

## Knowledge versus Experience: Indicator to Good Journalism Practices

AWAN ISMAIL  
*Universiti Utara Malaysia*

RIZALAWATI ISMAIL  
*International Islamic University Malaysia*

### ABSTRACT

Globally, journalism education is undergoing significant changes in view of the ongoing technological evolution. Hence, it is important to have a good journalism education that can shape good journalism practices and professionalism. In recognition of this, the Council for Heads of Communication Studies (COHEC) in Malaysia has mapped out a framework for journalism education to be offered by Malaysian universities (COHEC, 2010). However, COHEC study was very brief and did not underline what makes good journalism practice. Therefore, this study seeks to identify the knowledge, experience, and skills needed in Malaysian journalism education. To this end, this study conducted in-depth interviews with senior practitioners – senior editors and chief editors - from media organizations in Malaysia. Findings show the importance of knowledge, experience, skills, and attitude needed for good journalism practices. The findings also acknowledged that journalism knowledge is as important as experience and debunked the old testimony that knowledge can be practiced on the job and no formal journalism education is needed. The understanding of journalism is not as a skill but as social, cultural, and philosophical expression, and general education is needed to cover the journalistic aspect of life. There is a need to redefine journalism as a field of study.

**Keywords:** *Journalism education, knowledge, experience, skills, attitude, Malaysia.*

### INTRODUCTION

Journalism performs a number of functions in modern societies as a source of information, analysis, and commentary on current events. As such, journalism operates under constraints emanating from political, economic, social, cultural, and technological developments (UNESCO, 2013). The majority of journalists aim “to serve society by informing the public, scrutinising the way power is exercised, stimulating democratic debate, and in those ways aiding political, economic, social, and cultural development” (UNESCO, 2007, p. 7). All these constraints and challenges render journalism an interesting field of study.

Despite the heated debates over the efficacy of journalism education, there is a general paucity in the research on this topic. The limited research that does exist tends to be either too normative or overtly descriptive (Becker et al., 2003; Hirst, 2010; Poynter, 2013). In addition to that, most of the researches done were on Western countries and far too little on their non-Western counterparts. Journalism education in Malaysia, for example, is not being studied by many although it commenced in 1970.

Journalism education in Malaysia has been conceptualised and subsequently materialised based on various Western and Eastern models (Hirst, 2010; Mensing, 2010; Poynter, 2013). Most

of the journalism schools' and departments' scholars have been educated abroad, especially in the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe. For example, in the Department of Communication, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) alone, 14 out of 15 lecturers obtained their masters and/or doctorate degrees from Western universities. When journalism education was first introduced in Malaysia, there was no dedicated school or faculty for its study. Communication, in general, first started as part of the humanities curriculum in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) in 1970 (Zaharom, 2003). A proper communication school was only set up in 1972 by Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), formerly known as Institut Teknologi Mara (ITM). Most of the lecturers were sent to Western countries for their studies, especially to North America. Furthermore, in the early years, journalism was not considered by many as an academic subject but a training programme due to its 'practical' nature (Syed Arabi, 2000). Because of this 'practical' nature, journalism education received a lot of criticisms (Little, 2006; Mensing, 2010; Broaddus, 2012). However, the introduction of the Outcome Based Education (OBE) (MQA, 2007; COHECS, 2010; MoHE, 2011) by the Ministry of Education Malaysia has led to a shift in educational approaches away from purely academic and theoretical studies to more practical outcomes. The outcome based framework as propagated by Biggs and Tang emphasises the need to reflect on student learning experiences, thereby highlighting the importance of including the 'practical' nature of the journalism studies (Biggs & Tang, 2011).

It is also important to note that journalism, communication, and/or media education in Malaysia is only offered at the tertiary level. Meanwhile, in other countries, especially in developed countries, students have been exposed to journalism/communication/media education since they were in school. This means that from an early age, such students should have a good foundational understanding of how media works.

#### STATE OF JOURNALISM EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

Journalism education usually covers practical skills and contextual knowledge. Irrespective of needs, demands, cultures, laws, and national histories, proper journalism education must balance between practical and contextual knowledge. This is referred to by Ahmad Murad Merican as 'the backbone for the journalistic profession' (2002). It contributes significantly to the functioning and well-being of the society.

According to Ahmad Murad Merican (2002), journalism education in many Malaysian public universities comprises of a number of components, including:

1. Writing skills (newswriting and editing abilities)
2. Language and critical thought (language and logic)
3. Substantive knowledge in providing content (social science and the humanities, such as sociology, economics, history, political science, media laws, etc.)
4. Knowledge of communication as a field of study (marketing, advertising, public opinion, communication research, international communication, etc.)
5. Computer and production skills (information technology, video production, graphics, etc.).

Different Malaysian universities have integrated and emphasised these components differently in their journalism education. Some universities place emphasis on writing skills, while others on substantive knowledge or technological skills.

However, according to Tanner et al. (2014), the reality is that not all media employers are seeking the same skills in prospective journalists. The skills required of trainee journalists vary, depending on the organisation and position. Despite this, the fact that all university-based journalism programmes structure their courses around a similar range of core subjects (all of which have a technical bent), suggests that there are at least some agreements among educators about what the industry expects in a graduate (Tanner et al., 2014, p. 11). However, such expectations are in a state of flux due to unprecedented rapid technological change. This has created new challenges for university-based journalism programmes (Martin, 2008; Kraeplin & Criado, 2005), and Malaysia's journalism education is no exception.

Donsbach (2013) has outlined five (5) conducts that a journalist should have: (1) possesses a keen awareness of relevant history and current affairs, as well as analytical thinking, (2) has expertise in the specific subjects about which he or she reports, (3) has scientifically based knowledge about the communication process, (4) has mastered journalistic skills, and (5) conducts himself or herself within the norms of professional ethics (Donsbach, 2013).

#### JOURNALISM PRACTICES AND PROFESSIONALISM

Journalism, as a profession, operates under constraints coming from the political, economic, social, cultural, and technological developments in all parts of the world. There is no doubt that journalism performs a number of functions in modern societies as a source of information, analysis, and commentary on current events. Most of the journalists aim "to serve society by informing the public, scrutinizing the way power is exercised, stimulating democratic debate, and in those ways aiding political, economic, social, and cultural development" (UNESCO, 2007).

The early journalists believed that journalism should be practiced on the job and that it could not be taught. Some argued that journalistic writing skills were a God-given gift not acquirable via education (A. Samad, 1966). While journalists can be trained via university education, it may take a lifelong field experience to become a really good practitioner.

There is a wide and global debate on journalism education, mainly on what is a good journalism education (Comrie, 2003; Deuze, 2006; Reese & Cohen, 2000; etc.). Many of the scholars agree that journalism education should prepare students by giving knowledge (education) and skills (training) to reflect on best practices in journalism. It should prepare them to be responsible journalists with both broad general knowledge and specific knowledge, which are important to journalism. It should not only prepare them with good linguistic ability, but also the knowledge of the technological advancement and changes in the news media. However, journalism best practices need to be redefined according to the industry practices.

Although journalism is a popular field of study – there are an increasing number of students studying journalism and increasing number of universities offering journalism as a field of study - yet the education and training of journalists is much debated and rarely researched. And if there is any, most of the studies on journalism education tend to be either too normative, or it remains overtly descriptive (Becker, 2003).

In Malaysia, a recent study on media and communication studies has been conducted by the Council for Heads of Communication Studies (COHECS) – a working committee established by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia in 2006. Its book titled “*Hala Tuju Pengajian Komunikasi dan Media di Malaysia*”, which was published in 2010, generally reported on the employability of media and communication graduates in Malaysia. It extracted feedbacks from 60 employers from media and non-media organisations on their perceptions and expectations of media and communication graduates. It also mapped out the state of media and communication studies in all Malaysian public universities. However, it did not critically discuss in-depth on the curriculum of each programme. For example, what subjects or courses are included in the journalism programme? Do all public universities run the same subjects for their journalism programme? Have journalism students from different public universities in Malaysia been fairly fed with the journalistic knowledge and skills so that they can compete fairly in the future job market?

Therefore, this study basically attempts to evaluate what the Malaysian journalism education curriculum should embed within the context of professional education and industry training. This means, following Weaver and Wilhoit, “preparation of students for a career working with news media organisations and studying the work of those people editorially responsible for different types of storytelling in a wide range of news media” (1996 in Deuze, 2006). Whatever it is, journalism education usually covers practical skills and contextual knowledge. No matter what type of needs and demands the media system imposes, and different cultures, laws and histories the country has, there must be a balance between practical and contextual knowledge in journalism education. It is at least partly based on its function as what Ahmad Murad Merican refers as ‘the backbone for the journalistic profession’ (2002). It contributes significantly to the functioning and well-being of the society. With the technological (digitalization and globalization), economical (commercialization and corporatization), and social (multiculturalism and globalization) changes in the media ecology today, does Malaysian journalism curriculum prepare students to be future journalists?

#### ESTABLISHMENT AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE JOURNALISM STUDIES

Journalism education has been recognised in higher educational institutions through the establishment of departments and faculties (Poynter, 2013; Netzley & Banning, 2011). Nonetheless, what makes the curriculum of journalism education unique is that the development of each curriculum is in line with the progress of journalism in the respective countries or continents. For example, a study done by Poynter reflects more on Western-based institutions where he highlighted the different viewpoints of academics and the industry players on journalism education. On the other hand, the Latin American scholars and policy makers are more concerned for media organisations to be developed as ideological organisers (Castillo, 2014). Meanwhile, the Gulf based countries’ journalism education direction is focusing on journalism ethics and religion (Pintak, 2013). For African countries, the main concern of journalism education is on the development and challenges of online journalism (Mabweazara, Mudhai & Whittaker, 2014). In the Asian continent, we are still struggling to balance Western-centric curricula and national needs (Ullah, 2014). In the case of South Korea, there is a need to develop “the synthetic

knowledge model” where students need to be equipped with multiple skills and the universities need to attract and sustain experienced professors who have both industrial and academic abilities as mentors in the journalism schools (Soo, 2010). According to Loo (2013), in Asia, it has been argued that journalists report news in order to facilitate state-based agenda, whereas in the West, journalists practice ‘transparent reporting’ which champions freedom and not forced to align to any state-based views. Moreover, there is a call for scholars to conduct research on journalism profession and its related issues especially in the developing countries where less is known (Memon, 2014).

Being a Commonwealth country, Malaysia has been influenced by the British educational system in terms of academic structure and curriculum. Moreover, most academics in Malaysia were trained abroad, mainly in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Europe (Murad, 2008). Only recently, the trend has shifted to Australia and New Zealand due to lower tuition fees as most of the Malaysian scholars in public universities are funded fully by the Malaysian government. Most of them return to the country and serve various higher learning institutions with the influence of their previous PhD or Master experts and supervisors in the Western world.

As a result, the way the journalism curriculum has been designed has Western influence. Most higher learning institutions have been looking to the Western world due to its rapid technology changes and advanced techniques in journalism. Most references are in English, which is the nation’s second language. English is also a business language of the country. Malay is the national language but there are few references in journalism that are written in it. Most public universities offer journalism courses in Malay language. However, the references are mostly in English.

#### JOURNALISM EDUCATION AND INDUSTRY PRACTICE DIRECTION

Golding (1977 in Du Toit, 2013, p. 154) argued on the American journalism education which, in particular, has been seen to have operated not just to reproduce technical skills but also to replicate a particular occupational ideology based on notions of individualism, professional objectivity, and independence from the state. These ideas were often seen to clash with local understandings of the role of journalism in the developing world (Gaunt, 1992 in Du Toit, 2013). It was debated by Mensing (2010) that rather than aligning journalism education to industry-centred model, it is advisable to focus on community-centred model. She further insisted that there should have been a call to revamp the journalism education in the United States and most scholars agreed about the change. Nonetheless, to find one model that fits all is rather challenging.

According to Rooney (2003: 83), journalism education must be craft-based with an emphasis on acquiring skills through practice; journalism education must be a mix of skill acquisition and traditional liberal education; and journalism education must include a critical engagement about the place of the journalist in society. However, Pavlik (2013) argued that American journalism education is still clinging to traditional journalism practices rather than creating and developing innovative relationship with the entrepreneurial modes of curriculum. He further argued that it is urgent for journalism education to move beyond traditional journalism principles. Interdisciplinary is a must in order to redirect the journalism future as a dynamic field.

Areas such as digital media entrepreneurship and innovation are the way forward to capture the audience interest. Thus, collaboration with the media industries, especially the digital-based companies are encouraged to leapfrog the journalism education to a new phase. It has been noted that in journalism education, multimedia and multiculturalism need to be considered in the curriculum (Deuze, 2005; Kumari, 2014). It has been the urge to be part of the advanced technology where things are changing in terms of learning experiences for future journalists.

Moody et al. (2013) discussed about the need to have diversity in leadership in the oldest United States-based association which is the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC). They argued that in order to be inclusive in terms of journalism education direction, it is important to have diversity in leading institutions such as AEJMC. Diversity here refers to gender and ethnicity. After years of pushing the agenda of leadership diversity in AEJMC, the study found that there are still rooms for improvement, especially for Hispanics, Asian Americans and Non-Native Americans. The ethnic minority leaders need to be included in the Association as they could provide guidance to the American journalism education and are able to chart what is missing from journalism education so far.

Leask (2013) proposed for journalism educators to consider the idea of internalization of curriculum. This idea is important as it will cut across many countries and give the students the benefits of having a more integrated curriculum in their student years. Then, Garddiner (2013) further linked the theory of Self Determination Theory (SDT) to journalism teaching in a classroom. He related that the assumptions of SDT, which are autonomy, competence, and relatedness exist in journalism class if the teachers practice student-centred learning. Students decide on their task and set out how to accomplish the tasks. It is one of the examples whereby journalism education can benefit from student-centred learning.

In addition, Loo (2013) argued that journalism education during undergraduate years in Malaysia universities did not prepare the journalism students for the workplace. A change of mindset is required and most students could benefit from overseas training. He also stressed that the Malaysian and Singaporean leaders such as the late Lee Kuan Yew and Mahathir Mohamad had emphasized that journalists need to tailor their news according to a national agenda. In short, national issues need to be emphasized rather than adopting Western based reporting as situationally Asia is different from other countries. It is indeed a different type of journalism compared to the Western based journalism approach. A study by Motlagh et al. (2013a; 2013b) on journalists in Malaysia indicated that gender and journalism education do not have an impact on journalism ethics. They further emphasised that senior journalists tend to practice higher ethical standards than junior journalists. This means that experience plays an important role in creating awareness and practicing journalism ethics.

Even though scholars such as Mensing (2010) and Pavlik (2013) agreed that there must be quality in journalism contents in terms of substance and ethics, there is no consensus in guiding what is the direction of journalism education. There is a call for scholars internationally and locally for journalism education to have a guide on journalism education framework. In the case of Malaysia, the researchers are determined to understand how we could make a difference by studying what is the future direction of Malaysia's journalism education.

## METHODOLOGY

This study utilised the qualitative in-depth interview method to gauge the depth and breadth of journalism education in Malaysia. The importance of using in-depth interviews in this research is to transform the answers given by the respondents in accordance with recognized or accepted knowledge and experience of journalistic practices. A qualitative in-depth interview is more flexible and unstructured in the sense that questions are generated in the process of the interview itself. An interview guide serves as the basis for the conversation. In the interviews we conducted, respondents talked about a range of issues that posed new questions for further discussion. DeMarrais (2004, p. 52) described qualitative interviews as follows:

For this study, the interviews were semi-structured and a topic guide was used to ensure comparability across cases. Effort was made to be as 'authentic' as possible in the interviews (proceeding as in a normal conversation) in order to put the respondents or interviewees at ease. As emphasised by Legard, Keegan and Ward (2003, p. 141), as a research method the success of interviewing greatly hinges on the personal and professional capabilities of the researcher, a skill that only comes through practice and experience.

15 respondents were selected purposively among media professionals or practitioners of mainstream media and senior media/journalism lecturers (academics) from public universities in Malaysia) (N=15). Interviews were conducted for a duration of 30 minutes to 120 minutes for each interview. All the interviews were transcribed in detail. A thematic analysis was used to analyse the transcribed interviews.

The collected interview data include feedbacks from both media practitioners and academics. Their reflections on journalism demonstrate the strengths and limitations of many topics on journalism education in Malaysia. The respondents were generous with their thoughts and beliefs despite their initial reservation. However, their views emerged as the interviews progressed and the data proved rich. The complexities of the respondents' background were seen as major contributions as their different opinions and answers helped to construct a better understanding of journalism education in Malaysia. Identifying different respondents' feedback enabled the research to qualitatively ascertain how journalism education is regarded by those most closely involved with it, and the factors that influence the journalism education landscape in Malaysia.

In addition, the respondents' different background illustrates how a latent analysis can provide insights about certain aspects of journalism education in Malaysia. Their opinions and answers, both positive and negative, helped eliminate possible confusion especially in describing the journalism education in Malaysia.

## THEMATIC ANALYSIS AND CODING PROCESS

Our interview process abided by strict and systematic research methods to ensure the lack of bias in the data. A thematic analysis was used to find similarities among respondents' thematic statements. The thematic analysis was derived from questions based on the main research objectives, the conceptual framework, and the literature review. The interviews were transcribed diligently and were summarised twice. Once we had completely summarised the transcribed data, we started to do the coding process on the first and second summary of transcribed data, and

later manually retracted the coding from the summary in a manner similar to that described by Saldana (2009, p. 13). As argued by Saldana (2009, p. 13), coding is different from themes because “a theme is an outcome of coding, categorising, and analytic reflection, not something that is, in itself, coded” thus there is no such thing as ‘theme coding’. Therefore, thematic analysis is used in this research to analyse and illustrate respondents’ thoughts, interactions, or individual experiences, to collectively respond to this research inquiry.

This research approach includes identifying the themes from the designed questions, as Kvale (1996, p. 88) argued, theme analysis describes “the concept of the topic under investigation before interviews begin”. Kvale (1996, p. 226) further explained that “the interviewer does not uncover any pre-existing meanings, but supports the interviewees in developing their meanings throughout the course of the interview”. For example, this research focused on the experience that could contribute to journalism education. Respondents were asked about journalism education and were given the opportunity to enlarge upon their answers, leading to a greater understanding of journalism curriculum within the broader context of journalism research based on the knowledge, experience, attitude, and skills needed.

#### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The interviews with academics and media practitioners demonstrate that there are various understandings of journalism education in Malaysia; these are indications of what could contribute to better journalism curriculum across the country.

Respondents gave their perspectives on the overall knowledge and experience needed in the journalism profession. On knowledge, attitude, and skills, most of the respondents noted that these three elements were much influenced by the niche of each university. Respondents also claimed that the universities help to shape student’s perceptions of the profession. However, they also detect a lack of skills in journalism graduates and it has become a major issue in the country. The overall claims by respondents about the current state of universities which offer journalism programmes suggest that the journalism education in Malaysia is moving slowly towards real journalism practices. Despite feedbacks and comments from the respondents on journalism education, knowledge and experience remain as an important dimension to the respondents.

The respondents have defined the experience of journalism as an important element to the graduates. The data suggests three important findings concerning the (1) knowledge (theory and practices), (2) experiences of journalism, (3) the importance of journalistic skills (writing, language, etc.), and lastly, (4) journalism students with good attitudes (passions, desire, responsibility, etc.).

Meanwhile, a journalism education should teach students how to identify news and recognise the story in a complex field of fact and opinion, how to conduct journalistic research, and how to write for, illustrate, edit, and produce materials for various media formats (newspapers and magazines, radio and television, and online and multimedia operations) and for their particular audiences. It should give them the knowledge and training to reflect on journalism ethics and best practices in journalism, and on the role of journalism in society, the history of journalism, media laws, and the political economy of media (including ownership, organisation, and competition). It should ensure that they develop—or have some prerequisites — the



linguistic ability necessary for journalistic work in their country, including, where this is required, the ability to work in local indigenous or vernacular languages. It should prepare them to adapt to technological developments and other changes in the news media. (UNESCO, 2007, p. 6; Breit, Obijiofor & Fitzgerald, 2013, p. 124).

This study has envisioned the journalism education in Malaysia and has applied these elements into the Malaysian model of journalism education. Therefore, this analysis will be based on thematic analyses which comprise knowledge, experience, attitude, skills, and critics of journalism.

### *1) Knowledge*

Most of the respondents claimed that knowledge is among the most important aspects in the field of journalism. Diversity in knowledge was also seen as important and relevant to the students. Respondents also stressed on the ability to understand well the constitutions and to write on press freedom and human rights. Besides that, young graduates were also strongly encouraged to understand the political development, not only in the country but also worldwide.

Strengthen the knowledge and abilities to claim or write from different perspectives of backgrounds. Need to include psychology, sociology, law, political, economy, international journalism, and international relation in the curriculum. I think they (journalism graduates) may have to know everything political or non-political (Informant R1).

Understand the current political situation and political development in Malaysia. Therefore, it is strongly suggested a subject on the political system in Malaysia. However, basic knowledge is a must. But need to also guide them to be creative by learning technology. At least a basic knowledge of technology as the use of the medium is different but the idea or philosophy of journalism is still the same. The students must have the ability to sense the news, must have basic knowledge and creativity (Informant R3).

Knowledge must be diverse on local and international subjects. Subjects suggested Principle of Journalism, Media ethics, Broadcast Journalism, Mass Media Theory, New Media/ Social Media, International Issues/ Relations, Science, Environmental Issues, Literature of Journalism (History of Journalism) and Philosophy of Journalism (Informant R4).

The component of journalism education should consist aspects like language, writing skills, Liberal Arts. Suggested subjects such as thinking subjects, various dimensions of philosophy in journalism which are involved with factuality, imagination, thinking, and objectivity, visual literacy, and include some substantive subjects such as analysis of society-sociology, political science and economics (Informant R5).

## 2) *Experience*

Experience was among the main issues discussed by the respondents, in which a journalist with more experience and had gone through many challenges over the years of duties, and a journalist who just joined the industry within five years or less. In the face of the vital need for practical, hands-on experience in journalism training, coupled with the near-total absence of appropriate equipment and environment to enable students to gain the required experience, internships provide an important means in journalism curricula and training programmes to plug the gaps created by deficiencies in the training system (Ojomo & Olusegan, 2015, p. 106).

A journalist is the one with more experience and had gone through many challenges while on duty (Informant R3).

Want to make them writers ... or journalists... certain fields... the industry needs people like that... but today what they get is less... may be just 20%..can write a little bit..not that much in terms of experience (Informant R9).

No problem at all (with the young journalists) except a shortcoming is experience, exposure.. a lack of exposure (Informant R12).

That the future of the journalism industry is one that will experience change with online media controlling and overpowering the traditional print media (Informant R13).

The most important thing is how is he going to determine his path/ just because something is good in theory, it doesn't mean it will be good in practical terms, and when you're being practical you need experience, so to find that experience, he needs to know if he is ready, if he's confident and brave to take risks (Informant R7).

The gains obtained through experience in previous jobs will help to improve on the next task by looking into what went wrong and what worked right with the aim to achieve better performance (Ojomo & Olusegan, 2015, p. 105).

Most of the respondents mentioned that experience in different portfolios really helped them in their profession. Journalism professors should stress the importance of all areas of journalism and incorporate hands-on experience in each field of journalism. Again, this is especially true for those students who feel like they need to be up-to-date on evolving technology, which might as well be a high percentage of journalism students today (Daniels, 2012, p. 47).

Experience and education in history, really helped me when I was a reporter and also Group Editor (Informant R4).

Last time people learn from experience or the remains from the colonials, compared to people nowadays they have school of journalism, but still using the same principles. Never think outside the mind.. I mean we are still in the same context. We learn from experience,

experience taught us. Those people who train us from experience are using the same mechanism as the West (Informant R4).

Universities should have a sharing session with the industry in order to share experiences (Informant R7).

Besides respondents' feedback, internships have become one of the most important ways for journalism students to receive initial professional experience and also break into the field (Ojomo & Olusegan, 2015, p. 109).

### 3) *Attitude*

Based on attitude, most of the respondents highlighted that young journalists should have positive thinking and good attitude to be good and responsible journalists. They also need to have passions in journalism. The ideal characteristics of journalists with good attitude must be developed from the beginning and the university must find ways to bring out the best from the students so that they will become good journalists and serve better society.

An ideal characteristic of a young journalist is idealism and idealism in journalism is more than just work. This idealism may also contribute to the society. We serve the society (Informant R1).

To be a journalist is about interest, love to read the newspaper, being independent, able to apply censorship/self-censoring. Training development was different from those who graduated overseas and local and this will identify the output versus the outcome (Informant R2).

A good journalist must have passion in journalism. To have meaning of journalism, for example care for the society. The students themselves must have good personality, good command of the language and general knowledge. It's not so much about the subjects. But for the personal development of the students, the university has to train them and bring out the best of the students (Informant R3).

Need to be responsible, committed, open minded, no bias, not prejudice, holistic writing and these attitudes are very difficult to build (Informant R4).

### 4) *Skills*

Respondents also claim that the skills needed are not only language and writing, but soft skills also matter such as writing skills, communication skills, technological skills etc.

...when we talk about journalism, it has to do with expressions, it has to do with culture, it has to do with writing, it has to do with thought, it has to do with political and social life. So, it's not only the skills of writing news. The two components basically have been around

for a long time. One is news, the other is opinion. For each component, you have a variety of characteristics...This has to be emphasised... Because we are not only dealing with the writing, we won't work by using print platform anymore. We are using broadcast, there is online, there is cyber. So, they have to have some versatility. Not only with different technology that is used, but also versatility with the visual. Because now a journalist must also perhaps capture the visual through various forms of technology (Informant R2).

Skills needed for journalism graduates such as writing, language comprehension, and communication (Informant R4).

Skill of writing, understanding about society (knowledge of the society, political system, economic etc. (Informant R5).

Although journalism education is seen to have operated not just to reproduce technical skills but also to replicate a particular occupational ideology, based on notions of individualism, professional objectivity and independence from the state (Golding, 1977 in Du Toit, 2013, p. 154), analysis of the respondent's comments suggests an array of understandings of the journalism education curriculum in Malaysia.

The majority of respondents (academics and practitioners) thoroughly understands journalism education in Malaysia as having originated from the West and in the context of Malaysian journalism, the role of journalism is still to develop nation building and maintain cultural unity among the ethnic groups. The understanding of the on-going process of the struggles of the nation's development can be seen from the responses by the academics and practitioners.

Most of the academics agree that the main issue in journalism education in Malaysia is commonly understood to support nation building aspirations, as they are also former practitioners who underwent a period of journalism training and their visions of nation building are a shared vision as academics. The respondents (academics and practitioners) describe journalism as a positive, responsible practice in Malaysia internally and externally. Representative comments include:

When you talk about journalism, you cannot forgo the literary dimension. The media does not care about literary dimension. Anyone who can write... they can be a journalist. Anyone who put anything news on Facebook, social media, they can be a journalist... But the literary dimension has to be really emphasised in journalism and the future, I think also is to look into the historical aspect.. in terms of not only the history of journalism. But also how it was developed. What was it for? What were the rules and norms and ethics, practice. And also I would say that perhaps contrary to what people may think...journalism education and the practice of journalism in Malaysia would be more... The knowledge of journalism would be more... because we cannot teach journalism out of the ethnic context (Informant R2).

According to Du Toit (2013, p. 157), scholars writing about journalism education also point out that the shifting role of knowledge within the global economic order has important implications for the function and status of the media, and this has impacted on the way in which universities teach about media.

The majority of the practitioners and academics concur that there are several obstacles and dilemmas faced by journalism education. Academics and practitioners claim that the journalism education provides ready materials from Western scholars, and are too idealistic to be applied in our culture, politics, economy, environment, and etc. Based on the argument by Gaunt (1992), these ideas were often seen to clash with local understandings of the role of journalism in the developing world (Gaunt, 1992 in Du Toit, 2013, p. 154).

Most of the respondents urged the lecturers to go back to the industry and gain industry practice. They also claimed that the universities need a serious and in-depth analysis to study irrelevant knowledge/facts taught in the class/university. Furthermore, due to lack of understanding of journalism training, the universities failed to prepare the students to become good and responsible journalists.

The practitioners and academics have similar understandings of the concept of journalism education, based on the students' opportunities and limitations of curriculum practice. This is despite the fact that most of the respondents have different journalism training backgrounds (local and abroad), for example, R1, R2, R3 and R5 graduated from Western universities and have been teaching in journalism for more than 10 years. Prior to teaching, they were also former journalists and policy makers.

## CONCLUSION

Journalism students are expected by the industry to have good experience, positive attitudes, vast knowledge, and competent skills. Since journalism doesn't work in a vacuum, one cannot deny the importance of media political economy and this has, in a way, shaped the experience, attitude, and skills of journalists. This study also illustrates the importance of knowledge and experience from the industries' perspectives.

Journalism education in Malaysia was started based on the industry's feedbacks and political influence, and over the years, technical aspects such as writing skills, attitude, and knowledge in particular have been the major issues among young journalists who graduated from the universities. However, the issues of knowledge, experience, skills, and attitude were not the main reasons journalism education was established in Malaysia. There are other aspects that have been established besides those elements, especially when critical engagements with the local community and the public are becoming increasingly significant. Apart from that, journalistic craft and other knowledge are embedded in the syllabi.

The interviews conducted had explored more about the significance of journalism study in Malaysia. The details revealed on the importance of knowledge versus experience, attitude, and skills among the young journalist from the industry and academic perspectives.

Knowledge was seen as a multidisciplinary, such as, psychology, political science, sociology, international relations, literature, management, etc. However, some of the basic knowledge such as the principles of journalism, history of journalism, history of society, and

technology were also seen as main syllabi for the journalism curriculum across the universities. Skills such as writing skill, language skill, critical thinking, creative thinking, and new media are also seen as important aspects by the industry and academics. The major issues that were raised by both industry and academics were attitude. Most of the graduates need to be more responsible, passionate, positive thinking, brave, committed, dedicated, have the desire to succeed, open minded, and not biased towards certain issues as they need to be the check and balance of the society. The provision of information literacy education is not only linked to success in employment but to the “opportunity to enhance the quality of journalistic reporting, and thereby contribute to qualitative improvements in the level of public discourse in society” (Field & MacMilan, 2011, p. 177).

Therefore, Malaysia should promote and introduce an accreditation for the journalism profession to maintain its values. It is timely for Malaysia to have a media council which provides guidelines for journalists in order to become responsible journalists and can take action on journalists. The media council must be able to take action on unethical journalists.

There are also certain claims made by the industry practitioners that some knowledge taught in universities is irrelevant. Therefore, the academics need to encourage students to become good journalists. The understanding of journalism is not as a skill but as social, cultural, and philosophical expression, and general education is needed to cover the journalistic aspect of life. There is a need to redefine the profession of journalism as well as the restructuring of the offering of journalism not just as a normal course but as a field of study.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research is a part of the Fundamental Research Grant (FRGS) which was sponsored by the Ministry of Education (S/O Code: 13264).

#### BIODATA

*Awan Ismail*, PhD is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Multimedia Technology, Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). She received her BA in Mass Communication majoring in Journalism, from Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) and MSc. in Corporate Communication from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). In 2013, she obtained her PhD in Media Studies at the University of Adelaide, Australia. Her specialization is in journalism and media with recent focus on journalism education in Malaysia. Email: [awan@uum.edu.my](mailto:awan@uum.edu.my)

*Rizalawati Ismail*, PhD is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Communication, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). She obtained her BBA in Operational Management from Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), a MSc. in Corporate Communication from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and a PhD in Media and Communication from the University of Melbourne, Australia. Her research interest includes media and communication studies. Email: [rizalawati@iium.edu.my](mailto:rizalawati@iium.edu.my)

#### REFERENCES

- Becker, L. B., Huh, J., & Vlad, T. (2003). Predictors of diversification of Journalism & Mass Communication Faculties 1989-1998. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 26-48. Retrieved from <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/107769580305800103>
- Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2011). *Teaching for quality learning at university* (4th ed.). Bershire, England: Society for Research in Higher Education and Open University Press.
- Breit, R., Obijiofor, L., & Fitzgerald, R. (2013). Internationalization as De-Westernization of the curriculum: The case of journalism at an Australian University. *Journal of Studies in Internationalization Education*, 17(2), 119-135.
- Broadus, M. B. (2012). *Students' Writing Self-Efficacy, Motivation and Experience: Predictors in Journalism Education* (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Tennessee).
- Castillo, A. (2014). Subverting democracy and thwarting social change: An examination into the Latin American mass media. *Mass Communication and Journalism*, 4, 185. doi:10.4172/2165-7912.1000185
- COHECS. (2010). *Hala Tuju Pengajian Komunikasi dan Media di Malaysia*. Bangi: UKM Press.
- Comrie, M. (2003, 4-5 December). *The place of journalism in the universities of tomorrow*. Paper presented at the JEANZ Annual Conference, Western Institute of Technology, Taranaki, New Zealand.
- deMarrais, K. (2004). Qualitative interview studies: learning through experience. In K. deMarrais & S. D. Lapan (Eds.), *Foundations for Research: Methods of Inquiry in Education and the Social Sciences* (pp. 51-68). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Deuze, M. (2006). Managing media convergence: Path-ways to journalistic cooperation/convergent journalism: The fundamentals of multimedia reporting. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 61(3), 330-333.
- Deuze, M. (2005). What is journalism? Professional identity and ideology of journalists reconsidered. *Journalism*, 6(4), 442-464.
- Du Toit, J. E. (2013). Journalism education in universities: *The global and local migration of concepts between discipline and practice* (Doctoral thesis, Stellenbosch University, South Africa).
- Hirst, M. (2010). Journalism education "Down Under". *Journalism Studies*, 11(1), 83-98.
- Kumari, A. (2014). Evaluating social media as a new tool of journalism education. *South Asia Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 1(1), 1-10.
- Kraepelin, C., & Criado, C. (2005). Building a case for convergence journalism curriculum. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 60, 47-56.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews — An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Little, J. (2006). Perspective on assessment practices in Australian journalism. *Australian Studies in Journalism*.
- Leask, B. (2013). Internationalization of the curriculum and the disciplines: Current perspectives and directions for the future. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 17(2), 99-102.

- Legard, R., Keegan, J., & Ward, K. (2003). In-depth interviews. In J. Ritchie & J. Lewis (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers* (pp.139-169). London: Sage.
- Loo, E. (2013). *Bridging the cultural gap in journalism training and education in Asia*. Singapore: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.
- Mabweazara, H. W., Mudhai, O. F., & Whittaker, J. (Eds.). (2014). *Online journalism in Africa: Trends, practices and emerging cultures*. Routledge: New York.
- Memon, B. (2014). Journalism and journalists as a research field: A review of literature. *Asia Pacific Research Journal*, 32(1): 77-92.
- Mensing, D. (2010). Rethinking (again) the future of journalism education. *Journalism Studies*, 11(4), 511-523.
- Moody, M., Subervi, F., & Oshagan, H. (2013). Ethnic/racial minorities' participation in AEJMC: How much and what type of progress?. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 68(3), 269-281.
- MoHE. (2011). Retrieved from <http://www.mohe.gov.my>
- Murad, A. M. (Ed). (2008). *Blinded by the lights: Journalism and communication study in Malaysia since 1971*. Shah Alam, Malaysia: University Publication Centre (UPENA).
- MQA. (2007). Malaysian Qualification Framework. Retrieved from <http://www.mqa.gov.my/>
- Netzley, S. B., & Banning, S. A. (2011). Tomorrow's journalists: In-groups, out-groups, and new topic preference. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 66(1), 39-53. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769581106600104>
- Pavlik, J. V. (2013). A vision for transformative leadership: Rethinking journalism and mass communication education for the twenty-first century. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, 68(3), 211-221. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077695813499561>
- Pintak, L. (2013). Islam, identity and professional values: A study of journalists in three Muslim-majority regions. *Journalism*, 15(4), 482-503.
- Poynter. (2013). *State of Journalism Education 2013*. News University.
- Ullah, M. S. (2014). De-westernization of media and journalism education in South Asia: In search of a new strategy. *China Media Research*, 10(2).
- Saldana, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Soo, L. W. (2010). Korean journalism education in multi-media age: Analysis of program and educator. *Seminar Report on Korean Broadcasting Institute (한국방송학회 세미나 및 보고서)*, 45-70.
- Syed Arabi Idid, S. A. (2000). Communication training and education in Malaysia: Developing the practitioners. In P. H. Ang, & S. Ramanathan (Eds.), *Communication education in ASEAN*. Singapore: The Asian Media Information and Communication Centre.
- Tanner, S., Green, K., P., & Cullen, T. (2014). Graduate qualities and journalism curriculum renewal: Balancing tertiary expectations and industry needs in a changing environment. *Final Report 2014*. Australian Government.



*UNESCO Series on Journalism Education*. (2013). Model curricula for journalism education: A compendium of new syllabi. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002211/221199E.pdf>

Zaharom, N. (2003). Media role in a K-Economy: Transforming media education in Malaysia. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 14, 156-165.