

Rethinking Journalism Education in Indonesia: Nine Theses

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ABSTRACT

Since the number of Indonesian mass media products is rapidly increasing, the media industry is seeking – more than ever before – for qualified and professional journalists. Although Indonesia disposes of a broad variety in journalism education, the findings of a qualitative case study show a serious amount of problems and deficiencies. What the Indonesian journalism education currently needs, is a rethinking of political, legal, and curricula aspects within a nationwide debate.

Introduction

In the past two years, the Indonesian mass media were brought into transition, caused by a regional economic collapse as well as tremendous political changes. The liberation of the press and the withdrawal of administrative restrictions initiated an enormous press boom. Within one year, from May 1998, the number of national press publications increased by approximately 400 percent. In October 1999 the government announced the issue of five new TV-licenses for commercial channels. More than ever before, the mass media industry is seeking for qualified and professional journalists. These new development obviously raise one question to more importance: Does the current Indonesian journalism education actually meet its goal – protecting the quality in journalism?

In Indonesia, where professionalism in journalism is not a new issue, useful empiric data on media communicators only rarely exist. This lack of research is apparently a common problem in the Third World (Rampal, 1996:26). Despite the raise of new theories on media and development, old paradigms like Lerner's Modernization Model, which stressed the potential of the media in trans-

forming societies from "traditional" to "modern", are still in use (Fair, 1989:137). Moreover, since today the most influential studies in the Third World are carried out by foreign researchers. Although the efficiency of this scientific one-way drive remains questionable, there is no indication for any "research imperialism" (Halloran 1988:45).

The published studies examining the journalism education in the Third World mostly did not consider all relevant dimensions so far and were not comprehending the systemic nature of the journalism education and its interdependency with environmental subsystem. This paper examines the Indonesian journalism education according to its contextual conditions, structures, objectives, and didactic contents.

Competence in Journalism

Stefan Russ-Mohl, a German scholar, once glibed: Defining quality in journalism is quite similar to any attempt "to nail a pudding to a wall" (Russ-Mohl 1992:85). Despite a multitude of approaches to quality in journalism, most of them have one thing in common: Professional competence is seen as the crucial factor that makes quality in journalism possible. In quest of a systematic

allocation of competence in journalism, we should concentrate on the simple question: What does a journalist need to know for doing his job accurately and successfully?

In the beginning of the 20th century scholars in North America (Joseph Pulitzer) and Germany (Richard Wrede, Max Weber) started to think about the basic qualifications in journalism. 60 years later, in the eighties, we were still waiting for a common systematic model of competence in journalism which might be helpful in relaunching antiquated curricula. New impulses finally came from the German scholar Siegfried Weischenberg who introduced a schematic model of competence in journalism consisting of different factor (Weischenberg 1990:24). After interviewing lecturers in Indonesia, this model could be modified as follows:

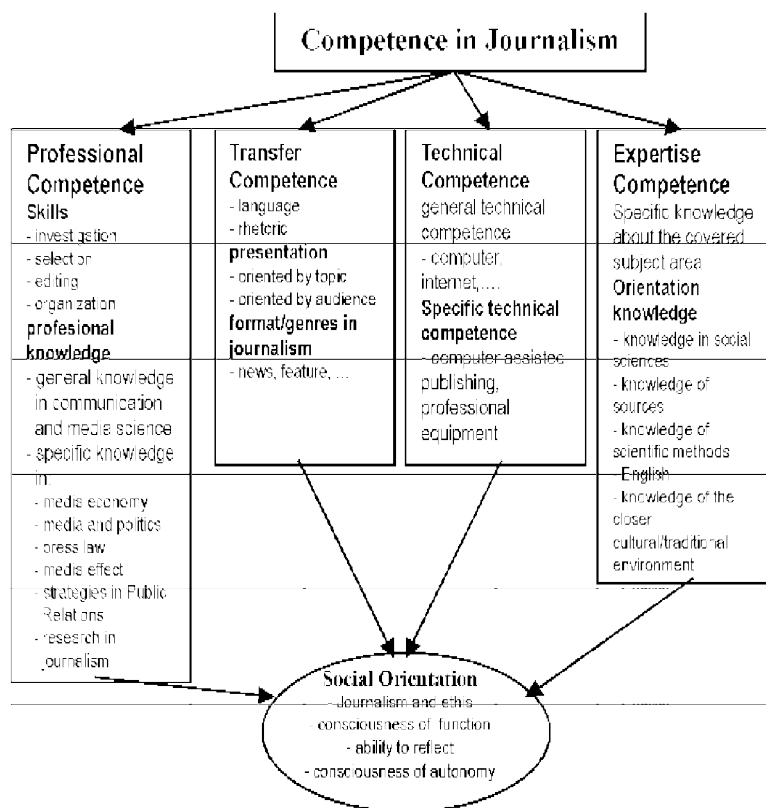
Professional Competence includes basic skills and professional knowledge in mass communications, among others media effects and research in journalism which supplies the theoretical funding of a strong social orientation (see below). Knowledge about contemporary strategies in Public Relations might immunize inexperienced young journalist against the communication goals of well-educated PR-managers.

Transfer Competence means the ability to deliver mass media messages to the audience. Technical Competence covers fundamental computer skills as well as handling the Internet and electronic databases. Beside this general skills, journalist needs a specific competence in modern publishing and professional equipment.

Failure in journalism is often caused by a deficient knowledge about the covered subject or person. Therefore we call for thorough background knowledge (Expertise Competence) in the respective sphere of work.

A journalist, who is covering economic developments, should know something about economy – a correspondent for the Middle East should have some thorough knowledge about this region.

The factor *Social Orientation* covers the consciousness of the function and the autonomy of journalists in a mass media system as well as their ability to reflect and criticize alarming developments within their own profession. But “orientation” does not mean “control”, rather it is meant as “guiding”.



Method

A lack of helpful data, studies and rudimentary scientific infrastructure forced to decide for a qualitative research design. From March to May 1999, five major Indonesian institutes educating journalists have been visited: the Institute for Social and Political Science (IISIP), Dr. Soetomo Press Institute (LPDS), Gadjah Mada University (UGM), Multimedia Training Centre (MMTC) and the Institute of Education, Research and Publications Yogyakarta (LP3Y).

Curricula, syllabi and schedules have been evaluated by document analysis and qualitative contents analysis, supplemented by elements from text-hermeneutic, because statements do not stand on their own, but are surrounded and determined by their context. In addition to these methodical steps, the author interviewed a total number of 26 permanent lecturers by using an interview guide.

Findings

Above all, there are quite a few data listing the level of formal education for the population of Indonesian journalist. We note that an amount of 34 percent did not finish any professional education at all and just 0.7 percent got a Master or a Doctor's degree. From this data we do not know, which kind of subject they actually studied.

Table 1
Level of formal education of Indonesian journalists²

| Highest degree | n | % |
|----------------------------------|-------------|------------|
| Junior high school | 24 | 0,4 |
| Senior high school | 2241 | 33,6 |
| Vocational training (non-degree) | 889 | 13,3 |
| First academic degree (S1) | 3481 | 52,1 |
| Master (S2) | 41 | 0,6 |
| Doctorate (S3) | 3 | 0 |
| Total | 6679 | 100 |

The firsts institution, which educated journalist in Indonesia, the Akademi Wartawan (Journalists Academy), started to operate in Jakarta in

1950. Three years later, a group of alumni founded the Perguruan Tinggi Jurnalistik (Journalism College) which is today known as Institut for Social and Political Science. The state-run Gadjah Mada University in 1950 established a course *Publicitit* (oriented on the German tradition of *Publizistik*), in 1959 followed by the Jakarta-based Universitas Indonesia.

Today, the Indonesian journalism education is presenting itself with an exciting variety: There are four partially new established journalist schools which offer professional short time courses ranging between some days and six months. The higher education in journalism and communications is vertically divided in 6 academies, 14 colleges, 2 institutes and 47 universities. Most of them run by private foundations. Academies impart basic professional skills within one to four years (non degree: Diploma D1-D4). Colleges and institutes are allowed to issue the Sarjana S1- and S2 degree (S2 is comparable with Master), while only universities are enabled for issuing the S3-degree (Doctorate).

Table 2
Vertical distribution of the higher journalism education in Indonesia³

| Type | degree | n | Students |
|--------------------------|--------|-----------|---------------|
| Academy (Akademi) | D3 | 6 | 579 |
| College (Sekolah Tinggi) | D3-S1 | 14 | 2,436 |
| Institute (Institut) | S1 | 2 | 1,212 |
| University (Universitas) | D3-S3 | 47 | 14,865 |
| Total | | 69 | 19,092 |

Despite these positive aspects, the findings also show a serious amount of problems and deficiencies. First of all, the journalism education, so far, is concentrated by approximately 80 percent in the highly populated island Java and the industrial town Medan in Sumatra. The eastern parts like Irian Jaya (West Guinea), Maluku, and most of the Sunda Islands are currently a "journalism education free zone".

Current regulations in Indonesian educational law do not commit any integration of liberal arts in the curricula. There is no opportunity to choose a second (or even a third) subject in addition to the main subject Journalism or Communications. For this reason we see no chance for improving very expertise knowledge within the present curricula. Moreover, the journalism education is still blocked by a so-called *National Curriculum* for Communication Science, journalism, Public Relations, and Advertising.

The present curricula in Indonesia – caused by this National Curriculum- contain quite a much in abundance: Subjects like *Religion, Patriotism, State Ideology*, and an *Introduction in Social – and Natural Sciences* actually have nothing to do with higher education. Generally, the curricula seem to be swamped with theoretical issues and far from the practise. This study discovered a serious integration gap among the different taught subject as well as with the practise; the several subject are mostly given in addition to each other. An interviewed lecturer even stated.

There is no interaction between education and the media industry. The industry is a world on its own; the education is a world on its own.

Another evident deficiency in the Indonesian journalism education is caused by a chronic shortage of money: The technical equipment is far behind the real mass media production. Modern publishing software like *QuarkXPress* or *Illustrator* usually did not enter the syllabi. Most of the visited educational institutions do not even teach their students how to use the *Internet*.

In Indonesia, so far, could be observed that its journalism education does not consider the importance of an autonomous and reflective consciousness regarding the function and the role of journalism in a mass media system. For journalists in conflict situations, nine of 26 interviewed lecturers proposed an adaptable and disciplined attitude, 11 suggested idealism and autonomy.

Base on previous interviews with 10 Indonesian editors in chief we chose five institutions, which represent the entire spectrum of the local

journalism education. Far from our expectations, the reputable Faculty of Communication Science at the *Padjadjaran University* in Bandung (West Java) did not enter the sample. For describing the didactic contents we used curricula and syllabi.

The section Communication Science at the state-run *Gadjah Mada University* (UGM) was established in 1950. Located in Yogyakarta, Central Java, the section offers two courses of studies: In the academic year 1998/1999 about 200 students were registered for Broadcasting (Diploma D3, 5 semester), 440 student in Communication Science (Sarjana S1, 8-14 semester). The applicants have to pass the national selection test issued by the Ministry of Education. Particularly, we were interested in the Communication Science, which offers a specialization in journalism.

The lesson are focused on theoretical knowledge, but practical skills are quite rare in the curriculum. News-investigation and news-formats are even compressed into a single seminar lasting three ours a week over one semester. The faculty is equipped with PC's and software for processing text, graphic design and statistic, but electronic publishing did not get access to the curriculum yet. All of the 16 permanent lecturers acquired a university degree in Communication Science: three of them have working experiences in journalism.

The Jakarta-based *Institute for Social and Political Science* (IISP) is one of the experienced institutions in the Indonesian journalism education. Founded in 1953, the IISP offer a course in journalism (Sarjana S1) with currently 1050 students. The institute is equipped with computer (for text, graphic, and statistic) and is connected with the Internet. There are no broadcasting facilities available yet, caused by a shortage of funds. From 10 lecturer who teaching professional skills and knowledge (*Professional Competence, Transfer Competence*), at least six instructor had acquired substantial working experiences in journalism.

The curriculum is dominated by theoretical knowledge. With regard to developing an autonomous consciousness about functions, tasks, and the role of journalist in a democratic society, we could not find any evidence. For the duration of

one semester (three hours a week) the students are involved in a simulated editorial office which aims to publish a newspaper under realistic conditions. The students are not obligated to attend a long-term internship. Exercising professional skills in journalism covers about 20 percent of the total curriculum, including seminars for news writing, investigation, feature, and rhetoric.

The Yogyakarta-located *Multi Media Training Center* (MMTC), inaugurated in 1985, educated exclusively journalist working for the government-own television (TVRI) and radio station (RRI). Staff, curricula, and budget are handled by the National Ministry for Information, which after the presidential change in October 1999 does not longer exist. The fate of the MMTC is still unclear.

As a part of the ministerial administration structure, the MMTC never suffered from financial trouble. The institution owns excellent studio facilities and the local TVRI-station is located in the same street. The 44 students each year are instructed by 30 teachers, 16 of them are vested with profound working experiences.

The curriculum looks well balanced: In the first year the students were taught in professional skills, in the following two years (attended by the 12 respective 8 best students) completed with more theoretical knowledge. Depending on the duration of their studies, the students receive a Diploma D1-, D2-, or D3- certificate (non-degree).

Its strong point the MMTC shows in teaching skills like investigation, news selection and editing. The audience as reference dimension in journalism is considered, the knowledge about media effects is directly integrated in the training of professional skills.

Realizing the insufficient qualification of Indonesian journalists the National Press Council in 1998 initiated the foundation of the *Dr. Soetomo Press Institute* (LPDS). The Jakarta-based institute, which aims to “produce professional model journalists for an instant recruitment”, offers courses for beginners in journalism as well as for professional updating.

Applicants for the basic course (Postgraduate Studies in Journalism, PSJ) require a tertiary

academic degree in any field of study, except they are already working in an editorial office. Beside an entrance test covering English and Indonesian language skills and general knowledge, they have to write a short statement about their motives for application. The number of students is limited up to 20 students. Eight from 10 permanent lecturers are well experienced in journalism.

The LPDS above all provides professional skills and knowledge, particularly about investigation, editing, and creative news-writing. An overriding importance is given to exercising news formats in journalism, but it is still not clear why the curriculum cuts out arguing genres like editorial or essay. In the same way, knowledge about the audience remains unmentioned.

The PSJ-course looks compact and practise oriented, although there is no internship considered. The most significant deficiency of the LPDS-institute is similar to the previously portrayed institutions UGM and IISIP: Knowledge around new technologies in journalism is not provided in an adequate way. Unfortunately, the original duration of the basic course in journalism, 40 weeks, has been halved in 1996.

The *Institute of Education, Research and Publications Yogyakarta* (LP3Y) was established in 1997 and is situated in the Javanese town Yogyakarta. The independent institute provides, among others, a six months lasting intensive course for prospective journalists. One part of the 20 participants is generally sent from national mass media companies, the remaining students are selected by a written entrance examinations and a psychological test. The participants require a tertiary academic degree in any discipline.

The basic course lasting 26 weeks is formatted like workshop. On working days the participants are committed to train their professional skills by practicing in accordance to their lessons provided on every Saturday. About one week the student spend in a selected editorial office.

The curriculum neither covers knowledge about press law, media classification, and ethics nor does it mention the audience as reference dimension. For the emergence of any reflection of

journalism and its role within the society the LP3Y does not provide enough theoretical knowledge in journalism and communication.

The LP3Y owns a computer lab equipped with software like *MS Word*, *PhotoShop*, and *PageMaker*, but computer assisted publishing did not get access into the curriculum. From the 16 registered instructors only two have graduated in communication science, but 11 of them have acquired profound working experiences.

According to the records of 98 lecturer working permanently at the selected institutions, only 44 of them have collected working experiences in journalism and 50 lecturers have studied in journalism or communication. By crossing these qualifications, we discovered that just 26 lecturers acquired the “ideal” qualification for educating prospective journalist, which contains of substantial working experiences and former studies in communication or journalism.

Additionally, in 26 interviews with random selected lecturers we asked them, among others, for their motivation to become an instructor in journalism or communication. The given answer were quite surprisingly: Many interviewed lecturers stated that to become an instructor has been not their own respective first choice:

My parents told me, for a woman it is better to become a teacher.

Accidentally, I have a family in Yogyakarta, here I got married. When I still was a journalist, I always had to be ready for a change of place. The work as an instructor gives me the opportunity to stay permanently in Yogyakarta.

Moreover, there might be also some students who are actually at the wrong place. A lecturer at the state-run Gadjah Mada University stated:

The students do not choose the seminars that really need, but they choose the lecturers giving the better reference [...] They come to us and have no idea what they want to become. They study at the university because they want to postpone their later failure in the job market.

The interviews also indicated a communication gap between the faculty members as well as between the various institutions. Research is car-

ried out sporadically and does usually not involve students. Lecturers and instructors in the Indonesian journalism education—as far as it could be observed—apparently have tendency to avoid research and professional updating. For many lecturers, it seemed even hard to remind three contemporary volumes or authors in communication sciences.


Conclusion

Therefore, this paper proposes nine theses, which might be helpful in handling these current insufficiencies:

1. A basic revision in educational law should student in Indonesian enable to choose a second, complementary subject beside their main subject Journalism or Communications.
2. The responsibility for designing the curricula should be handed over to the respective educational institution. We propose the withdrawal of the National Curriculum.
3. More efforts for establishing new educational facilities should be considered in the minor provinces, particularly in the eastern part of Indonesia.
4. A rethinking of the curricula should show a coherent didactic concept. The implementation of didactic objectives has to be accompanied by a permanent evaluation.
5. Young journalist aspirants should be given a social orientation which make them able to reflect and criticize alarming development within their own profession and which can immunize them against several attempts of internal and external intervention. A social orientation can be given in the form of long-term internships. After returning to school, the several experiences should be discussed and reflected in the class.
6. The implementation of new technologies in journalism should be discussed, trained and reflected. Because of the rapid development of technologies, which are used in journalism, the legitimization of any journalism education

is dependent on its ability to keep pace with this speed.

7. It can not be stressed enough that there is a need for integration among the different taught subjects as well as with the practice.
8. Lecturers and instructor have to realize their key role in the educational process, they should appear with more professional commitment.
9. Supporting this proposed reconsidering of the Indonesian journalism education, there is a need for a nationwide debate which can connect the legislative, executive, educational institutions, publishers, broadcasters, journalist organizations, and, of course, journalists by themselves.

To give this discussion an empirical foundation, we suggest to carry out basic field research examining a representative amount of Indonesian journalist and their working conditions. This might be the first in the years to come. Moreover, a re-thinking of the journalism education needs communication, because journalism is communication. 

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