Bridging the Skills Gap: Aligning Journalism Education with Industrial Needs in Nepal

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Abstract

In Nepal, many individuals joined the journalism profession without professional training or formal education in the past. With the 1990's democratic transition, the journalism landscape underwent significant changes, marking a proliferation of news media outlets, academic programs, and training opportunities. Even with many journalism programs and training opportunities available, there are still a gap in skills between classroom learning and industry demands, leading to journalism graduates lacking some essential professional skills. This study investigates the contributing factors to this skills gap, comprising outdated curricula, limited exposure to the newsrooms, and the lack of practical know how as well as confidence to work in the modern-day digital newsrooms. Employing key informant interviews with working journalists, newsroom leaders, and journalism educators, and reviewing the relevant literature, this study identifies skills gap not only among fresh graduates but also mid-career professionals, and proposes strategies to match journalism education and training opportunities with industry needs. The findings underscore the requisite for market-oriented curriculum design and regular updates, skill-centric teaching methods, adequate internship opportunities for journalism students and hands-on training for working journalists to prepare them for the realities of Nepal's evolving media landscape.

Keywords: journalism education, skills gap, curriculum updates, digital newsroom

Introduction

Nepal's media landscape is diverse with 4,859 newspapers and 4,061 news portals registered as of July 2023. However, the active operational status reveals a more modest figure, with 928 newspapers and 998 online portals being published and updated regularly (PCN, 2023). Additionally, there are 1,186 local radios and 243 television channels (DoIB, 2023). Nepal's media sector experienced significant growth after the restoration of democracy in 1990 (Onta, 2008; Pandey, 2022). The advent of digital technologies further propelled its surge, generating employment opportunities within the media industry and increasing the demand of skilled journalists (Acharya, 2018). Alongside the industrial boom, the media sector witnessed an increase in the number of journalists. The Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), an umbrella trade union of Nepali journalists, comprises more than 13,000 working members across the country (FNJ, 2023).

Despite a history spanning one and a quarter century of Nepali journalism, Nepal initially lacked an education or training system to support the media industry (Acharya, 2018). Due to this, many journalists joined the profession without formal education or professional training in journalism for decades. This trend is still evident as many serving editors of major news outlets are from non-journalism academic background (Acharya, 2018). Many journalists, after a few years in the profession, feel the need for enchaining their skills. Some of them join academic programs to obtain a degree in journalism. Since studying for an academic degree demands a few years of effort, many others find it hard to go to university in the middle of their career. Mid-career journalists, despite their willingness to learn new skills or enhance their journalism skills, often get no opportunities to do so due to lack of training institutes and training programs aimed at them.

The ongoing discourse surrounding the disparity between classroom journalism teachings and newsroom practices, as well as the dichotomy between journalism theories and professional applications, spans across the world (Buckingham, 1996; French & Richards, 2003; Masterman, 2015; Hubbard, 2022). This debate primarily revolves around two divergent views: One emphasizes the necessity of enriching journalism education with greater resources and contemporary programs aligned with market demands, alongside well-prepared, knowledgeable, and skilled journalism educators (Acharya & Sharma, 2022; Kumar, 2022; Ullah, 2013). The second view questions the necessity of a robust academic background in journalism to excel in the field (Buckingham, 2015; Regmi, 2022), particularly in the era of participatory media culture and digitization, where individuals can evolve into "self-mass communicators"

(Castells, 2013). Besides, a third perspective advocates for the potential of modern digital technology in bridging the gaps between media education and professional practices (Hubbard, 2022).

Discourse on journalism education and newsroom exercises are widely discussed topic in many countries, yet it has received relatively less attention in Nepal's academic discourse. Existing literature on this theme mostly focuses on assessing evolution of media education, training exercises and their prospects and limitations, and the gap between the principles learned in classrooms and newsroom practices (Pant, 2009; Parajuli et al., 2009; Humagain, 2010; Acharya, 2019). Many of these studies argue that the quality of journalism education is inadequate to meet the international standards and domestic market needs (Parajuli et al.; Acharya, 2019). However, previous studies are limited in scope and lack methodological rigor. Acharya and Sharma (2022b) assess the status of Nepal's media curriculum in light of global benchmarks and values as well as local aspirations and demands. The study's limitation lies is its exclusive reliance on the perspectives of journalism educators, employing a global lens rather than a local one that may not entirely fit with the nuances of Nepali context.

Study into the current state of classroom learnings and their alignment with the needs of a modern, digital, and multimedia newsroom is limited. Previous studies have also paid less attention on the newsroom perspectives, including the impact of evolving technologies on journalists' work. In this context, this study examines the implications of journalism education and training opportunities for both aspiring and employed journalists. Drawing insights from various stakeholders, including journalism educators, newsroom leaders, and working journalists, this study explores strategies to bridge the skill gaps among the aspiring and working journalists and aims to connect classroom learning with newsroom expectations.

Methods

This study is primarily based on key informant interviews (KIIs) with newsroom leaders, working journalists, media educators, researchers, along with a review of relevant literature. Besides, non-structured interviews were conducted with six journalism professionals, trainers and experts to verify data and bolster the analysis. As KIIs is a method used to gather first-hand knowledge from expert sources (Hancock, et al., 2009), the 13 participants were asked a series of semi-structured questions about prevailing pedagogical exercises in media education; available media programs and curricula, and prospects of skills enhancement opportunities for journalists in their

news organizations and media sector in general. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, using a snowballing approach (Saldana, 2011). Among them were two sitting editors of news dailies, three editors/news editors of online news portals, three journalism trainers, four working journalists with several years' careers in print, radio, television and online news media as well as two journalism educators. Seven out of 13 KII participants had studied journalism prior to joining newsrooms, while four others studied journalism in the course of their journalism careers, who never pursued journalism education while one media educator never worked in newsroom. Three of them also had experiences of heading various media organization or journalism trade unions, including the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), the Society of Economic Journalists (SEJON), the National News Agency and Nepal Television. The KIIs were mostly conducted in November 2021, and some were taken in September 2023 and January 2024. Interviews were taken in Nepali language for convenience and transcribed verbatim immediately afterward, and then translated into English. Each participant was numerically coded as participants (p) 1–13 in alphabetical order based on their first names. The data, analyses, and conclusions are drawn based on thematic analysis of responses from the KIIs. Responses from informal interviews with seven experts, including media professionals and educators are also embedded in these thematic analyses.

With regard to the theoretical framework, this study engages with relevant global perspectives, drawing from the World Journalism Education Council's (WJEC) 'Declaration of Principles' (2007) and UNESCO's 2007 model curriculum in media education (Banda, 2013). The WJEC's 11-point 'Declaration of Principles' outlines key tenets for global journalism education. These principles advocate for collaborative efforts between academic institutions and media organizations to advance interdisciplinary journalism education; offering various academic programs and courses tailored to cater to both newcomers and seasoned professionals, and providing specialized training opportunities for both media students as well as educators. The curriculum should strike a balance between theoretical and practical aspects, ensuring proficiency in technological tools for generating quality content (WJEC, 2007). Meanwhile, the 2007's manual by UNESCO aims to enhance teaching-learning practices and curriculum content (Banda, 2013). UNESCO views media education reform as crucial in cultivating professional journalistic standards that, in the long run, can galvanize democratic processes. Acharya & Sharma (2022) suggest that both of these initiatives are interlinked and complement each other, often working together to foster universal standards of media education. Based on these perspectives, this study delves into the examination of the media education landscape in Nepal.

Findings and Analysis

State of Journalism Education and Training in Nepal

This section provides an overview of the journalism education and training landscape in Nepal. Drawing primarily from insights from KIIs participants and previous studies, it examines current initiatives in journalism education and training. The focus is on exploring existing university programs, curricula, and teaching-learning practices.

Un-updated Curricula and Lack of Practical Approach

The surge in media outlets after the 1990s' democratic transition led to an increased demand for skilled journalists. To address this, various universities and campuses introduced journalism courses, while non-academic institutions offered short-term training to equip aspiring journalists with professional skills. Journalism has also been introduced as an elective subject in secondary and higher secondary schools (Grades 9, 10, 11 & 12). There are over 168 schools and 80 colleges offering diverse media and journalism programs across the country (Acharya, 2019).

Seven universities— Tribhuvan University (TU), Purbanchal University (PU), Kathmandu University (KU), Mid-Western University (MWU), Pokhara University, Far-Western University (FWU) and Nepal Open University (NOU) offer journalism programs in graduate and/or post-graduate levels. TU has the most diverse programs from bachelor's degree to PhD; KU runs bachelor, Master's and PhD programs in media studies, where PU offers Master's and Bachelor's programs in journalism, and media technology. Likewise, NOU runs Master's program in media and communication studies, while other universities run Bachelor's degree programs. Though journalism is recognized as a practical discipline (Parajuli et al., 2009), universities' programs focus heavily on theoretical aspects. Despite having some practical exercises, university curricula lack a practical approach in journalism teaching-learning practices. For instance, TU's graduate program makes up 70 percent of theoretical classes, while practical classes account merely for 30 percent (Maharjan, 2020; Acharya, 2019). Opportunities for skills development like internships and traineeships are notably absent in these academic programs (Maharjan, 2021).

Skills gap is exacerbated by outdated readings in university courses, which fail to correspondence with current issues and market trends (Acharya, 2019; Maharjan, 2021; Parajuli et al., 2009). University curricula undergo regular updates to keep pace with the evolving media dynamics and market needs (WJEC, 2007). Such revisions

are not always evident in our higher education system in Nepal. For example, TU's Master's journalism courses, for example, have not been updated since 2014. The lack of integration of diverse aspects of digital media and the failure to keep pace with the digital innovations hinder the preparedness of journalism graduates for the newsroom demands (Maharjan, 2020).

Contemporary newsroom seeks individuals who are not merely proficient in reporting news, but storytellers with the versatility to craft stories across diverse media formats (Robinson, 2011). This includes proficiency in handling text, audio, video, graphics, interactive elements, and technical skills. Majority of KII participants with journalism-graduates, reported the absence of reporting skills such as pitching news, conducting interviews and writing news when they first entered newsrooms. Two participants (p- 9 & 13) even recalled their weakness in understanding evolving issues and sensing news, let alone being a multi-media storyteller.

All journalism-graduates (including p-9, 11, 12 &13), who are now active in newsrooms with years of experiences, reported the disparity between classroom learnings and newsroom practices, and shared their initial struggles to transitioning to newsroom from classroom. Despite having theoretical base about journalism, they acknowledged initial lack of confidence and basic reporting skills such as pitching news, taking interviews, present reports effectively. Reflecting on her first newsroom experience, participant (11) recounted a humiliating incident when a news editor discarded her first story, dismissing it as an 'essay' rather than news. "Had I been taught the practical aspects of news writing, I wouldn't have faced such humiliation," adds the participant. Akhilesh Upadhyay, a long-time editor-in-chief of The Kathmandu Post, observed that absence of practical exercises in classroom learnings leads to a situation where numerous journalism graduates find themselves lacking the essential skills and confidence required for effective roles within newsrooms (A. Upadhyay, personal communication, March 21, 2018).

Still, most of the journalism-graduate participants view that with dedicated educators and updated courses, classrooms could simulate students through engaging them in news reporting, writing, and editing practices. They share the sentiment that educators with newsroom exposure can effectively link theoretical coursework to newsroom practices. Participant 11 adds: "Educators with substantial exposure bridged the gap between the classroom and newsroom by sharing their experiences, insights into newsroom dynamics, and expectations." Participants 9 & 13 call for better newsroom exposure for journalism students, proposing compulsory internships as a basic part of journalism education.

Training Gaps, Funding Woes and Sustainability Challenges

In response to the increasing demands of the market for skilled journalists, numerous training institutes emerged to provide practical knowledge and hands-on skills. These institutions aim to provide trainings, particularly for those individuals without formal journalism education. Two primary categories of such institutions involve of those explicitly dedicated on providing journalism training, and those engaged in training activities despite having a primary objective unrelated to media training (Parajuli et al., 2009). Among the early players include the non-for- profit Nepal Press Institute (NPI) and the for-profit Media Point (MP). These institutes rely their operations through student fees and grants. However, they faced challenges related to sustainability and adapting to the evolving needs of the industry. NPI, established in 1984, still runs its flagship 10-month basic journalism training, and approximately 600 learners have graduated from its 39th batch (K. Kafle, personal communication, January 10, 2024). While, MP, established in 1995, with similar objectives and programs) ceased its training in 2015 due to financial hardships (S.R.S. Basnet, personal communication, November, 2020). Two other training institutes, Jamaleshwor Institute and the Academy of Audio, Visual Arts, and Sciences, provided fundamental journalism courses from the late 1990s to the early 2000s, meeting a fate similar to other journalism training centers.

The remaining training institutes struggle to offer updated courses that align with the rapidly changing media landscape. This leads to a gap in advanced training opportunities for many aspiring journalists. Media School, a relatively recent institute founded in 2010 as a for-profit journalism training center, faces challenges in its sustainability. Despite providing basic media training, it falls short by lacking courses that address the essential new skills required for journalists working in the digital newsrooms (N. Chalise, personal communication, November 18, 2021). A notable exception is the Center for Media Research-Nepal's (CMR-Nepal) newly launched Journalism Academy. Aiming to provide short-term hands-on skills required for a modern digital newsroom, it provides trainings about mobile journalism, data journalism and podcasting. These programs are targeted for experienced and mid-career journalists so that they could have fit into the digitized newsrooms and sustain in the media profession (U. Acharya, personal communication, May 26, 2023).

Some advocacy organizations, journalist unions, and media-related NGOs are also involved in the journalism training. Majority of these institutions run journalism training courses for advancing their agenda or as part of the projects that they have received funding on (Parajuli, et. al., 2009). Humagain (2010) notes that these training programs cannot fulfill the knowledge and skills gaps of the mid-career journalists and

fresh university graduates as they are funding-driven and 'project-based'. Moreover, irregular and funding-driven training programs by media institutions, journalist associations, and advocacy organizations have not effectively addressed the knowledge and skills gaps faced by mid-career journalists and fresh graduates. These programs are often project-based, leading to a lack of systematic and comprehensive training tailored to the specific needs of the industry.

Journalism Training Needs and Perceptions Among Stakeholders

This section presents the outcomes of KIIs and analyzes them in accordance with the WJEC's (2007) declaration and UNESCO's manual (Banda, 2013). Organizing the participants' responses; the findings are categorized into three key themes: the university programs vis-a-vis newsroom expectations; the performance of training institutes, and availability of hand-on training opportunities aimed at bridging the skills gap between classrooms and newsrooms.

University Programs Mismatch Newsroom Expectations

Academic disciplines seek to achieve certain educational and professional goals, using curricula and pedagogies, responding to demands for certain competencies from the professions they are associated with (Acharya & Sharma, 2022). Although the university programs in journalism seem effective to provide theoretical knowledge, they have become shy to impart professional skills. Almost all KII participants (n-11) shared the view that journalism programs at universities are theory-laden and inadequately provide professional skills required to be a journalist.

Participants (p-1, 2) — a sitting editor of a national daily and a media trainer and former chairman of the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), respectively — noted that our university and training curricula often fall short in understanding the market's needs. The contemporary media market seeks professionals not only equipped with basic journalism skills but also those who possess the ability to be multimedia storytellers, engage in real-time reporting, demonstrate proficiency in data and mobile journalism, and exhibit IT skills. Several participants, including p-1 & 2, believe that the lack of such skills might be a factor in numerous journalism graduates choosing not to pursue careers in the media sector. Another serving editor (p-4) argue that a more skills-oriented approach in the classroom could have attracted a greater number of students to pursue journalism.

There is a lack of research about the number of journalism graduates pursuing journalism careers. Media educators and several KII participants (including, p-1,5 & 6) estimate that merely a quarter of fresh graduates join the media. Multiple

factors could play roles in one's career choices—including market demand, earnings, motivation factors etc. Educators argue that not all journalism graduates are destined to join newsrooms; instead, they have diverse employment options. University programs incorporate various dimensions of media and communication studies. For instance, TU runs programs focusing on journalism and mass communication aspects, while KU's programs are media-study centric. The perspective of journalist-turned-academic Kundan Aryal well sums up this. He says: Academic programs are not designed exclusively like those of professional training institutes. As journalism and media studies are interdisciplinary in nature, the courses are designed to produce not just journalists (K. Aryal, personal communication, September 23, 2023). Graduates may have diverse career options, such as becoming a social scientist, communication and public relations professionals, content creator, researcher, academician, among others. Chiranjibi Khanal, the head of the Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at Tribhuvan University, notes that many journalism students explore opportunities in government services, non-governmental organizations, and private firms. Khanal highlights that journalism graduates are often sought after for roles such as public relations and information officers (C. Khanal, personal communication, November 17, 2019).

Participants shed light on how the high expectations from journalism graduates often fail in newsroom. Participant-1 shared his organization had at once hired more journalists without journalism degrees than those with formal academic qualifications. "Those who have learnt skills as well as theoretical base perform well. Those who have only theoretical knowledge, they may perform well in classroom, but may not necessarily replicate that performance in the newsroom," the participant added. Participant-4, however, argues that a prior academic background provides an added advantage for the newsroom, as journalists with a sound theoretical base and ethical understanding can bring valuable perspectives.

Many participants who graduated in journalism, including p-8, 9 & 13, emphasize their ability to maintain a balanced presentation of news, protect source privacy, and acknowledge the significance of objective facts. Participant-9 shared her experience, noting that her news reports received fewer corrections and cautions from supervisors compared to reports by colleagues without journalistic backgrounds. Participant-11, another journalism graduate, however, argues that while it provides advantages, a journalist's ethical behavior ultimately depends on their 'sense of professionalism.'

As in recent times newsroom looks for multi-skilled storyteller (Robinson, 2011), theory-laden university programs do not match it. Participant (6), an editor of an English-language news portal, said that having a journalism degree and good

command in reporting are not enough to perform well in a digital newsroom, which needs multitasking journalists having good skills with photo, audio or audio-visual contents. Even experienced journalists lack such skills. In the digital transformation of media, many experienced journalists also lack digital skills and need acquiring those skills. Shrestha (2021), a pioneering Nepali-language blogger and digital journalism trainer, noticed that even senior journalists in digital newsrooms follow the traditional media (print media) practices (U. Shrestha, personal communication, November 24, 2021). According to him, senior journalists have a print media background and try to follow the same practices in digital newsrooms. They need many skills to work efficiently in digital media. Participants (5 & 6) underscores the need of training for trainers as many journalism educators and trainers are not updated and well versed in many new dimensions, approaches and skills applicable in the digitized newsrooms. Participant- 3, a journalist with extensive experience at prominent publications, who has no journalism academic background, acknowledge his early struggle in weaving news and incorporating fundamental elements like the 5W and 1H, attributing it to the absence of journalism academic background. He currently feels the gap in technological proficiency and fact-checking within the digital media landscape.

Expecting everything from the classroom could be ideal, as academic programs must encompass various aspects of learning, including principles, values, ethics, and theories. Several participants, including p- 4 & 12, acknowledge that translating theoretical knowledge gained in classroom into newsroom practice is not easy. Kundan Aryal, a journalist turned media educator at TU, reinforces this idea. Aryal points out that, in many other countries, despite having sound academic programs, there is a presence of training institutions to bridge the skills gap. To address this, enabling training facilities and promoting in-house skills development opportunities should be prioritized, in addition to reviewing existing academic programs and curricula (K. Aryal, personal communication, September 23, 2023). Participant-3 notes the mentorship deficit in newsroom for newcomers, urging newsroom leadership to instill qualities such as hard work, curiosity, and, above all, ethical conduct among the journalists.

Journalism-graduates (including, p-9, 11, 12, & 13) emphasize for newsroom leadership not to place high expectations on fresh graduates. Participants 9 & 13 view the transitioning from classroom to newsrooms can be smooth through proper guidance, skills enhancement training and orientations by the concerned media organizations about newsroom's styles, priorities, and evolving technologies. Yet, all of them reported rare chances of in-house skills enhancement opportunities in their years of career. While p-9 got three training opportunities by various non-for-profit organizations, p-13

received no such chance throughout her over six years in journalism. Participant-11 reported having in-house guidance on effective news reporting and wiring informally.

Training Institutes Failed to Move with Digital Change

Participants paint a concerning picture of the state of media journalism training amidst the significant drop in both the number of training institutes and trainees. Participant-2— a media trainer and former chairman of the Federation of Nepali Journalists observes that gradual decrease has been particularly seen in last decade. Among many institutes established to provide journalism training, only the Nepal Press Institute (NPI) has sustained with a few programs. NPI's media training coordinator Kapil Kafle reported that besides 10-month's fundamental journalism course, NPI used to conduct various specialized journalism training but they have discontinued the program due to a lack of funding (K. Kafle, personal communication, November 21, 2021). Participant-6, a former secretary general of NPI, attributes to factors such as diminishing appeal for journalism as a profession and declining quality for this shrinking interest in journalism training. Media educator at TU, Kundan Aryal, argues that journalism as a profession might have become toothless due to lack of rigor at the institutional as well as journalist's levels. He adds: "We have no established and dedicated practical media training institution to offer modern and up-to-date training programs that respond to the training needs caused by digitization" (K. Aryal, personal communication, September 23, 2023).

Participant (8) shared how his Media School, a popular journalism training institute, could only conduct basic journalism training in distance learning due to the pandemic. Training institutes' focus on basic journalism training and lack of focus on digital newsrooms did not attract journalists. According to (p-2), most of NGOs' training are sporadic and project-based and conducted only when they find funding. These institutions mostly offer training for a few days, and rarely provide curriculum-based training. Almost half of the participants (p-4, 5, 7 & 10) observed that training offered by NGOs are repetitive.

Journalists are also attending training opportunities provided by various national and international organizations, including the CMR-Nepal, Center for Investigative Journalism, Thomson Reuters Foundation, Asian College of Journalism, and Indian Institute of Mass Communication. Such training opportunities are rare and competitive, and only a few are selected to attend. Participant (4), who was once the Asia Journalism Fellow in the Philippines and had attended a few international trainings, shared how many international trainings are not designed to cater the needs of our local journalists.

The participant calls for a need-based training, especially to impart skills required by the digital transformation to both new-comers and experienced journalists.

Majority of participants (including p-1, 4, 5, 10 & 12) opine that existing journalism training institutes failed to produce good trainers with updated knowledge and skills. They underscored the need of methodological, pedagogical and module review of the available and ongoing training approaches as existing ones couldn't meet the demands of the industry. They observed lapses on conducting training within a learner-friendly, interactive, and modern internet-ready set-up and called for a fresh and dynamic approach not only in the areas of training but also the delivery of it.

Skill-focused Trainings to Meet Industry Needs

Today's media landscape demands journalists who are not only wordsmiths but also multimedia storytellers, capable of crafting compelling narratives across diverse platforms (Chone, 2019; Christopher, 2013; Robinson, 2011). Yet, the gap between industry needs and university curricula is wide. Overhauling university curricula, shifting teaching-learning approaches towards practical application, and incorporating more hands-on multimedia production experiences into journalism courses can largely be addressed many of skills gaps. However, universities alone cannot shoulder this responsibility and may be unable to do so in near feature as their curriculums have not been reviewed for years due to bureaucratic system of curriculum design and revision.

As media educator K. Aryal (personal communication, September 2023) suggests, training institutes play a vital role in bridging the gap and equipping students with the skills necessary to thrive in the current media ecosystem. Several participants pointed out that skills enhancement training would be crucial to ensure Nepal's media embraces the digital transformation. Participant-1 notes that in-house orientations are more effective to induct newcomers in the media houses. However, almost all newsroom leaders and working journalists (including p-1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12 & 13) shared most of the media institutions have no human resources to provide specialized skill training and has no systemic programs of providing on the job skills development training.

Two participants (p-4 & 8) emphasize the important role of appropriate training programs in giving confidence and enhancing the performance of journalists, especially in the context of present-day digital newsroom. Ideally, a collaborative approach between newsrooms and journalism training institutes, involving the creation of customized curricula aligned with newsroom needs and delivered by trained trainers, is considered optimal. However, there is a notable absence of such collaborative efforts

between training institutes and media houses in Nepal. Besides, a consensus among almost two-thirds of participants asserts that specialized training programs are mostly short-term and rely on the expertise of the resource person rather than need of the participants. As result, the effectiveness of the training is heavily reliant on the quality and preparation of the resource person, potentially resulting in unequal relevance for all trainees.

Discussion and Conclusion

Drawing through the perspectives of WJEC's (2007) "Declaration of Principles" and UNESCO's (2013) module in media education, this study discerns a serious gap in collaborative efforts between academic institutions and media organizations. Existing academic exercises instill students with a sound theoretical base and ethical understanding. However, the media industry is in desperate need of not just news reporters, but multimedia storytellers with proficiency in multiple media formats. The practical skills that students achieve in the universities and training facilities are not adequate to become a dynamic storyteller that present day newsroom looks for. On the regard of striking a balance between theoretical and practical aspects (WJEC, 2007), our university programs expose its serious lapses to ensuring proficiency in technological tools for generating quality content.

Journalism training institutes have traditionally focused on imparting basic reporting and news writing skills to aspiring journalists. But their imperative need for a fundamental overhaul extends to their training modules, programs, and the quality of trainees. The declining number of learners and funding owes have already pushed many of these institutes out of business, and remaining ones are facing an existential crisis. A handful of media related organizations, and NGOs are providing specialized training targeting working journalists. Still, such initiatives are largely project-based, funding-oriented, irregular and to promote their agenda or issues rather than imparting skills to journalists and meeting the market needs. Opportunities for mid-career journalists to augment their capacities and match with newsroom demands and shifting technologies are rare. Though occasional skill enhancement and refresher courses exist, they are limited, highly competitive, and often depend on the grace of newsroom leadership to grant necessary leave for participation. The practices of in-house training is almost non existential.

Moreover, existing media education and training seem a lot more limitations than its prospects. This can be transformed by overhauling the universities' journalism

programs and training initiatives, aligning them with the newsroom expectations and market needs. Academic leaders should be flexible and open to revising theory-laden curricula and lecture-focused teaching methods. Instead, skill-oriented programs with the openness to regular updated should be adopted. Equally important is providing journalism educators with skill-focused training and orientations, as per the changed university readings and market dynamics. This can be partly addressed when selecting trainers and educators with firsthand newsroom experience and inviting newsroom leaders, esteemed journalists, and veterans as guest lectures. Their insights and experiences could be helpful to understand evolving newsroom dynamics, market expectations, can be effective to journalism students to navigate the challenges encountered in a newsroom environment. Trainers also must be well-versed in the same media field they are training for so as to ensure effective knowledge transfer.

Equally essential is a strong collaboration between academia and the media industry, as highlighted by the WJEC's 11-point 'Declaration of Principles' (2007). This involves working closely with media houses to understand market needs, facilitate in-house internships for students, and secure job opportunities for exceptional interns. Training efforts should cater to both novices and experienced professionals, tailored to match evolving newsroom practices, technological shifts, and media formats. Expanding training opportunities is crucial, not only in dedicated training facilities but also within the respective organizations. This expansion should go beyond journalists in Kathmandu, reaching those in remote areas and outside the Kathmandu Valley. It's essential to offer a mix of basic training programs for newcomers and specialized courses, especially for mid-career journalists. This is crucial because many mid-career journalists are considering leaving the profession due to the evolving use of technology, which they missed learning earlier.

ANNEXES

Annex I: List of KII participants

- Akhanda Bhandari, Editor, *Annapurna Post* daily newspaper.
- Dharmendra Jha, Chairman, National News Agency (RSS), media trainer, and former president, Federation of Nepali Journalists.
- Dhurba Simkhada, Reporter/OPED Editor, Kantipur daily
- Gunaraj Luitel, Editor-in-Chief, *Nagarik* daily newspaper
- Harsha Man Maharjan, researcher, *Martin Chautari* & journalism educator, Madan Bhandari Memorial College.

- Kosh Raj Koirala, Editor, Republica, daily
- Laxman Humagain, former Secretary General, Nepal Press Institute and former General Manager, Nepal Television
- Navaraj Chalise, founder, *Media School* and talk show host at *News24 Television*
- Pragya Timsina, Image Television, Galaxy 4K Television
- Pushpa Raj Acharya, news editor, Ekagaj.com and former chairman, Society of Economic Journalists (SEJON)
- Shova Sharma, Reporter, Setopati.com
- Surendra Paudel, news editor, farakdhar.com
- Tulsi Aryal, Reporter, Kantipur FM

Annex II: List of Participants for personal interview

- Akhilesh Upadhyay, Former Editor-in-Chief, The Kathmandu Post.
- Chiranjibi Khanal, Head of Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Tribhuvan University.
- Kapil Kafle, Media Training Coordinator, Nepal Press Institute.
- Shree Ram Singh Basnet, Founder, Media Point.
- Kundan Aryal, Associate Professor, Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Tribhuvan University.
- Ujjwal Acharya, Managing Director, CMR Nepal-Journalism Academy.
- Umesh Shrestha, a pioneering Nepali blogger and a digital media trainer at CMR-Nepal Journalism Academy.

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