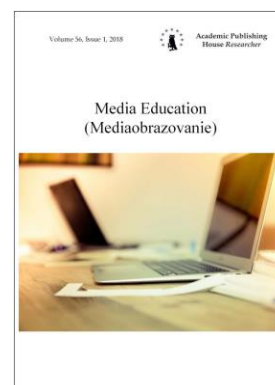




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Professional Competencies of a Modern Education Journalist

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Abstract

During 2020, we surveyed 21 educational journalists and editors from major highly specialized as well as broadly specialized media outlets in Ukraine. The results of the survey allowed us to determine how, in the opinion of experts, the industry of educational journalism is developing and what competencies are important for journalists writing on educational topics. The level of educational journalism in Ukraine on a scale from “1” (low) to “10” (high) was rated at an average of “5” points by experts. With the statement that there is a lack of author's analytical content on education in Ukraine, experts agreed at an average of “8” points (on a scale from “1” – quite enough to “10” – critically poor). The questionnaire made it possible to establish the competencies that journalists and editors of educational media outlets consider important, namely knowledge of laws in the field of education, selection of information based on the reliability of sources, understanding the needs of the audience, studying the interests of parents and children, searching for news and checking sources, advanced search information on the Internet, interviewing techniques, generating ideas and meanings, developing contacts, literacy and self-editing.

Keywords: educational journalism, education journalist, mass media, journalism competencies, journalism in Ukraine.

1. Introduction

Our research aims at studying the competencies of an education journalist, based on Ukrainian and international experience and the results of the questionnaire of journalists from Ukrainian educational media outlets.

The objectives of the work correspond to the set tasks:

1. Identify the key competencies of an education journalist;
2. Determine the current state of educational journalism in Ukraine.

The relevance of our study is increased by the poorly developed theoretical base and conceptual apparatus of educational journalism. Not enough research has been devoted to the study of educational journalism.

The communication strategy of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (hereinafter referred to as CS MES) was formed, inclusively, based on the results of monitoring public opinion and media – “165 resources (TV channels, radio stations, print media outlets, Internet) were analyzed – TNS/MMI data (mass media consumption) and GFK (advertising activity on TV)”, “monitoring of the Ukrainian Internet sector” was carried out – “196 Internet resources were analyzed” (CS MES, 2017). The conclusions are interesting – despite the fact that the educational

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sector covers a huge audience, “education reform is not among the five reforms that Ukrainian citizens know about” (CS MES, 2017).

The data of Looksmi's media monitoring “State of the Ukrainian education system” show that education is covered less than other current government topics, there is a “shortage of analytical materials”, “there is a lack of advertising and communication campaigns” regarding education. The number of materials about science does not exceed 1 %. “There are almost no materials related to vocational education” (CS MES, 2017).

V. Rizun and V. Ivanov draw attention to the problems of training journalistic staff in the study “Education in the field of media”. Among the problems of the industry in Ukraine, researchers name “the orientation of the media industry to the creation of educational commercial centers with a shortage of teaching staff, and not the development of old schools of journalism”; “problematic relations between centers of journalism education and the media industry, supplier and customer of journalistic staff”, as well as “a small number of high-quality textbooks and manuals” (Rizun, Ivanov, 2013: 44).

As for textbooks or manuals – in Ukraine, we did not find any separate publications for journalists specializing in educational content, in addition, there are no universal developments in ethical news coverage in the field of education, such as, for example, in the USA – “Education writers association” (“EWA”) (EWA, 2020).

Currently, there is only one operating bachelor's program in Ukraine, which trains specialists in “educational journalism”. The pilot program “Educational journalism” is being implemented at the Institute of Journalism of the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, and gives students the opportunity to undergo a traineeship at the press centers of regional and national educational departments, educational media outlets, as well as educational institutions for a better understanding the way educational process takes place.

Educational journalism is primarily the production and distribution of relevant news of interest to an educational audience. The educational audience is a very broad definition. It includes everyone involved in various levels of education as well as those involved in the educational process (children – parents – teachers – experts). Sometimes educational journalism is considered within the concept of “lifelong education” (or lifelong learning) proposed by UNESCO (UNESCO, 2021). Lifelong education begins at birth and ends with death. That is why “lifelong education” is a subject of discussions among educational experts, because education is compared with the form of existence, accompanies a person of the 21st century every day, becomes the main philosophy of “learning society” (Wain, 2016).

Ukraine needs specialists who have not only basic journalistic education, being able to generate content, but who also understand the specifics of the educational process and how it happens, who are ready to work with national and international documents, have a deep understanding of the local and global educational landscapes, as well as the appropriate competencies to “be capable of forming a new view of the future education in the audience” (Katerynych, 2020: 163).

2. Materials and methods

Scientific validity and completeness of the results of the study, its theoretical and methodological level in the socio-communication approach is provided by using such methods as a literature analysis (analysis of scientific papers, made it possible to determine which ideas on the competencies of educational journalism prevail in the Ukrainian and international scientific space, which sides are poorly studied and require development), structural-functional analysis (highlighting basic categories regarding the competencies of an education journalist, which formed the basis of the survey) and an expert survey.

In total, 21 respondents took part in the questionnaire – journalists, editors and active authors of educational content. The selection of experts was based on a documentary approach. The invitation to answer the questionnaire was carried out by sending a personal message to the official e-mail of the media outlets and the personal journalists' e-mail.

The preparatory stage of the questionnaire included the development of questions, drawing up questionnaires, pilot testing (in which 6 journalists and editors took part). The next step was the questioning itself and distribution of questionnaires. At the stage of information systematization of the data obtained in the process of questioning took place by means of automatic generation of

statistics via the online tools of “Google”. Links to the survey were sent only to selected respondents.

The sample of our questionnaire is made up of journalists and editors of the Ukrainian media outlets, working on the creation of educational content. For the sample, we have invited education journalists from such media outlets: “Osvita.ua” (<https://osvita.ua/>), “Osvitoriya” (<https://osvitoria.media/>), “NUS” (<https://nus.org.ua/>), “Vseosvita” (<https://vseosvita.ua/>), “Suchasna Osvita Ukrainy” (Modern Ukrainian Education), “Druzhnya Shkola” (Friendly School), “Dzerkalo Tyzhnia” (The mirror of the week, <https://zn.ua/ukr/>), “Ukrayins'ka pravda. Zhyttya” (Ukrainian truth. Life, <https://life.ppravda.com.ua/>). The sample of respondents is valid, as they represent all national media specializing in educational content in Ukraine. The sample also includes journalists who specialize in educational topics and consider themselves as education journalists, but work in widely specialized media.

The questions were formed consider the level of the respondents' competence. Since the respondents are industry experts, the questions involve the use of specialized terminology – words and phrases denoting specialized products and technological processes. In the questionnaire, we used closed-ended questions and open-ended ones, a unipolar Likert positional scale. According to the number of participants in the questionnaire – group. According to the type of contact with the respondent – remote. The correspondent method of questioning provided for recording the answers received from respondents automatically in an online form. According to the subject content – questions about facts, knowledge and the opinion of the respondent, according to the function – questions-contacts, information questions, questions-filters.

SPSS was used to analyze the results of responses to questions containing numerical scales, as well as to determine the reliability of the survey.

3. Discussion

An analysis of 119 scholarly papers (included in Web of Science (54) and Scopus (65) databases from 1998 to 2017) on journalistic competencies showed that journalists, media owners, and audiences agree that the continuity of quality journalism depends on the integration of three environments: technological, economic, and fundamental principles of the profession. These findings provide a deeper look at journalistic competencies as a symbiosis of altering societal changes influenced by various socioeconomic factors, as well as technological developments and the digitalization of media (Gálik, 2019; 2020; Marta-Lazo et al., 2020: 53-54).

Some researchers of journalistic competencies emphasize the importance of working with big data. It is working with big data that is one of the key competencies of the modern journalist – it complements, validates, qualifies and creates a more coherent, welcoming, interactive and digitally oriented story (Oliveira, Angeluci, 2019).

A team of journalism researchers analyzed and compared 50 journalism competencies and qualifications identified in the 2006 European Tartu Declaration and 22 key competencies available in a survey of editorial job postings by journalism organizations in the United States in 2008 and 2009. Journalism skills such as writing style, teamwork, and working under time pressure were found to be important as before (Cokley et al., 2011).

Digital media have accelerated the process of media production, and journalists are faced with a lack of time. Journalists as multi-tasking professionals are becoming the norm (Praprotnik, 2016: 86).

Researcher N. Habor believes that “the requirements of the modern media market – a universal journalist. This is not even discussed now. But will this universality be in demand, shall we say, in five years, or maybe, on the contrary, there will be an interest in highly specialized competencies, skills, thematic specialization? Nowadays, neither experts from education, nor from the media business predict this” (Habor, 2018: 273).

It is not enough for an education journalist to simply write down the information presented at specialized press conferences and briefings; he/she has to find “an approach to an accessible and multimedia presentation of this information” (George-Palilonis, 2013; Shemberger, 2015).

The education journalist primarily works with a significant amount of information - most societal shifts lead to changes in the educational process, and in addition, every new executive team tries to make changes and implement reforms (Lemos, 2017). An education journalist must have several key skills – not just working with multimedia tools, but also thinking in multimedia way – having the multimedia mind-set, analyzing information, and drawing conclusions (Wenger, Potter, 2007).

As journalism and society change, emotions become more important and dynamic in the process of news production and consumption (Beckett, Deuze, 2016).

A modern education journalist builds a dialogue not only with adults but also with children. This is the specificity of educational journalism – to find appropriate approaches and encourage a child to communicate.

H. Lokarieva writes: “social dialogue” play an important role in journalism”, which includes “comparison of positions, desires and ability to understand the opponent, taking into account his approach, assertion of interests and demands because of criticism, controversy during the open discussion to achieve agreed solutions” (Lokarieva, 2013: 224).

The essence of the journalistic approach of communication with children is caution, discretion, politeness, balance between “possible” and “better to control yourself”, as well as consent to communicate with a child (Zelenina, 2015).

It is noteworthy that educational media outlets are not media killers and media terrorists; they less often cause public response than multidisciplinary or news media outlets (Nacos, 2016). However, they perform important functions, namely “informing, cognitive, critical, stratification, scientific-innovative, mythological, evaluative-stimulating and entertaining” (Katerynych, 2020: 155-156).

Sensationalism in educational journalism is not a "higher order" value. The rule "if it bleeds, it leads" does not apply here (Miller, Albert, 2015: 61). However, educational media is also no stranger to the theme of "seven guidelines" – "Scandals, Sensations, Fear, Death, Sex, Laughter and Money" (Detector Media..., 2008). Examples of such materials relate to sexual education, corruption, and lifehacks for educational institutions – where to take investments for educational projects; and infotainment – materials that use "entertainment by informing" (Morozova, 2012: 165).

M. Diachenko notes: “The creative self-development of a future journalist contributes to his professional growth” (Diachenko, 2016: 20). I. Drozdova says that today journalism focuses more on the “general idea of the profession” and the technology of journalism than on the “formation of the worldview”, “value system” and “features of creative self-realization” of a journalist (Drozdova, 2015: 17).

We interpret values as “something which has a certain material or spiritual value”, “the importance, significance of something” (SUM, 2015: 17).

There are the following values of an education journalist that we propose to highlight:

- Ability to work with vulnerable categories – juveniles, victims of bullying, children with special educational needs (IMI, 2019);
- Child-centrism – “the priority of the child's interests” (Dziomba, 2019: 113);
- Desire for lifelong learning;
- Social responsibility – “professional self-consciousness of a media worker” (Trehub, 2015: 138);
- Professional identity (Sherwood, O'Donnell, 2018);
- Compliance with the principles of basic professional ethics and ethics of an education journalist (Lyhachova, Dutsyk, 2016: 5);
- Curiosity (Holmes et al., 2014; Witschge 2013);
- Creativity and innovation (“creative and innovative thinking”) (British council, 2016: 5);
- Critical thinking (Kostrysia, Mazur, 2019: 134);
- Striving for self-improvement and career development (Diachenko, 2014: 170).

A deep understanding of the concept of “educational journalism” is reflected in the research of K. Schaar (Schaar, 2019). The scientist mentions the main topics that a modern education journalist should be interested in. These include the demographic change in society, age-related interactions, health and education, innovative teaching methods, and qualitative and quantitative social and research in education.

The German Academy of Journalism introduced the term "journalist as educator" into the dictionary of journalistic vocabulary. The journalist as an educator personifies the idealistic representative of morality and ethics, wanting to communicate the values of idealism to an audience by doing his or her job. In a broader sense, he or she acts not only as an educator of his or her "charges" but also as a "guardian of culture and morality. We should emphasize the aspiration of the journalist to be such an "educator" (Journalist als Pädagoge). The danger, however, is not to turn professional journalism into mentoring, with the "use of exhortations and admonitions" inherent in educators (Graesser et al., 2010).

G. Pérez distinguishes the following knowledge and skills that an education journalist should have: (Pérez, 1998: 113):

- “the concept of the education history (national and international), pedagogical ideals and methods of teaching, learning and institutional practices”;
- “knowledge of the main actors of modern education: professionals (professors, teachers), students, parents and civil society”;
- “knowledge of sources about educational events and contacts of experts who you can talk with about various educational topics”;
- “knowledge of new channels of educational information: specialized news agencies, Internet resources, thematic periodicals, radio and television”;
- “knowledge of the ethical and political aspects of providing educational information”;
- “knowledge of concepts of education quality”;
- “ability to form the agenda of the media outlets in the field of education, observation of this agenda using journalistic methods of work”;
- educational communication: media literacy and didactic use of the media, mission – providing explanation for things that are incomprehensible or inaccessible for readers.

To the skills identified by G. Pérez should be added the ability to learn throughout life and acquire relevant skills depending on the development of the journalistic and educational industries – “multimedia mind” (Quinn, 2005).

4. Results

21 respondents took part in the questionnaire. Among them are journalists and editors. According to the criterion “education” – 10 – “journalists” (journalism, advertising, publishing, media communications), 6 have “pedagogical” education, 1 – “law”, 1 – “Ukrainian philology”, 1 – “philology” (a respondent did not specify), 1 – “philosophy”, 1 – “computer science”. According to the criterion “place of work” – 6 – “Osvitoriya”, 3 – “Vseosvita”, 2 – “NUS”, 2 – “Druzhnya Shkola” (Friendly School), 2 – “Osvita.ua”, 2 – the newspaper “Suchasna Osvita Ukrainy” (Modern Ukrainian education), 1 – “NUS”, 1 – the center of innovative education “Pro.Svit”, 1 – “Osvita.Nova”, 1 – “Dzerkalo Tyzhnia” (“The mirror of the week” – analytical publication that does not specialize in educational topics). 16 are journalists, 4 – editors, and 1 work as a content manager. 10 respondents indicated work experience of more than two years, 9 of them – one or two years and 2 respondents indicated less than a year work experience. 16 respondents consider themselves to be the “specialized education journalists”, and 5 of them indicated that they specialized in a wide range of topics.

Table 1 explain the questionnaire was tested for reliability by applying a Chonbach’s Alpha, the value came out to be .947 which is 94.7 %. Hence, the questionnaire is reliable in terms of measuring the main concept of the study.

Table 1. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.95	3

With the statement that Ukraine lacks of author's analytical content on education topics, on a scale from “1” (quite enough) to “10” (critically poor), the respondents on average agreed on “7.5” points (4 answers “10”, 3 answers “9”, 5 answers “8”, 3 answers “7”, two answers – “5” and “6”, 1 answer – “4” and 1 answer – “3” (see Fig. 1).

The level of educational journalism in Ukraine on a scale from “1” to “10” respondents rated at an average of 5 points (the lowest score – 3, the highest– 8). The importance of journalism education for working as an education journalist on a scale from “1” (not important at all) to “10” (extremely important), the respondents rated at an average of 5 points (the lowest score is “1”, the highest one – “10”). It is interesting to represent the results on this criterion in accordance with the education received by the respondents. The response to the question “How much (from “1” (not important at all) to “10” (extremely important) do you rate the importance of journalism education for working as a journalist specializing in educational topics?” has some significant differences between respondents who work on the creation of educational content and received a journalism education. Some of them rate the education they received to work as a journalist

specializing in educational content rather high (respondent 4 – “8” points), others – vice versa (respondent 11 – “3” points, respondent 7 – “1” point). This category is assessed differently by respondents with pedagogical education (respondent 8 – “10” points, respondent 10 – “1 point”, respondent 5 – “7 points”, respondent 6 – “2 points”).

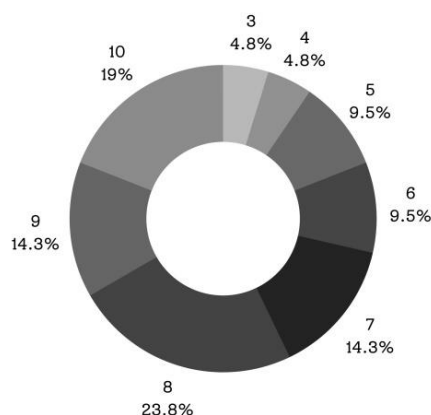


Fig. 1. The results of respondents' answers to the question-scale “How much (from 1 (quite enough) to 10 (critically poor) do you agree with the statement that Ukraine lacks of author's analytical content on education topics?”

Table 2 presents the experts' answers to the question “Which of the following categories do you consider the most important for working as an education journalist?” (several options were possible).

Table 2. Which of the following categories do you consider the most important for working as an education journalist?

Category	Number of responses (n=21)	Percent
Knowledge of journalistic ethics	6	28.6
Possession of broad general knowledge	5	23.8
Possession of deep specialized knowledge	10	47.6
Accuracy	4	19
Team play	5	23.8
Study of other cultures and languages	8	38.1
Adequate acceptance of criticism	3	14.3
Comprehension of political processes	4	19
Knowledge of laws in the field of education	18	85.7
Knowledge of laws in the field of information	2	9.5
Knowledge of laws in the field of copyright	3	14.3
Ability to establish social contact	5	23.8
Understanding of the media landscape and media business strategies	3	14.3
Ability to accept changes and innovations	6	28.6
Ability to adequately assess the importance of news	11	52.4
Ability to cope with stress and deadlines	9	42.9
Selection of information based on the reliability of sources	15	71.4
Team leadership	0	0
Desire for self-improvement	3	14.3
Good relationships with the employer	1	4.8
Understanding of the needs of the audience	15	71.4
Study of the interests of parents and children	12	57.1
Adherence to editorial policy	7	33.3

Table 3 presents the experts' answers to the question “Which of the following skills do you use in your journalistic work?” (several options were possible).

Table 3. Which of the following skills do you use in your journalistic work?

Category	Number of responses (n = 21)	Percent
Interpretation of statistical data and graphics	12	57.1
News search and source check	21	100
Analysis and synthesis of big data	9	42.9
Advanced search for information on the Internet	19	90.5
Establishment of contacts and the source base development	16	76.2
Interview technique	14	66.7
Photographing and photo processing	4	19
Audio recording and processing	7	33.3
Video recording and processing	3	14.3
Infographic creation	6	28.6
Other (writing author's materials)	1	4.8

Table 4 presents the respondents' answers to the question “Which of the following competencies do you consider the most important for a journalist writing on education?” (several options were available).

Table 4. Which of the following competencies do you consider the most important for a journalist writing on education?

Category	Number of responses (n=21)	Percent
Understanding of digital technology	6	28.6
Heightened emotional intelligence	12	57.1
Organizational skills	4	19
Generation of ideas and meanings	17	81
Ability to find and simplify information	12	57.1
Multitasking	10	47.6
Working with interactive content	6	28.6
Knowledge of methods and tools for working with open data	7	33.3
Active presence on social networks	8	38.1
Ability to build an extensive base of experts and stakeholders	15	71.4
Ability to establish contacts in the Ministry of Education and in other executive bodies	15	71.4
Knowledge of basic programming and HTML	2	9.5
Mastery of design basics	0	0
Mastery of the basics of marketing	1	4.8
Mastery of transmedia storytelling techniques	6	28.6
Understanding of the digital environment (analyzing audience expectations, studying competitors)	9	42.9
Experience in testing programs, services, applications	1	4.8
Orientation in matters of media business	0	0
Study of new products on the educational literature market	10	47.6
Blogging skills	0	0
Literacy, self-editing	17	81

5. Conclusion

In our study, we explored theoretical and practical approaches to understanding the competencies of an educational journalist. Among the important skills for an educational journalist emphasized in the theoretical studies are child-centrism, desire for lifelong learning, compliance

with the principles of basic professional ethics and ethics of an educational journalist, critical thinking, knowledge of the main actors of modern education, and others.

The results of the expert survey allow us to speak about the lack of analytical content on education topics in the Ukrainian media space. Also experts estimate the level of educational journalism in Ukraine on 5 points from 10. It means that journalists and editors who deal with the themes of education, see a problem in the perception and popularization of educational content among the audience.

From the practitioners' point of view, the important competencies for working as an educational journalist are news search and source check, knowledge of laws in the field of education, selection of information based on the reliability of sources, understanding of the needs of the audience, literacy, self-editing, establishment of contacts and the source base development, ability to build an extensive base of experts and stakeholders, ability to establish contacts in the Ministry of Education and in other executive bodies, advanced search for information on the Internet.

Our study underscores the need to develop training programs for educational journalists in higher education institutions and to create programs that describe the competencies and knowledge that educational journalists must possess. An important point is the development of an ethical guide for such journalists, since an educational journalist works with children. The topic of educational journalism in terms of practical research is poorly covered, theoretical concepts are developing chaotically, so we see the need for further research from this topic.

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