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**CHALLENGES FOR MODERNIZATION OF JOURNALISM
EDUCATION IN RUSSIAN UNIVERSITIES**

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Abstract

The article deals with the challenges of journalism education in modern Russia and the necessity for its modernization. It analyzes the causes of education crisis and the ways of tackling the identified problems. The authors argue the significance of practice-oriented learning (PBL) and the advanced study of media production by the future journalists. PBL generates different competences of future specialists in terms of developing professional, social and personal values. Like many news outlets, journalism education programs are evidently unprepared to respond to such profound structural transformation of the environment. The study indicates that there is a crucial demand in expanding technology training and changing media emphasis tracks. Strenuous PBL approaches allow students to skill-up quickly so that they can spend more time applying skills to real life situations. Employability is a central concern of the current study. Educators owe it to their students to give them the skills to acquire a satisfying career and to be lifelong learners so they can grow with and adapt to an economy that no one can predict. Teachers need to think about and actively prepare students for the world of work. The research revealed the need for a variety of skills such as technical knowledge, habits of mind like problem solving, and social competences like teamwork and communication as a part of an integrated whole.

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1. Introduction

The system of journalism education in Russian universities is going through a transitional period which requires active modernization efforts and a new teaching approach. Technical progress has a profound impact on modern journalism which is becoming more and more focused on audio-visual culture. As a result, it requires new training methods of multipurpose journalists. Today the Internet as a new communication environment encompasses either cinema and television or other media using different vehicles of expression. Today a journalist uses digital technologies to work simultaneously in a newspaper, radio, TV, Internet and mobile journalism. Convergence is lying at the core of the multipurpose journalist formation process. This creates new teaching approaches (Golousova, 2014).

The specific courses of the educational development in contemporary Russia are written and signed by the Russian president V.V. Putin in the Decree “About national goals and strategic objectives of the Russian Federation development for the period up to 2024”. It encompasses the following urgent tasks for higher education:

- creation of a modern and safe digital educational environment, providing the high-quality education and its accessibility of all types and levels;
- modernization of education, including introduction of adaptive, practice-oriented and flexible educational programs;
- creation of a system of professional competitions in order to provide citizens with opportunity of career growth;
- formation of an effective system for identifying, supporting and developing abilities and talents in children and young people, based on the principles of justice, universality and aimed at self-determination and professional orientation of all students;
- to double the number of foreign citizens studying at universities and scientific organizations and implement measures that help employ best of them in the Russian Federation» (Presidential Decree, 2018).

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 Cutler (2017), Ercan (2018), Lugmayr and Zotto (2016), Ibold and Deuze (2014), Kramp and Loosen (2018), Venkatesan (2016), Watkins (2016) and Miroshnichenko (2018).

We also should emphasize the work of Josephi (2016). According to the author, in the era of digital journalism students should be provided with a mode of practical learning along with the theory. Since only advanced study of media production can produce highly qualified tomorrow's journalists.

Today a considerable number of school graduates apply to journalism programs. Students master their skills by producing news for various media: newspaper, magazine, radio, television and the Internet. New media change journalism enriches mass media communication and impact on journalism education system that needs to be updated and changed.

3. Research Questions

This study outlines the range of challenges that faces Russian journalism education on the path to modernization: university entrants' knowledge level, preliminary elimination phase, disadvantages of tuition fee payments, mass scale of journalism education, complete or partial cancellation of the internship, a new set of journalism skills in the age of digitalization.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze the current state of journalism education in Russia and identify the challenges facing Russian universities on the path to modernization.

5. Research Methods

The descriptive, comparative methods and the method of observation were used in the research. It helped authors conduct the unbiased study about challenges facing Russian universities on the path to modernization.

Puyu (2011), Director of the Institute of Higher School of Journalism and Mass Communication at St. Petersburg State University is convinced that higher education in Russia has largely depreciated as since the late '90s of the 20th century it has become accessible to everyone. Higher school was no longer the nurse of elite because universities began to enroll even those who could enter only secondary specialized education institutions (Puyu, 2011). Indeed, the educational level of university entrants of the journalism faculties has considerably declined. It is the consequence of large-scale changes in the system of secondary school education and the focus of teachers on preparing school students for passing the Russian State Exam. Therefore, university lecturers face a serious challenge - to develop in today's students the qualities that were previously formed at school (Puyu, 2011). It is often the case that mastering future profession is not the priority for enrolled students. Many of them believe that a tuition fee will provide them with adequate "educational services" without making their own efforts.

This state of things dictates the need for strict entrance requirements and the level of general intelligence. Creative contests should be held for better selection procedures, that reveal not only writing skills of entrants, but also their general educational level and speaking skills that are highly crucial for journalists. "Speech culture is very significant. A journalist must have good verbal skills, especially a TV anchor or a radio presenter. It is very painful to see how young professionals speak thickly in front of the camera. That is why creative workshops make sense, because it is one thing to read something in a book, but quite another thing is to practice skills", noted A.P. Korochensky, Professor of Belgorod State University Department of Journalism (as cited in Tulupov, 2006, p.3).

To change the situation, the first-year students should pass difficult tests that can allow exclude unscrupulous students. By the way, it is a normal practice at the leading international universities in the world. The French educational system in contrast to the Russian one permits to complete a degree in 2 years. Then a student can quit studying, continue it at the university or go to another institution. If a student successfully completes personal curriculum in one year, he gets another degree. Thus, everyone can choose a suitable way of getting education (Cherednichenko, 2012).

In China the internship is a fundamental factor for obtaining a degree. “It is written in the curricula of the journalism departments of Shanghai that the length of the internship ranges from 4 to 6 months during the sixth or seventh semester. Therefore, the learning process is inextricably intertwined with the needs of modern media. The results of the internship are taken into account by universities in the preparation and adjustment of the curricula. Thus, the elimination of the course “The Theory of Marxism” allowed to coin such disciplines as “Media Management” and “International Communication” (Cherednichenko, 2012).

To move with the times many leading universities in Russia transform the process of education by introducing new educational technologies and paying more attention to practical skills in mastering the profession.

Thus, at RUDN University students master the skills of a stand-up presenter in various genres, learn the fundamentals of television technology, learn how to operate both handheld and mounted cameras, produce newspapers and magazines, create multimedia projects. The BRICS Television is one of the important divisions where the staff conduct practical trainings. The television studio is equipped with all the latest technology where students express their creativity: teleprompters, modern television cameras, computers, a recording console.

Various creative events are held during the learning process. For instance, «The day of the specialty» is organized by students of all courses. They shoot videos, award the best authors of articles, radio and television programs and commercials. This event is the celebration of the journalistic profession at the Philological faculty. Media practitioners provide different workshops for students on this day.

Another significant event is the annual student film festival «MEFI». By the tradition it is conducted by the 3rd year students during the spring semester. The contestants take part in the competition where they present 3-4 applications with a description of a future film or multimedia project. The most influential journalists are invited to be the jury members. They sort out the projects that are interesting for them. The chosen candidates shoot videos which are included in MEFI’s program.

The jury assesses video from the creative and professional sides of the work and award students in various categories.

“The day of the specialty” and “MEFI” festival help articulate students’ creativity and execute their imaginative ideas. Lectures in Broadcast Journalism in combination with these events equip students with the advanced multimedia journalism skills and teach them to stand for the universal values of humanism.

Besides, the professors at Philological Faculty use project-oriented approach which unlock students’ creativity. Within the «Lifestyle Journalism» course students create the projects for TV and the Internet. A students’ group is divided into smaller teams which create media projects dedicated to the lifestyle of a modern person. The projects embrace such topics as travel, food, health, lifestyle, sport, fashion, art, music, leisure, etc. The students take an interest in this class, because they study the lifestyle that they learn from newspapers, radio, television or the Internet. It meets the standards of media industry. We believe that project-based learning focuses on developing creative skills of the students.

RUDN graduates who work at the Russian and foreign largest TV channels, radio stations and Internet media are the proof that the described experience of teaching based on practice-oriented approach is truly effective.

On the one hand there is a practice-oriented approach used by Moscow State University, RUDN University, St. Petersburg State University, but on the other hand there some universities that do not keep up to the times and it affects the quality of graduate education.

The loss of the prestige of the journalist profession is also associated with a large number of journalism faculties and departments in all Russia regions where school graduates apply on a mass scale. Today you probably will not find a single educational institution where there is no a journalism degree (and besides the new departments are rapidly transformed into faculties). Journalism education have been discredited exactly for this. New journalism departments and even faculties experience an acute shortage of qualified teaching staff, educational and methodological literature (Problems and prospects of modern journalistic education, 2010).

Mass journalism education downgrades the quality of profession. “The concept of real journalism is being crossed off. Why do you think there is a decline in circulation? This is because of television? Radio? Or the Internet? No, no and NO! We do not satisfy the needs of the Russians in journalism and vivid imagination. A journalist must know the media history, the nation's history, have a very broad education, and only then they will have the right to be called a journalist” – said V. Bogdanov (as cited in Korochemsky, 2017, p.2).

The student summer internship is a crucial problem for many universities. It is completely canceled in some universities. However, it has to be highly important for students because it gives them the opportunity to gain valuable first-hand job experiences, acquire teamwork skills and participate in outdoor shooting and in all stages of media production. Cancellation of student summer internship is biting into the learning process. In our opinion it is unacceptable in universities, especially in the RUDN University, which is the member of the Project 5-100 program and wants to enter the World University Rankings. There are no peanuts in the learning process. Everything that contributes to the student professional development should be preserved.

Another important issue is to train students that meet the requirements of the digital environment. “The situation with media staff is complicated all over the world, it is connected with the expansion of the media business, its digitization and the emergence of new professional specializations within the same industry. It requires a new training approach to journalism, and it has already been accepted all over the world”, – said Zasursky (2005), the President of the Journalism Faculty at Moscow State University.

Media expert Miroshnichenko (2018) believes that new digital platforms are changing the professional competencies. It is the main issue for media workers, faculties of journalism and editors now. The author suggests several major trends in the media development.

First: the transition from the process to the product. It means that in the past a media specialist staked on skills, but now on product. The article is not a text now, it is a project and its success depend on the author's vision and the final result.

The product approach leads to another principle of working arrangement and it appears in the second trend: the combination of authorship and management. The author of the project is both a creator

and a leader. What used to be the competence of the editor has become the prerogative of the author. In a multimedia environment the author is responsible for the article development and presentation and also for the creation of all the accompanying elements: from layout setting and infographics to multimedia formats. The author of the project becomes a performer in that part of the work where they have the necessary competencies, and becomes a customer where they need special skills, knowledge or tools that they do not have. In this case, they must understand the process of media production and the exact format of the product.

Expansion of the competencies appear in the third trend – the new universalization. Gadgets allow journalists to produce such things that were not possible in the past as it required the help of a specialist. Nowadays any user can be a producer of photos, infographics, layout, video and audio. Automation will progress and give general users access to complex technologies, including cinema, animation, various interactive formats, virtual reality, augmented reality. Therefore, the crucial factor is the idea and the vision of the final product and its elements, but not the usage of tools. Modern universalism in the media is understanding of the entire range of formats, the ability to produce basic formats and highly specialized ones.

The fourth trend is a new specialization which is partly related to new technologies. It should have a competitive edge and its schtick. It could be a new tool, for example an ability to work with big data or to create engagement tests. It could be an old format, for example, the ability to take an interesting interview or to make a report from dangerous areas. The principle is highly crucial: amid such total universalization of competences, the unique knowledge is the value-added component. By the way, a good speller is still in high demand in the multimedia environment. In the era of endless stream of information from the Internet, social networks where written language has transformed into oral the skill to write correctly has become a marketable skill as the ability to write a programming code.

If a journalist uses the product approach, creates a project from any type of content, has a clear vision and their own schticks, they will be a prospective employee in the traditional media and in-demand employee as a freelancer. The future of the media is described not only by market outlook, but also by the changes of competencies. The personal strategy of a journalist is to watch closely the set of media competencies, not only the media market itself. It is quite impossible to influence changes of industry, but it is quite possible to develop personal competencies. What vital, is to know the right direction (Cutler, 2017).

Complaints on teacher's skills and the balance between theoretical and practical knowledge are among the issues that affect the quality of journalism education. We do not fully agree with such a statement, because the decline in lecture hours leads to changes in the curriculum and cut-down of the course, especially when a course takes only a semester. As it noted above, the level of humanitarian knowledge of graduates requires significant adjustment.

Teacher training courses have become an essential part of improving journalism education. They help optimize teaching process. However, there are certain challenges. Some courses cost a lot. That is why the management of universities, in particular, the RUDN University, organizes free courses for employees inside and outside the university. For example, in 2018 the staff of the Philological Faculty of

the RUDN University had a refresher training course at Moscow State Linguistic University. In addition, they participated in international scientific conferences both in Russia and abroad.

Studying new teaching methods, exchanging valuable pedagogical experience, the professors bring creative and innovative teaching strategies into curricula.

In addition to the problems mentioned above, it should be particularly emphasized that there is a great demand in textbooks about integrated and visual communications. There is also a shortage in practical tasks books for the discipline «Broadcast journalism».

The legislators are also aware of the necessity in journalism education modernization in Russia. Various competitions of journalistic skill are regularly held, a lot of grants are given for training journalists both in Russian universities and abroad. This is a good incentive and additional motivation for students to showcase high performance in learning process. By the way, the grants and contests for Russian students are often organized by the foreign universities and foreign commercial organizations. The main requirement for getting the internship is the fluency in a foreign language and mastery of practical skills.

6. Findings

Thus, along with the systemic training of media professionals (additional creative contests, exams for applicants, expel of unsuccessful students in the first year of study, technically equipped classrooms etc.), there are organizational, scientific and educational methodological issues which solution is completely the subject of educational institutions that are ready to introduce innovative approaches into education.

The effective solution of the above-mentioned problems, efficient methods of teaching journalism in leading universities of Russia that are based on updated curricula and mastering the professional competencies confirm the priority and the need for practice-based teaching of media professionals.

7. Conclusion

The current study is focused on the analysis of the main challenges in the system of journalism education and its current state, identification of a number of issues that complicate the large-scale modernization process. The solution of all the highlighted problems in this article will contribute to improving the quality of journalism education, and thus raising the quality of graduates across the country. Enrichment of the learning process, focus on the quality of education is the goal which all the Russian universities, including the faculties of journalism, should strive for.

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