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**PRACTICE-ORIENTED JOURNALIST EDUCATION IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN RUSSIA**

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***Abstract***

The article deals with the challenges of contemporary journalism education that should focus on cultivating of application-oriented talents. Students' immersion into a media production process is a ubiquitous component for professional training and development of future journalists, who learn to create original content at university newspapers and television stations. The study examines the "gap" between demands of journalism job market and practical orientation skills of graduates and how universities can bridge this gap. It is believed that the practice-based learning strategy is the effective way to challenge the issue. The situation appears to be more complicated because journalism is rapidly changing profession and is not likely to stay firmly rooted, it always demands additional qualifications. It is assumed that through cooperation students develop creative skills and discover innovative approaches to accomplish tasks. In this case, education focuses not only on remembering the content, but also on the practical knowledge and application skills. The situation-based nature of the lessons generates and develops various competences of future specialists in terms of developing professional, social and personal values. The novelty of the study lies in an interdisciplinary approach to teaching skills and competences that embraces such fields of knowledge as journalism, design and knowledge of computer software.

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## 1. Introduction

The possibility to receive education at Russian universities has increased significantly today. More and more school graduates go to universities every year. Alongside public universities there is a significant amount of for-profit-educational institutions that offer a wide range of specializations in from technical to humanitarian sciences. “Higher education existed in the USSR does not correspond to educational standards of modern Russia, we have come to mass education” (Tulupov, 2004), - said ironically Professor V. Tulupov, the Dean of the Faculty of Journalism of Voronezh State University.

## 2. Problem Statement

Considering the topic related to the modern approaches in journalism education, we first of all refer to the works of such media researchers as J. J. Kaye, S. Quinn (Kaye & Quinn, 2010), P. J. Boczkowski, C. W. Anderson (Boczkowski & Anderson, 2017), E. C. Sheninger (Sheninger, 2014), A. Doucet, J. Evers, E. Guerra, N. Lopez, M. Soskil, K. Timmers (Doucet, Evers, Guerra, Lopez, Soskil & Timmers, 2018), S.R. Gallagher (Gallagher, 2016).

In the context of this analysis, we should also give an accent to the work of Matthew Hora “Beyond the Skills Gap: Preparing College Students for Life and Work” (11), which explores the problem of establishing a dialogue between the “industry” and “universities”. He cites an example of the pilot project “Innovative incubators”, launched in several American Schools of Journalism, where students and faculty teachers worked on new ideas for the media industry. According to him, such initiatives help “to reconsider the very nature of journalistic education in the mass media culture”. Another scientist C.N. Davidson argues that the emphasis in education programs should be made on interdisciplinarity and a combination of academic knowledge and practical skills (Davidson, 2017).

At the same time, J. McGee (McGee, 2015) draws attention to the fact that the ongoing processes of digitalization in the media are more likely connected with changing views than changing skills. And researcher J.E. Aoun believes that many principles of journalism, such as building trust with a reader and a viewer remain unshakable, both in the era of digital transformation of the media industry, and at the time of the telegraph invention (Aoun, 2017).

It is an open fact that the Russian education was considered one of the best education systems until it was undermined by endless reforms that have led to a number of problems, in particular, in liberal education. Humanitarian specialties are the most in-demand ones in Russia now, while technical professions are deeply unpopular with entrants.

Young people have a particular interest in special education: “If you contrast special education to general liberal education, the first one usually overpowers. In most countries in the world, education focuses on training for certain professions. Moreover, university curriculum of highly specialized educational program includes a number of courses related to the particular specialty and students focus only on specific faculty disciplines. On graduation they receive diplomas in the specific field of study” (Humanitarian education in the modern world).

### **3. Research Questions**

So, for instance, the most in-demand humanitarian specialties are “International Journalism”, “Public Relations”, “Advertising”, “Television”. For graduates they open great job opportunities in the area of print and electronic media. Experience shows that there is a high demand for formal journalism education. Digital technologies are reshaping the classroom experience and are posing more and more challenges to journalism. This also raises the question for universities of how to improve the quality of education in the days of convergent journalism. What do we mean by journalism education? Let us give the exact definition. “Journalism education is a media literacy practice-based education for training journalists after school graduation” (Fateeva, 2006).

This definition emphasizes a practice-oriented approach which cultivates the very journalism competencies needed to address market challenges in students. University newspapers, television stations and multimedia newsroom are used “during an educational year as media platforms in order to develop future journalists’ skills and improve their practical scores. One of the advantages is the close tie between media production process and academic knowledge that allows to put knowledge to use” (Galkina & Krashennikova, 2018).

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

The primary purpose of the article is to analyze the journalism competences that are needed to address the contemporary economic challenges, and what should be improved in media communication education.

### **5. Research Methods**

General scientific methods (analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction) and special scientific methods (structural-functional, typological, contextual) were used in our study.

For instance, newspaper and online production course is implemented at the Department of Journalism of the Philological Faculty of the RUDN University. The assignment is to design an A4 size, 8 to 16 pages newspaper (depending on a number of participants and an amount of content). Desired technical requirements include a computer-equipped classroom, a computerized layout system, and a newspaper printing machine. Newspapers due to be launched within two semesters. There are no limits for newspaper issues, everything depends on the student creativity and activity.

Students are divided into several editorial boards and delegate powers among each other to launch a newspaper. Each team chooses a chief editor, an executive assistant (a layout designer) and feature editors, define their target audience, its interests and requests, and develop a future newspaper concept. Then a teacher runs the best newspaper title contest, which most fully reflects the chosen idea. Students choose the winner through the voting process that sometimes escalated to heated discussions. The name that heads the poll wins.

When a newspaper’s name is selected, students start to develop its thematic and genre structure and assign each topic to a certain page. It is worth to mention that a newspaper concept involves not only content part, but a visualization and a composition of spreads.

A content strategy plan is collectively developed by an editor, an executive assistant and later is checked by a lecturer. A plan should correspond to a newspaper concept, readers' interests, a current socio-political situation in the society, a publisher's goals and objectives and also themes, genres and design of previous newspaper issues. Students are obliged to publish one or two articles per month to fulfil particular core curriculum requirement and get scores (there is a credit rating system in the RUDN university). They can get additional scores for a relative topicality, analytical nature of publications, author's literary skills. An editor and an executive assistant get additional scores for the fulfilment of professional responsibilities.

A newspaper production process starts with the object and subject identification of an article. The next step is to define a theme, a problem and an objective. A theme is a general object definition. A problem is a public question and answer is an article content. An objective is a specific goal of a publication, connected with one of the communicative functions: informative, explanatory, assessing, and inductive.

The genre of an article is based on the selected function. Therefore, a short commentary, a reportage, a report refer to the informative function; an interview, a press roundup refer to the educational function; a correspondence, a commentary, an article, a review, a feuilleton, a pamphlet refer to the function of public opinion creation and an essay to the intellectual upbringing.

The collection of factual material begins with the selection of information sources and fact checking. Some students have a great temptation to appropriate authorship, but not to go anywhere and they just sit idle in front of a computer. No doubt, the Internet is a storehouse of information that is used by journalists and it would be unwise not to make use of it. The main teacher's requirement is to cite references that student have obtained from the Internet, but not to plunder from other authors. This is a core principle of ethical journalism that they should fall into a habit and it also develops their professional expertise. For verification and fact checking they must be able to use various information sources, both the Internet and other datasets.

A data collection method embraces traditional vehicles: observation (participant, non-participant, systematic, non-systematic), interviews, conversation with main characters of an article, document analysis. It also embraces non-traditional vehicles: forecasting, biographical method. Sociological methods of gaining information are also welcomed: a survey, a content analysis, a journalistic experiment.

Each author intersperses pictures in an article, if necessary. During the process of collecting information a student independently takes photos, communicates with the main character. In a word, they act as a multipurpose journalist.

A newspaper production process also embraces the selection of a text type, whether it is a narration or a description, or reasoning. A narrative directly depends on the choice of a particular newspaper genre. A narrative composition is entirely in the hands of an author. They ought to write in different genre forms and to be a writer of great narrative power. A narrative structure is the core of a creative writing (development of idea into a logical progression, system events, a history of setting and social problem-solving). It is highly crucial to bear in mind the differences between a journalistic plot and a literary one. A glaring contradiction can be the basis of the story in analytical and fictional genres.

The main student's objective in the newspaper production process is to try different genres, narrative structures and various composition techniques. This assignment is aimed at literary skills development, writing capabilities, usage of different genres, subject-matter coverage and design features. It helps identify student's strength in various genres and thematic specializations and intensify them in further journalistic work. It is commonly known that the first questions a newcomer is asked sounds like this: "On what subject do you write? And what kind of genres do you typically write in?" Some graduates find it difficult to answer these questions.

Evaluation of texts is carried out with the help of the following communicative characteristics: timeliness (accordance with a social setting), accessibility (text comprehension), ethical aspect (is it relevant to include certain semantic elements?), completeness (a situation and its representation), representativeness (social significance of a text), reliability (the truth, the clear reflection of a reality), novelty (unknown facts, conclusions). More than that, a lecturer assesses students' literary skills, creative thinking and presentation of facts.

An executive secretary begins their work when all the publications are handed in. The job includes the creation of a newspaper draft plan. For this purpose, they use a design layout that includes a text distribution within the pages, its compositional arrangement, a font and a color design. The model helps students master skills of editorial board members in case an editor and an executive secretary leave. The benefit of this model is that a newspaper reputation will survive intact.

After that students distribute the printed edition of the newspaper at the university. However, the working process does not stop at this moment. The most significant part of this academic activity is the issue analysis during a short meeting. It is a production meeting with an editorial office where the results of the newspaper production process are being evaluated. The main goal is to assess the performance and the contribution of each editorial staff member into the work.

The newspaper issue assessment could be conducted by observers (who can be found in the editorial office or among senior students). Their objective is a detailed study of the content in accordance with one of the main characteristics: the content, the design, and grammatical correctness. Additional criteria are also possible to include (headline, illustration, etc.). But usually such assessments are based on several newspaper issues. The collective discussion of the issue is based on observers' evaluations and helps to avoid many mistakes in further issues.

The launch of several newspapers in one group, inevitably breeds competition, beginning from the concept name of the newspaper to its content and design. Usually newspaper editors exchange new issues among each other. The best publications are immediately noticed by readers. After several issues it becomes clear who is a brain child and who is a weak student. There are leaders and outsiders both in the number of issued newspapers and in their quality. All results are summed up at the end of the year on the student conference. Moreover, on the annual Specialty Day a jury of professional journalists and teachers assess works and choose the best students' newspaper and the best journalist. All winners receive various awards.

It is worth mentioning that the newspaper production process is the first course in the Media Studies curriculum. 2nd year students study radio and TV journalism and they are also awarded for the best radio and television programs. The long-term practice of these contests showcases that the winner is

usually the editorial team that produced the best newspapers in previous year. This very newspaper production process unites students in a creative group and hereafter this experience helps them adopt new types of media.

## 6. Findings

In our view, one of the serious problems of journalism education is the lack of multimedia newsrooms or poor internet-enabled classroom technology that is more like an amateur newsroom. A long-standing question issue is university auditoriums with outdated equipment that should be immediately addressed by the management of educational institutions. If we want to enter “the education world with our own traditions and cultural code that inherent in the national higher education” (Asmolov, 2008) we should pose this challenge and overcome it.

Practical classes in TV Journalism immerse students in the television production process and helps them consistently master each of the stages of TV program and films creation. Moreover, they learn to conduct interviews on camera and work behind the scenes. Unfortunately, the reconstruction of the television studio takes longer than expected, the reason is the lack of funding. It is crystal clear that without a modern television studio it is extremely difficult to teach students and help them gain experience and develop skills that are essential for their profession.

In this regard, the Faculty of Journalism of Penza State University experience is worth considering: there is a professional, well-equipped television virtual studio on a local Penza TV, where students can master all kinds of skills in the studio under the guidance of practicing journalists: participate in outdoor shooting, assemble the video and broadcast TV programs. Unfortunately, such classroom equipment and software can rarely be found in peripheral universities.

The second problem is the university curriculum which needs to be updated in terms of the multipurpose journalism. It is essential to introduce the “Multipurpose journalism” discipline as a compulsory course at all faculties of journalism, which allows students to study in multimedia training studios. The method of training a multipurpose journalist capable to work in print or digital media was first approached at the Department of Printing, Broadcasting and Television of the RUDN university in 1981. This kind of experience helped graduates to get good job offers. It is evident, even after 37 years that the faculty was on the right path. Today's multimedia newsrooms require journalists to be a dab hand at reporting, writing, shooting and editing audio and video.

The Faculty of Journalism of the South Ural State University has also obtained headway in this sphere. Professors of the “Mass Media” Department have already initiated the “Multipurpose journalism” discipline and published the textbook “The Multipurpose Journalist, the Basics of Creative Activity” (in 2 parts), in 2017. The textbook was written by composite authors of the Journalism and Mass Media Communications Department of the Faculty of Journalism of the South Ural State University under the editorship of L.P. Shesterkina, Doctor of Philology, Dean of the Faculty of Journalism, who received the award of the IV All-Russian Innovative Public Contest in the nomination “The best textbook (manual) for universities and post-graduate education”. The course book is devoted to “the features of professional work of a multipurpose journalist in a convergent media: video and photography, radio program recording, creation of media text for various types of media” (Universal Journalism, 2017).

Besides, the faculty has created good learning environment for the daily training practice of student journalists in a well-equipped university television studio and multimedia newsroom. Students have the opportunity to be skilled in the television journalist profession, take part in live broadcasting, conduct interviews on camera, assemble videos, work as anchor-people and broadcast TV programs at university.

We can sum up that “it is impossible to be the part of the international educational environment without appropriate technical facilities” (Boguslavsky & Neborskiy, 2017). And Universities ought to provide students with this technical basis.

Another acute problem of contemporary education is the “imbalance between large universities in the centers, included in various lists of international ratings, and universities in regions that fall behind them”. This situation is also due to the fact that the training of scientific and administrative personnel is also provided by the same university. This inevitably leads to the simplification of scientific and educational work, the emergence of local disciplines that are not of center interest” (Boguslavsky & Lelchitsky, 2017).

It is also highly critical to hold annual student film festivals at the faculties of journalism, such as MEFI at the RUDN University, or “Humane Cinema” and “The Golden Five” at the Institute of Culture, etc., They have already become a useful educational platform for students who want to showcase their first films, attend creative master classes and roundtables, communicate with professional journalists. The holding of student film festivals is an obligatory component of the journalism education, an integral part of the educational process aimed at the students’ professional skills development.

## 7. Conclusion

All the problems that have been mentioned above require urgent attention and solution. The synergy of practical skills in a modern educational television studio with an academic knowledge will contribute to the development of students’ skills, competencies, further professional work in the media and will significantly increase the quality of journalism education.

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