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## **EDUCATING JOURNALISTS-RESEARCHERS IN POLITICS: A COMPETENCE APPROACH**

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### **Abstract**

The article substantiates the need for transformation of information journalism into research and analytical journalism; the concept of “slow” and author journalism is revealed. The author argues that students of journalism departments should acquire a certain set of competencies, which would provide an opportunity to conduct research on socio-political processes and phenomena of modern life. For successful work in political journalism, a media employee should evidently understand the political structure of different countries in different periods, connect current events with the past and the future, and use research tools. Knowledge about politics, history, philosophy, economics, and culture helps to understand how the world functions. Therefore, the education of a journalist is not possible without extensive general humanitarian training. The author believes that replacing general cultural competencies with universal competencies common for all areas of training does not allow developing erudition and general culture which are almost the main constituents of a journalist profession. A survey conducted among senior students within the framework of the study showed the insufficient level of expertise of young journalists in the field of historical knowledge, which forms ideas about the functioning of political, economic, and social systems of society. The author concludes that the education system for journalists should have an academic character and focus on the basic branches of science.

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*Keywords:* Analytics, competencies, expertise, journalism, history research



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## 1. Introduction

The future of print media is gloomy: circulation is declining, and the number of readers is steadily decreasing. Russian media experts suggest different ways out of the crisis for print press publishers. One of them is to give up the priority of news, because aggregators and robots, as well as “civil journalists” and bloggers who have already deprived journalists of their monopoly on access to information channels will soon write them. Research and investigation, analytical interviews, expert commentary and concentration of meanings - this is the model that is called the only way of the print press industry development (*Rossiyskaya periodicheskaya pechat'*, 2020).

The model of “slow journalism” (or “long reading”) was first brought up by German researchers Köhler et al. (2010), who created the Slow Media Manifesto. In fact, the high-quality journalism with its analytical articles, columns of commentators, and essays has the right to be called slow, as opposed to fast and short journalism- or “fast food journalism” - with its fakes and copy-paste, the race for promptness and sensations, etc.

In fact, slow journalism is a return to the roots: in the 18th century, when the foundations of Russian journalism were being laid, the set was not towards facts, but towards the analysis of the facts. In a sense, this is a revival of author journalism, when the emphasis is on the authors who know how to “tell stories” and whose names attract readers. Storytelling, implying the speaker’s exclusive status as an established carrier of information, is a new trend in Russian journalism that has remembered its publicistic roots. In order to make good stories, a journalist should master, in addition to the technological skills for creating long reads or trans-media projects, such professional competencies as the ability to capture the social order, to know the context of current events, to assess the sources and reliability of information, to find different views on one story; along with all the sea journalist should have a clear personal position and a unique individual style, etc.

In the context of the introduction of federal state educational standards for higher education (FSES HE), the characteristics of the professional activity of graduates are based on the concept of competencies; their development becomes the educational goal. Today, the strategic goal of education is no longer the development of solid systematized knowledge, skills and abilities of students, but the development of social, intellectual, professional, ethno-cultural, moral and other competencies of the student as a person capable of self-determination, self-education, self-regulation, self-actualization, and competitiveness (Korchagin & Safin, 2016).

The reform of the modern system of Russian higher education has led to the unification of educational standards, approaches, curricula, and specialties. In the latest generation standard of educating Bachelors of Journalism, general cultural competences are replaced with universal competences, which are the same for educating specialists in different professional fields. If general cultural competencies reflected the ability of a graduate of the journalism department to use knowledge in the field of general humanitarian social sciences (philosophy, history, economics, law), universal competencies reflect the potential of the ability to learn and the social skills necessary for effective interaction, without which a person cannot be truly competent.

At the same time, in order to study social and political problems, to analyze, evaluate, and predict decisions and actions of the authorities and other socio-political phenomena, journalists need, in our opinion, a special set of general cultural competencies. For successful work in political journalism, it is especially important for a journalist to understand the political structure of different countries in different periods, to connect current events with the past and future, and to use research tools, not just intuition and common sense. Knowledge about history, culture, philosophy, sociology, and economics helps understand how the world functions.

## 2. Problem Statement

The problem of “slow journalism” is relatively new because the concept of “slow media” was formed in the USA and Europe only in 2018. There are no serious scientific developments in this area yet, however, there are numerous books, monographs, and research articles considering the analytical traditions of the Russian media (Ivanova, 2020), analytical genres and research methods in journalism (Tertychny, 2014, 2015). The specifics of research work, methods and forms of scientific research in modern journalism are considered by St. Petersburg scientists (Khabetcova et al., 2019). The research by Korkonosenko (2019), Shutenko et al. (2018), Kaminskaya and Erokhina (2020), Nygren et al. (2010) are relevant for the studies on the requirements for training journalists in the context of digital transformations.

To analyze the effectiveness of the competence-based approach, we used the work by the British psychologist Raven (1999) “Pedagogical Testing: Problems, Misconceptions, Prospects” presenting a theoretical model of competence, motivation, and behavior; the article by Korchagin and Safin (2016) “Competence-based approach and the traditional view of higher education”, which reveals the main aspects and problems of the development of a competence-based approach in higher education; as well as a number of other articles (Bettels-Schwabbauer, 2018; Clark, 2014).

Despite the unification of educational standards and competencies, educational programs for journalists in Russian regional universities still offer courses that provide general humanitarian education (history of foreign and Russian literature and journalism, cultural studies, history of Russia, philosophy, political science, etc.). Unfortunately, the amount of study time for these disciplines is steadily decreasing, and some courses are taught only in a distance format. In addition, the need to teach journalistic craft skills to the students (searching, producing and disseminating information, also in regards to the influence of digital transformations in the media) and to give them an idea of the normative regulation of journalistic activities do not allow to fully develop erudition and general culture which are almost the main constituents of a journalist profession.

## 3. Research Questions

This task is almost impossible for the reason that today it is necessary to solve it practically from scratch: first-year students often do not know elementary facts from history, geography, social science, and literature, they hardly master the logic of analytical thinking, without it, high-quality processing of

information is impossible (Zorin, 2014). By all means, these are the consequences of school “training” for the Unified State Exam, most of its tasks contain ready-made statements, you only need to choose an acceptable answer, and you don’t have to contemplate.

The distortion of the information picture of the day in the Russian media often happens because of fakes, as well as of news screening (Tretyakova et al., 2019), i.e. suppression of inconvenient, undesirable for the image of the authorities information (about the opposition, political trials, violation of rights and freedoms), including information from the history of the country (about dissidents, Stalinist repressions, human rights movement). The reason for these negative for journalism phenomena is the low level of general cultural competencies.

To prove this, we tried to answer the following relevant research questions:

- What do young journalists know and don’t know about the history of their country?
- Do future media employees have enough knowledge about politics, history, philosophy, economics, and culture, which could testify to extensive general humanitarian training?

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to identify the competence of future journalists in the field of the history of the country.

#### **5. Research Methods**

In October 2019, the author conducted a survey among senior students of the Higher School of Social Sciences and Humanities and Intercultural Communication of the Northern Arctic Federal University (NArFU) named after M.V. Lomonosov in Arkhangelsk. 120 people took part in the survey conducted by the method of questionnaires, they were mostly future journalists, and some of them combined their studies with work in the media.

#### **6. Findings**

The first question asked to the respondents was “Do journalists need to know the history of their country in order to reflect contemporary political events in the media?” The majority (87%) of the respondents answered positively, half of the remaining part found it difficult to answer, and only 7% said “no”. The question “Do you consider it possible to keep silent in the press about the controversial, tragic pages of the country’s past?” seemed difficult: 32% of the respondents answered that journalists should not hush up the facts, a fourth of the respondents believe that, on the contrary, it is possible, and the remaining 43% found it difficult to answer or did not answer.

The survey showed that students are in the dark about some positive or neutral facts from the history of Russia. For example, only 15 people answered the questions about the dates of the February

Revolution and could explain who Kerensky was; 28 people were able to correctly answer the question about the countries which were allies of the USSR during World War II. Students do not know the negative facts from the history of the country. Only 30% of respondents were able to correctly decipher the abbreviation GULAG, the rest wrote "I don't know" or got confused in the explanations. When asked where the Gulag Archipelago was, 70% of the respondents did not answer, the rest produced incorrect guesses, and only two students answered correctly: this is a network of Stalinist camps and the title of A. Solzhenitsyn's novel.

When asked about the books they had read, the students answered that they had read a summary of the novels "Quiet Flows The Don" by Sholokhov, "Doctor Zhivago" by Pasternak and "The Gulag Archipelago" (included in the school curriculum), but none of the respondents read the novel "Children of the Arbat" by Rybakov (except four people), the story "Sofya Petrovna" by Chukovskaya (which would be deeply studied at high school literature lessons some 10-15 years ago), or the documentary book "Dissidents" by Morev.

Unsurprisingly, 89% of respondents were unable to name any Soviet dissidents. Eight people named A. Solzhenitsyn, three named Academician Sakharov, and only one respondent named Lyudmila Alekseeva, a well-known human rights activist of our time. When asked what the Soviet dissidents were protesting against when they came out with placards on Red Square in August 1968, 96 out of 120 people answered "I don't know", some wrote "against nuclear war" or "against the war in Afghanistan". Only six students know that eight members of the dissident movement protested against the entry of Soviet troops into Czechoslovakia. Two protestors were then declared insane and sent to compulsory psychiatric treatment. This standard procedure for dealing with dissidents was called "punitive medicine". When asked what "punitive medicine" means, the students wrote that there are long queues at health centres, bad specialists, poor service, or treatment without anesthesia, the death penalty, or euthanasia.

None of the interviewed student journalists was able to answer the question who published the Chronicle of Current Events in the 20th century; it means that they also know nothing about the human rights organization Moscow Helsinki Group. It is not surprising that 80% of the respondents were unable to answer the question what the words "samizdat" and "tamizdat" mean. Some believe that "samizdat" is a person who publishes something on his/her own; others think that this is the title of an Internet magazine.

However, the respondents have heard a lot about the Stalinist terror and even have their own opinion on this matter: only 6.3% of the surveyed students know nothing about repressions; 26.4% know and believe that the repressions were justified by political necessity and without them it was impossible to maintain order in the country; the remaining 67.3% are sure that such cruelty cannot be justified by anything.

The last survey question asked was about the meaning of the abbreviation SLON. Only 30% of the respondents - who live, pay attention to the fact, in the city of Arkhangelsk - remembered that this is the world's first camp for political prisoners, the Solovetsky special purpose camp, which is located on the Solovetsky Islands in the Arkhangelsk region. The rest replied that it was a "secret camp", "special camp", "council of camps" or confessed: "I don't know," and one person made a postscript: "I don't remember, really. I feel ignorant".

A survey of senior students showed the insufficient competence of young journalists in the field of historical knowledge. The obvious lack of knowledge about politics, history, and culture suggests that the education of journalists at a regional Russian university lacks extensive general humanitarian training.

## 7. Conclusion

The research was aimed at identifying the historical competence of future journalists. As a theoretical basis for the study, the scientific literature on the topic was studied; an empirical method of research, a survey of senior students of the Higher School of Social, Humanitarian and Political Sciences of NArFU named after M.V. Lomonosov was used.

The research defined the insufficient competence of young journalists in the field of historical knowledge, which form ideas about the functioning of political, economic, and social systems of society. Thus, we can draw the following conclusion: if the society is interested in journalism which could honestly and professionally investigate, explain, and predict the most important events in the country and in the world, the education system of journalists should have an academic character and consider the basic branches of science.

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