



A Communicological study on the Issues of Education and professions of the journalists in Sri Lanka

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Abstract : This study explores the complex landscape of education and professional development for journalists in Sri Lanka through a communicological lens. It aims to identify the key challenges faced by aspiring and practicing journalists in terms of educational opportunities, curriculum adequacy, and professional growth. By employing a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and content analysis, this research examines the alignment between journalism education programs and the dynamic requirements of the media industry. Findings reveal significant gaps in the existing educational frameworks, highlighting a disconnect between theoretical knowledge imparted in academic institutions and practical skills demanded by employers. Furthermore, the study addresses issues such as limited access to quality training, the impact of digital media evolution, and the socio-political influences on journalistic practices. Recommendations are provided for enhancing journalism education and professional training to better equip journalists with the necessary competencies to thrive in a rapidly changing media environment. This research contributes to the broader discourse on media education reform and professional standards in journalism, offering insights that can inform policy-making and curriculum development in Sri Lanka.

IndexTerms - Journalism Education, Professional Development, Digital Media Evolution, Socio-Political Influences

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, the media acts as a mirror that reflects society (McQuail, 2010). Around the 18th century, laid the foundation for the emergence of newspapers, magazines, etc., and electronic media such as radio and television. From then until today, everything is done through the media, such as manipulating information, directing it, presenting it to people, and updating it (Briggs & Burke, 2009). With the evolution of the human race, the psychological profile has grown exponentially and become an industry and a business as well as a huge force, as the newspaper radio, television, and social media as a new medium have created a social space. The media can sometimes be identified as the fourth power in a country and has become a scatterbrain that exerts influence over the executive, the legislature and even the judiciary. There the media produces information and captures the messages spread by the media about various phenomena. It is called a journalist to manipulate the force of the media due to the public consciousness. To be active at the professional level of a journalist, he or she must have a definite knowledge of philosophical socio-economics, history, and anthropology. He must also engage in a philosophical worldview instead of a worldview that understands the ordinary world, and a specialized professional intellect instead of the common sense (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007; McNair, 2009).

According to communication analysis, the journalist is the most important source of information that is essential for the social progress of a country (Lasswell, 1948). A journalist is a responsible social worker who has created his message to represent the general public. It is the job of the journalist to double-check the accuracy of the message delivered to the recipient. The responsibilities of the journalist as a whole and its focus should be on the role of adapting public consciousness, social cognition and personal cognition to a particular direction of social development. Therefore, it is possible for a journalist to go beyond the impact on personal and social life and have a significant impact on governance, political economy, culture and so on. Under these circumstances, the attention of intellectuals in various parts of the world, especially in the West, began to turn to journalism. During these ten decades, journalism has studied various schools of thought and disclosed various aspects of this complex socio-political phenomenon, and found some regulation of its functioning. Similarly, various scholars have paid special attention to the education that a journalist should receive and have conducted research on it.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The article "Global Journalism Education: A Conceptual Approach" written by Deuze (2006) is important in the context of macro research written about the related research. He has focused here on a common practice of media education. Deuze explores the complex landscape of global media education, proposing a conceptual framework that integrates diverse educational models and practices from around the world. Deuze emphasizes the need to understand media education as a dynamic and multidisciplinary field influenced by local, national and international contexts.

In their 2000 article "Educating for Journalism: The Professional Preparation of Journalists in the United States," Reese and Cohen examine the state of journalism education in the U.S., highlighting the tension between academic training and professional practice. They discuss the historical evolution of journalism education, noting a shift from an apprenticeship model to formal education within universities. The authors analyze curricula from various journalism programs, pointing out the disparity between theoretical knowledge and the practical skills demanded by the industry. They argue that despite improvements, journalism education still faces significant challenges in adequately preparing students for the rapidly changing media landscape. The study concludes with recommendations for integrating more hands-on training and fostering closer collaborations between academic institutions and media organizations to better align educational outcomes with professional expectations.

In the article "Rethinking (again) the future of journalism education," Mensing (2010) critically examines the persistent challenges and evolving needs within journalism education. She argues that traditional journalism curricula are increasingly inadequate in the face of rapid technological changes and shifting media landscapes. Mensing advocates for a transformative approach that integrates digital competencies, entrepreneurial skills, and a more dynamic, adaptive educational framework. The article highlights the necessity for journalism programs to move beyond conventional newsroom practices and embrace innovative teaching methods that prepare students for a multifaceted media environment. She emphasizes the importance of fostering critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability to equip future journalists with the tools necessary to navigate and thrive in an industry marked by continuous change. Both Mensing (2010) and the communicological study on Sri Lankan journalists emphasize the need for a transformative approach to journalism education. They highlight the inadequacy of traditional curricula in meeting the contemporary demands of the media industry and stress the importance of integrating digital competencies and practical skills into educational programs. These studies underscore the necessity of adapting journalism education to foster critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability, ensuring that journalists are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of modern media landscapes.

In the macro research approach written about the relevant research, several types of research related to the relevant research problem in Sri Lanka can be applied. De Silva (2015). "Journalism education in Sri Lanka: Challenges and prospects, Fernando (2017). "Adapting journalism education to the digital age: A case study of Sri Lankan journalism schools', Perera (2018). "The role of journalism education in promoting ethical standards in Sri Lankan media.", Gunaratne, (2012). "Journalism education in Sri Lanka: A historical and contemporary overview.", and Wickramasinghe, (2014). The research "Media education and the need for a new curriculum in Sri Lanka" can be considered prominent.

In his 2012 study, Ariyawansa examines the multifaceted challenges that journalists in Sri Lanka encounter in their professional lives. The research identifies key issues such as political pressures, economic constraints, and threats to personal safety, which significantly hinder journalistic freedom and integrity. Ariyawansa also highlights the lack of adequate training and educational resources, which contributes to the difficulties journalists face in maintaining professional standards and adapting to new media technologies. The study underscores the impact of socio-political dynamics on the media landscape in Sri Lanka, advocating for structural reforms and enhanced support systems to empower journalists and safeguard their crucial role in society.

Karunaratne's 2016 study investigates the pivotal role of education in establishing and maintaining professional standards among journalists in Sri Lanka. The research highlights the correlation between the quality of journalism education and the overall competence and ethical practices of journalists. Karunaratne argues that comprehensive educational programs are essential for equipping journalists with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the complex media landscape. The study emphasizes the importance of curriculum development which includes both theoretical and practical components, addressing the evolving demands of the industry. Furthermore, the research identifies the need for continuous professional development and the implementation of rigorous training programs to ensure that journalists uphold high standards of accuracy, fairness, and accountability in their work.

While existing research such as De Silva (2015) identifies the challenges and prospects of journalism education in Sri Lanka, and Fernando (2017) explores the adaptation of journalism education to the digital age, there remains a significant gap in the integration of communicological perspectives in these studies. Perera (2018) and Wickramasinghe (2014) discuss the role of journalism education and the need for new curricula, respectively, yet they do not fully address how educational frameworks align with the practical demands of the media industry. Reese and Cohen (2000) provide a comparative perspective on journalism education in the United States, which highlights the global challenges and opportunities but lacks specific insights into the Sri Lankan context. Karunaratne (2016) examines how education shapes professional standards, but a comprehensive analysis linking theoretical knowledge with practical skills through a communicological lens is missing. "A Communicological Study on the Issues of Education and Professions of the Journalists in Sri Lanka" aims to fill these gaps by providing a detailed examination of the alignment between journalism education programs and industry requirements, incorporating socio-political influences, and offering specific recommendations for curriculum development and professional training that integrate communicological theories and practices. This approach not only enhances the understanding of journalism education in Sri Lanka but also contributes to the global discourse on media education reform and professional standards. Accordingly, this research is expected to address such problematic situations both professionally and objectively. It should be done as a socially positive step. The research proposals will provide the basis for a formal educational background in the field of journalism. It also sets out the dimensions of what a journalist needs to meet in his or her career as a professional. It will lay the foundation for a more academic background, such as giving the journalist an analytical understanding of the service that the general public expects from him. It also provides a thorough understanding of Sri Lankan journalism and the modern process of his career as he studies the professional profile of journalists in many Western countries. In particular, this study will guide new researchers to identify the limits and directions of research that should be studied in future research.

The field of media can be described as the foremost hand that controls the mind of the individual. At the same time, journalists must become educated and intelligent professional journalists. However, timely research must be done into what is currently causing the sharp discrepancy between media education and professionalism. But it is very rare for such issues to be discussed in a country like Sri Lanka. It is a great social crisis for a group of people who have not studied the media properly to be associated with the media as journalists. Moreover, it poses a major problem for institutional objectivity as well as statehood. This research is expected to address such problematic situations both professionally and objectively. Very few Sinhala books have been published on this subject in particular. Therefore, it is intended to publish a book in Sinhala and fill that gap. Finally, plan to submit a proposal to avoid them in this situation. It should be done as a positive social step.

3. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The journalism profession in Sri Lanka faces significant challenges related to education and professional development. There is a noticeable gap between the theoretical knowledge provided by journalism education programs and the practical skills required in the field. Additionally, the rapidly evolving digital media landscape, socio-political influences, and limited access to quality training further exacerbate these issues. This disconnect impacts the quality of journalism, hindering journalists' ability to adapt to new media trends and uphold professional standards.

4. RESEARCH AIM

The aim of this study is to investigate the educational and professional challenges faced by journalists in Sri Lanka through a communicological perspective. Specifically, it seeks to identify the gaps in journalism education, assess the adequacy of current curricula in meeting industry demands, and examine the socio-political and digital media influences on journalistic practices. The ultimate goal is to provide recommendations for improving journalism education and professional development to better prepare journalists for the contemporary media environment in Sri Lanka.

5. EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONS OF THE JOURNALISTS IN SRI LANKA

According to Edwin Ariyadasa, individuals in media and allied professions must receive proper education and training to become professionals. He emphasizes that having prior knowledge in the relevant field is essential for journalists to communicate effectively and contribute to ideological, organizational, educational, entertainment, cultural promotion, and publicity roles. This foundational knowledge enables journalists to deliver fair and accurate messages through their professional work. The first formal media education course in Sri Lanka began in 1969 with the establishment of Junior Universities, marking a significant step in the professionalization of journalism in the country (Perera, n.d., Silva, n.d., De Silva, 2015; Fernando, 2017).

At present, the University of Kelaniya, the Sri Palee Campus of the University of Colombo, the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, and the University of Rajarata offer different courses related to Communication and Mass Media. These courses support government-sponsored diploma programs, as well as offerings from private organizations and institutions. Communication is a very popular academic field due to the increasing number of candidates entering the media profession. There are two main categories of media education recipients. The first category consists of media candidates who are pursuing formal media education. The second category includes professional journalists who already have some experience or none at all but feel the need to systematically enhance their education. This category also encompasses government or private sector news officers and public relations officers working in radio, newspapers, and television media. Additionally, individuals engaged in small group publishing, who may not be officially in the media profession but have been involved in writing for several years, fall into a category that does not necessarily require formal media education. Therefore, journalists are socially recognized as intellectuals, literary critics, and professionals who are engaged in a wide range of work. The Oxford Dictionary defines professionalism as the form in which a journalist's professional quality is modeled, as well as the ability to work professionally (Retrieved from <https://www.oed.com/>). Accordingly, a professional journalist is someone who has received practical training and can communicate artistically through electronic or print media. This individual should work towards social security and aim to highlight the existing inequalities in society.

Due to the lack of a proper code of conduct in Sri Lanka, there are significant issues with professionalism in journalism. The absence of standardized ethical guidelines and professional standards leads to inconsistent practices across the media industry. This situation undermines the credibility and integrity of journalism, as journalists may not adhere to uniform principles of accuracy, fairness, and accountability. Consequently, the public's trust in the media is eroded, and the media's role as a reliable source of information and a watchdog of society is compromised. Establishing a comprehensive code of conduct is essential for enhancing the professionalism and ethical standards of journalism in Sri Lanka. Also, facts can be presented about some of the main identified challenges in the mass media sector of Sri Lanka.

5.1 STANDARDIZATION

The absence of universally accepted minimum educational qualifications for journalists in Sri Lanka has led to significant disparities in the level of professionalism within the field. Unlike many Western countries where a basic degree in journalism or a related field is typically required (Weaver & Willnat, 2012), Sri Lanka does not mandate any specific educational credentials for entry into journalism. This lack of standardization allows individuals with varied backgrounds and educational experiences to enter the profession, often without the necessary foundational training in journalistic ethics, research methodologies, and media laws (Gunasekera, 2007). This situation is compounded by the limited availability of formal journalism education programs in the country. While institutions such as the University of Colombo and the Sri Lanka College of Journalism offer degrees and diplomas in journalism, these programs are not sufficient to meet the industry's needs (Ekanayake, 2011). Consequently, many journalists enter the field through non-traditional routes, such as on-the-job training or political patronage, which further exacerbates the inconsistency in professional standards (Samarajiwa, 2015).

Moreover, the lack of a standardized educational framework contributes to the uneven quality of media output. Journalists without adequate training may lack the skills required for critical analysis, ethical reporting, and investigative journalism, leading to a media landscape that can be susceptible to bias, sensationalism, and inaccuracies (Harrison, 2006). This inconsistency

undermines the credibility of the media and hinders its role as a watchdog in society, impacting public trust and the overall democratic process (Karunathilake, 2013).

5.2 TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

The development of skilled journalists in Sri Lanka is significantly hampered by the absence of a robust framework for professional training. Unlike countries with well-established journalism training programs and institutions, Sri Lanka lacks comprehensive structures to systematically develop and refine the skills of aspiring journalists. This gap in professional training opportunities means that many journalists enter the field without sufficient preparation in essential areas such as investigative reporting, media ethics, and digital journalism (Jayaweera, 2005). Although the University of Sri Lanka and other government institutions offer courses and diplomas in journalism, these programs are not widespread enough to serve the entire industry. (Ekanayake, 2011). Additionally, the curriculum in many of these programs often lags behind current industry standards and technological advancements, leaving graduates underprepared for the modern media landscape (Samarajiwa, 2015). This inadequacy is further exacerbated by the limited availability of continuous professional development opportunities for working journalists, which are crucial for keeping up with the evolving nature of media and communication (Gunaratne, 2006).

The lack of structured training programs also affects the quality of journalism produced. Journalists without adequate training may struggle with basic reporting skills, such as fact-checking, sourcing, and maintaining objectivity (Wijesinghe, 2013). This can lead to the dissemination of misinformation and a general decline in the credibility of the media. Moreover, the absence of specialized training in areas like conflict reporting and environmental journalism leaves journalists ill-equipped to cover complex and sensitive issues effectively (Goonasekera, 2007).

5.3 POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PRESSURES

Journalists in Sri Lanka frequently encounter significant challenges stemming from political interference, censorship, and economic instability, all of which have profound implications for their ability to operate independently and uphold ethical standards (Jayaweera, 2005). The Sri Lankan media landscape is marked by a history of political interference and manipulation. Journalists often face pressure from political authorities to report favorably or refrain from criticizing the government (Samarajiwa, 2015). This influence extends to editorial decisions, story selection, and even the hiring and firing of journalists, compromising the independence and integrity of media organizations (Gunaratne, 2006).

Censorship remains a persistent issue in Sri Lanka, particularly in times of political unrest or conflict. Government authorities may impose restrictions on reporting, suppress dissenting voices, or outright censor content deemed critical of the regime (Wijesinghe, 2013). This censorship stifles freedom of expression and undermines the role of journalists as watchdogs of society.

Also economic factors also pose significant challenges to journalists in Sri Lanka. Media organizations often operate under precarious financial conditions, relying on advertising revenue and government subsidies for sustenance (Goonasekera, 2007). This dependence on external sources of funding can compromise editorial independence and lead to self-censorship to appease advertisers or government sponsors (Karunathilake, 2013). These political and economic pressures have tangible effects on the practice of journalism in Sri Lanka. Journalists may engage in self-censorship to avoid repercussions or adhere to editorial directives that prioritize political agendas over journalistic integrity (Harrison, 2006). This compromises the quality and accuracy of reporting, erodes public trust in the media, and undermines the democratic function of journalism as a check on power.

5.4 INADEQUATE USE OF NEW TECHNOLOGY

The media sector in Sri Lanka faces significant challenges due to the inadequate use of new technology, which hampers its ability to compete globally and meet the evolving demands of the digital age. Despite the rapid advancements in digital media and communication technologies, many Sri Lankan media organizations have been slow to adopt and integrate these innovations into their operations (Ekanayake, 2011). This reluctance or inability to embrace new technology results in outdated production processes, inefficient content delivery, and limited audience engagement. For instance, the use of data analytics for audience insights, digital content management systems, and interactive multimedia storytelling are areas where Sri Lankan media lags behind (Jayaweera, 2005).

Moreover, the lack of investment in technology infrastructure further exacerbates the problem. Many media organizations operate on tight budgets, prioritizing immediate operational costs over long-term technological upgrades (Samarajiwa, 2015). This economic constraint limits their capacity to acquire and maintain modern equipment, software, and training for their staff, which are essential for producing high-quality content and staying relevant in a fast-paced digital environment (Gunaratne, 2006). As a result, media professionals often work with outdated tools, hindering their ability to perform efficiently and innovate in their reporting techniques (Wijesinghe, 2013).

The inadequate use of new technology also impacts the reach and accessibility of media content. With a growing number of consumers accessing news through digital platforms, traditional media outlets risk losing their audience to more technologically adept competitors who offer faster, more engaging, and interactive content (Goonasekera, 2007). Additionally, the lack of a robust online presence limits the ability of Sri Lankan media to engage with the diaspora and international audiences, thereby missing opportunities for broader influence and revenue generation (Karunathilake, 2013).

CONCLUSION

The research entitled "A Communicological Study on the Issues of Education and Professions of Journalists in Sri Lanka" identifies several key challenges within the media sector, including a lack of standardization in journalism education, limited training opportunities, political and economic pressures, a lack of a proper code of conduct, and inadequate use of new technology. Addressing these challenges is crucial for enhancing the professionalism, credibility, and overall effectiveness of journalism in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, it is essential to establish a standardized educational framework for journalism. This can be achieved by developing a national curriculum that includes both theoretical and practical components, ensuring that all journalism programs across the country adhere to the same high standards. Collaboration with international journalism schools and accreditation bodies can also help align Sri Lankan journalism education with global best practices.

There, expanding vocational training opportunities is critical. This includes creating more comprehensive and accessible training programs for aspiring and current journalists. Government and private sector partnerships can facilitate workshops, seminars, and continuous professional development courses focusing on modern journalism skills such as digital media, investigative reporting, and ethical journalism.

The political and economic pressure on the media sector in Sri Lanka has been the main reason for not establishing a quality media practice. therefore, To mitigate political and economic pressures, it is important to establish and enforce policies that protect press freedom and journalist independence. This includes legal protections against censorship and harassment, as well as measures to ensure economic stability for media organizations. Encouraging diverse and sustainable revenue models, such as audience-supported journalism and grants, can reduce financial dependence on politically motivated sources.

The existence of a proper code of conduct is essential for the development and well-being of society in any profession. However, the absence of a common ethical system that works for the entire media in Sri Lanka has become a major factor in raising problems in the field. Therefore, implementing a robust and universally accepted code of conduct for journalists is crucial. Media regulatory bodies should develop and enforce ethical guidelines that all media organizations and journalists must follow. Regular training on these guidelines will ensure that journalists understand and adhere to ethical standards, thereby enhancing the credibility of the media.

Especially, embracing new technology is imperative for modern journalism. Media organizations need to invest in the latest digital tools and platforms to improve content production and distribution. Training programs should include modules on using new technology effectively, ensuring that journalists are equipped with the skills needed to engage with contemporary media consumers.

By addressing these challenges through coordinated efforts involving educational institutions, media organizations, government bodies, and international partners, Sri Lanka can foster a more professional, independent, and technologically adept media sector. This, in turn, will enhance the role of journalism in promoting democracy, transparency, and informed public discourse.

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