luna et al., 2021). These competencies are essential for functioning respectfully in life, properly managing academic aspects, and achieving solid personal integration. Fostering emotional intelligence also promotes gender equality (Morales et al., 2020).

Likewise, the literature agrees that gender equality is not exclusive to the diversity of skills and talents that human beings possess (Belingheri et al., 2021; Eden & Wagstaff, 2021). It is necessary to value each person based on their capacities, regardless of gender (Solbes-Canales et al., 2020). By breaking down gender barriers and promoting emotional intelligence education, it is hoped to promote future personal and social development, which will be more equitable and satisfying for future generations (Llamas-Díaz et al., 2023).

In this same sense, Ruiz (2023) adds that this comprehensive management also takes into account and considers the valuable social environment in which the institution is immersed, so interaction and collaboration with the community must be encouraged. Another important aspect is planning and execution, which indicate that

awareness-raising activities must be carried out prominently at the classroom level in a personalized and attentive manner. Likewise, it is necessary to include a set of innovative and evaluative strategies that stimulate the potential of each student, as explained by Carmona (2024).

Importance of leadership in the educational field

Educational leadership involves building healthy environments with a positive climate and relationships of respect and trust throughout the educational community (Leithwood et al., 2020). Effective leadership entails building and maintaining the morale of others, as well as employee effectiveness and well-being (Dooris et al., 2021). Furthermore, recent research conducted by Aranda and Luque (2024) indicated that effective leadership caters to diverse leadership styles and that members of the educational community prefer leaders who direct them empathetically and understandingly.

Leadership in the educational field is goal-oriented and actively engages with others in achieving established objectives and improving conditions (Shen et al., 2020). Furthermore, numerous studies support the idea that "extraordinary" leaders greatly influence members of the educational organization, generating a positive impact on their professional and personal development.

Meanwhile, it is crucial to mention that educational leadership is not limited solely to principals and heads of educational institutions but extends to teachers and other professionals who play an important role in the education and guidance of students (Pont, 2020). In this sense, it has been observed that educators who exercise inspiring and motivating leadership manage to generate an environment conducive to learning and the acquisition of new skills by students (Fernández & López, 2023).

On the other hand, Molina-Vicuña (2023) concludes that leadership is a dynamic process that requires constant updating and adaptation to the changes and needs of today's society. Only through strong and committed educational leadership can quality education be guaranteed for future generations.

Thus, according to Salinas and Gamboa (2024), communication is a two-way and fluid process of exchanging information, knowledge, ideas, and perspectives. This process is the fundamental pillar and key tool that allows the vision and objectives of educational leaders, as well as students' needs, expectations, and achievements, to be clearly, precisely, and effectively transmitted, understood, and shared.

In this way, effective communication in the educational field is not only established and strengthened as the basis for building and consolidating relationships of trust, respect, and collaboration. Additionally, it promotes and catalyzes the generation of innovative solutions adapted to each educational community's real and specific needs. This is achieved through efficient and effective communication between all educational stakeholders—administrators, students, families, and teachers. Communication is close to an enriching environment that facilitates identifying and understanding needs, designing appropriate pedagogical strategies, implementing concrete actions, and constantly monitoring and evaluating progress and results (Bragg et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2023).

Ultimately, for Rabiul et al. (2023), leadership and communication are an essential and inseparable pairing whose synergy allows for driving positive changes and promoting the participation and co-responsibility of all student population members. Consequently, it substantially improves academic outcomes and the overall well-being of students.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted through a comprehensive literature review designed with a hermeneutic approach and a descriptive-interpretive scope. The main objective was to identify and analyze communication strategies in educational management that impact student performance, provided that the sources considered leadership as a central factor. The literature search was conducted in the Scopus, Web of Science, and SciELO databases, selected for their relevance and the quality of the articles indexed therein.

The search process was developed using specific keywords, such as "educational management," "leadership," "communication strategies," and "school performance." These keywords were combined using Boolean operators (AND, OR, LIMIT TO) to refine the results and ensure the relevance of the articles obtained. The search was limited to original Spanish and English articles published between 2019 and 2024. The search focused exclusively on empirical studies and theoretical reviews that addressed the relationship between communication, leadership, and academic performance.

Once the initial sources were collected, a three-phase selection process was carried out. The first phase consisted of filtering by Title, Abstract, and Keyword, which allowed us to identify the most relevant articles for the research. In the second phase, the selected articles were thoroughly read to assess their relevance to the study objectives. Finally, a discussion of the individual findings was held, in which the researchers cross-validated the relevance and quality of the selected articles.

The information obtained from the articles was organized and processed using qualitative coding techniques. ATLAS.ti software was used to facilitate the identification of recurring themes and patterns related to communication strategies in educational management and their impact on academic performance. Coding allowed the information to be categorized into key areas, such as communication strategies, the impact of leadership, and the interaction between the two in educational contexts.

Data analysis was conducted following a hermeneutic approach, which involved a comprehensive reading and contextual interpretation of the results. This process included an iterative review, known as the "hermeneutic circle," in which the relationship between the parts and the whole text was repeatedly examined, ensuring a coherent and in-depth understanding of the findings. Finally, the results were presented in a structured report that included a discussion of the practical implications of the findings and suggestions for future research in educational management and leadership.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A summary of the hermeneutical analysis is provided below. This presentation was strengthened in two ways. First, the findings from the sources were contrasted and compared with other mainstream studies. Second, the data were plotted at the end of each theme so that the relationship between codes and categories could be appreciated.

Key concepts in educational communication

Communication, as an invaluable and essential resource, exerts a considerable influence on human beings. Therefore, it is the main objective of social interaction, not only as intentional motor behavior but as the construction of a solid and grounded reality based on the beliefs, values, and representations shared by a group. In this sense, it is essential to foster the stable habit of observing and promoting fluid, constant, high-quality communication.

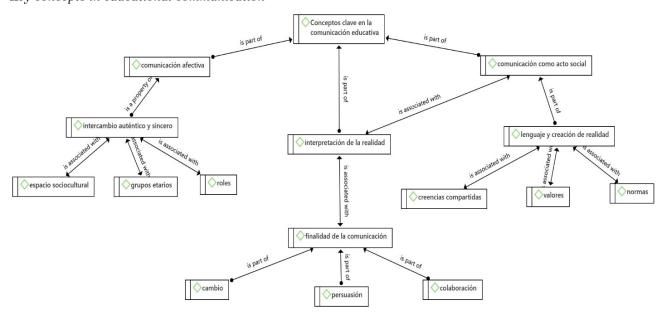
In line with the above ideas, Barrios et al. (2021) emphasize that quality communication, in essence, is deeper and lies in establishing an affective, warm, and enriching exchange with those close to us. In the educational context, this means establishing interactions with teachers, parents, and sons, as fundamental actors in life. Furthermore, peer-to-peer communication is emphasized in these environments, as valuable experiences, interests, and learning are shared (Corbett & Guilherme, 2021; Ding, 2021).

Along these same lines, Carriazo et al. (2020) explain that this authentic exchange will allow for a deeper understanding of significant others, providing the opportunity to discover the individual and collective needs of other human beings, as well as one's own. According to Espinosa et al. (2020), this perspective helps clarify how to more appropriately and efficiently manage each of the needs and limitations individuals face in everyday life, classrooms, and other learning environments.

In short, communication plays a crucial role in developing human affectivity. People need and depend on communication in all its forms, which is reflected in everything from the emotional bond between mother and child to the establishment of emotional bonds in the school setting with educators, peers, and other people in the context. In short, "communication" can be defined as a complex and fundamental process in which all people, through various signs or behaviors—whether verbal, written, or gestural—generate an exchange of data with others, triggering specific responses in them.

Furthermore, Pacheco and Cabrera (2020) affirm that language not only communicates but also creates, collects, and preserves information and objects, permeating all our experiences and thus enriching our lives in a transversal way. Communication is essential to interpreting, predicting, controlling, and manipulating the social reality to which people constantly relate (Xie & Derakhshan, 2021).

Figure 1. *Key concepts in educational communication*



Source: own elaboration **Note:** the figure appears in its original language

Effective communication in the school environment

In the study of this category, research showed that, at certain levels and disciplines, the students most likely to achieve academic success are those with a superior vocabulary, prior knowledge, and a positive relationship with their teacher. Furthermore, it has been found that students tend to pay more attention to nonverbal messages than verbal ones and are eager to interpret signals, which means they are highly interested in the teacher and their body language.

In this sense, research on social communication has revealed fundamental data for a better understanding of the phenomena that influence educational practices. For example, it has been found that a lack of eye contact, such as unwanted eye contact on the part of the teacher, is associated with a low response rate from students (Iaconelli & Anderman, 2021; Kincade et al., 2020). This demonstrates that visual communication is vital for capturing students' attention (Kincade et al., 2020).

Furthermore, when teachers were informed about the negative effects of a lack of eye contact, significant changes were observed in their message and behavior. Rosas et al. (2021) explain that these changes have positive effects on students, improving their attention and academic performance. Developing effective communication in school requires that the various members of the school environment (parents, students, teachers, counselors, and administrators) maintain an open, assertive, respectful, and non-authoritarian communication style.

The literature highlights that positive communication enhances individuals' self-concept, reinforces cognitive, social, affective, and moral development, and fosters interpersonal and group relationships. Additionally, it has been found to promote a specific culture, contribute to learning, improve academic performance, increase effectiveness and motivation, and promote the community's overall well-being (Han, 2021; Rotschild, 2024).

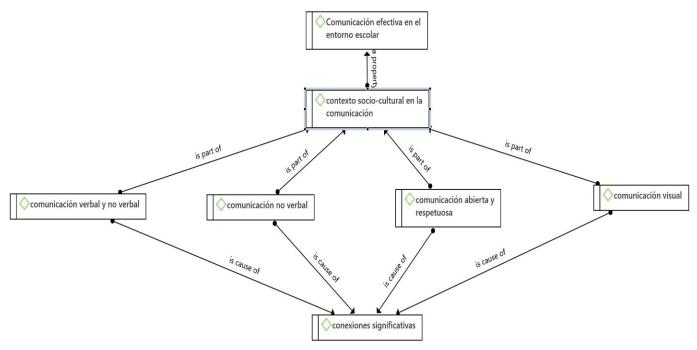
Globally effective communication can be achieved by transcending the school environment and applying the same principles to other areas of daily life (Hastasari et al., 2022). It is important to emphasize that communication is largely about transmitting information but also about establishing meaningful connections between people (Xie & Derakhshan, 2021). This involves listening and responding empathetically to others, avoiding unnecessary misunderstandings and conflicts.

Effective communication also involves conveying ideas clearly and coherently, using appropriate language adapted to the context, the channels, and the recipient (Ding, 2021). Furthermore, it is essential to develop nonverbal communication skills, such as body language, facial expressions, and appropriate tone of voice (Noël et al., 2022). These elements can influence how the message is perceived and interpreted, so it is important to be

aware of them and use them effectively. At the same time, it is essential to consider the sociocultural context in which communication occurs, as each person and each group may have their norms and values (Aririguzoh, 2022).

Figure 2.

Effective communication in the school environment

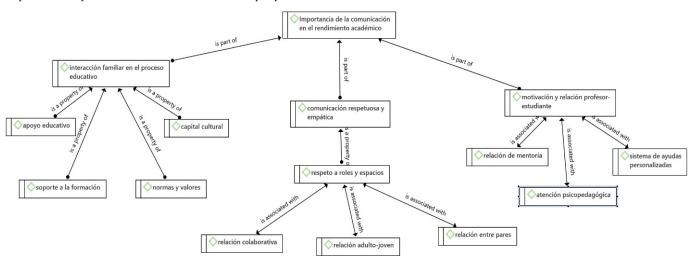


Source: own elaboration **Note:** the figure appears in its original language

Importance of communication in academic performance

Figure 3.

Importance of communication in academic performance



Source: own elaboration **Note:** the figure appears in its original language

Motivation is an essential pillar for learning and is mainly influenced by the relationship of the teacher with the students and the relationship with peers (Randi & Corno, 2022). Therefore, greater interaction between families in the socio-educational process should be promoted (Rodriguez-Oramas et al., 2022). It must be noted that motivation is a fundamental component of learning and is primarily influenced by the relationship between teachers and students, as well as the relationships between the students themselves. Other important aspects

Gutiérrez Caiza & Granda Vidal

include the effectiveness of the learning method itself, the active role of autonomy that students can exercise, and the connection between the curriculum content and the students' reality (Xie & Derakhshan, 2021).

Therefore, authenticity, empathic interest, and establishing a balanced relationship between adults and students are crucial in communication (Sethi & Scales, 2020; Song et al., 2022). If parents and teachers can establish a relationship based on respect and trust, they will create positive expectations that, in turn, influence achievement.

Gender and Education. Theoretical Foundations

A detailed look at the theory of education and curriculum reveals that most of the theoretical scenarios, analyses, and reflections revolve around educational institutions at their different levels of schooling (preschool, primary, secondary, vocational training, adult, among others) and their articulation with a social context that mediates and challenges their institutional dynamics (subordinations) and curricular dynamics (models) (Leyva-Pérez et al., 2020). Thus, the various theoretical and practical proposals actively and persistently seek solid theoretical frameworks capable of addressing the complexity of the curriculum, but they also do so through a deep dialogue with the surrounding reality.

These curricular dynamics, which extend and develop in the various educational spaces, are immersed in the power relations that deeply permeate society. However, these dynamics are constantly challenged and subverted as a result of the strategic actions of struggle and resistance carried out by the different actors involved in the educational field, coinciding with the positions of Díaz-Soler (2022) and Barráez (2020).

The gender approach in education constitutes a recognition of the dispersion of the school population into binary and exclusive categories of male and female (Paechter, 2021). Consequently, it seeks to detect and make visible inequalities in conjunction with other axes and dimensions of inequality (age, language, social class) and seeks interventions that offset or reduce the effects of the inequality generated.

Along these same lines, processes of analysis, decision-making, design, and implementation of interventions related to gender inequality are also organized (O'Connor, 2020). Its theoretical foundation arises from feminist critical theories and gender research in a double sense: the conceptual framework or theoretical analysis of reality and knowledge, of gender relations – masculine and feminine – and gender, as an axis or transformative category of processes interrelated with other axes of differentiation, which respond to hierarchies (race/ethnicity, social class, geographical areas of the country, culture, age) (Psaki et al., 2022).

Social construction of gender

Sexual identity cannot be understood without its sociocultural context (Diamond, 2020). Its social construction will develop from three fundamental elements. First, the activation and formation of certain structures in the nervous system that predispose to act in a certain way. Secondly, the environment in which the development takes place and which will offer signs and signals to which he/she has to respond. Thirdly, the "walking" of the structures, i.e., a physiological functioning whose development is experiential. This does not mean that genetic data are fuzzy or that all alternatives are valid (Quintana & Pfaus, 2024).

Additionally, sexual identity cannot be reduced to a binary dichotomy of male or female, as there are a variety of gender identities that go beyond this traditional conception (Robinson, 2020). It is essential to recognize and respect the diversity of experiences and experiences of people in relation to their sexual identity (Cerezo et al., 2020; Suen et al., 2020). By broadening the understanding of sexual identity and its sociocultural context, the transition to a more inclusive and empathetic society is strengthened, where all people can live with high levels of authenticity and without discrimination.

Communication strategies for academic performance with a gender perspective

In recent years, there has been exponential progress in developing this new skill-competence of assertive communication. Studies and interventions are even being conducted to help students limit inappropriate, offensive, or rude practices toward other non-traditional social groups or emerging collectives (de la Torre et al., 2021). It is important to educate students about the negative effects of this type of language and accurately explain that exclusion or denigration—even verbally—of others reflects harmful attitudes that perpetuate discrimination and its stereotypes.

In this same vein, students must be taught to discover their potential and understand that today, it is assumed

that, within the same individual capacities, the male gender is superior in some aspects. In non-inclusive or gendersensitive schools, there may be a tendency to emphasize attention to boys, mainly due to stereotypes that portray them as more aggressive, demanding, and disobedient—that is, more demanding. However, the female gender must be respected and valued, thus promoting the self-esteem of female colleagues (Bang et al., 2020; Streck et al., 2022).

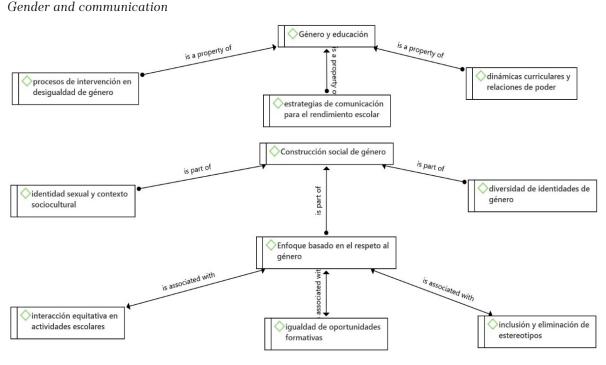
Approach based on respect for gender

Generally speaking, equalizing the academic outcomes of girls and boys requires the use of more egalitarian forms of communication that promote self-realization, socialization, independent thinking, and the recognition of differences (Kikinezhdi et al., 2020). Based on this approach, alarm bells are ringing regarding student development and the equal distribution of educational opportunities.

This transformation has led to a more inclusive pedagogical approach, which seeks to promote equal treatment and a gender perspective in the socio-educational sphere (Brennan et al., 2021). The study highlighted the need to eradicate gender stereotypes in the language and messages conveyed to students. This entails using generic terms that encompass all individuals without distinguishing between men and women.

Likewise, a trend toward reviewing and modifying educational materials to eliminate sexist stereotypes and representations was identified (Aragonés-González et al., 2020). Another key aspect has been the promotion of constant interaction between girls and boys in all school activities. This is because this focus on gender equality provides equal learning opportunities and encourages students to express themselves and share their ideas and opinions without any gender barriers.





Source: own elaboration **Note:** the figure appears in its original language

CONCLUSIONS

In light of the reviewed sources and the results of the empirical studies analyzed, a series of premises can be extrapolated to better understand the characteristics that a good Communication for Academic Performance program should possess. First, it is concluded that it should be friendly to the rights and gender approach in Ecuador and aimed at improving students' academic results through educational communication.

It is also concluded that effective communication is essential in all aspects of life, especially in the school environment. It provides a means to establish meaningful connections and fosters mutual understanding. By

practicing open, assertive, respectful, and non-authoritarian communication, each individual can play an important role in personal, social, and cognitive improvement. Effective communication also promotes the participation of all people in the environment, which contributes to a better climate of coexistence and greater engagement and motivation.

Ultimately, positive communication strengthens self-concept, improves academic development, fosters interpersonal and group relationships, and contributes to the community's overall well-being.

Finally, it is essential for teachers to be aware of the leadership they exercise and the impact their nonverbal communication has on students. Encouraging appropriate eye contact and conveying clear messages through gestures and facial expressions can significantly improve student engagement and academic performance. Therefore, educators should pay special attention to their body language and seek to establish a positive relationship with their students to promote a nurturing and successful learning environment.

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