



"A Jack of All Trades": Students' Perception of Industry Realities and Classroom Theory in Kenyan Mass Communication Education

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Abstract

Digital transformation has pushed global newsrooms towards full convergence, making multi-platform fluency an industry baseline rather than a specialist advantage. However, Global South journalism pedagogy frequently struggles to align classroom theory with these operational realities due to resource constraints and entrenched academic silos. This qualitative study investigates the educational impact of industry immersion by analysing the perceptions of 16 Kenyan undergraduate mass communication students following a structured field visit to a major integrated media house in Nairobi. Immediately after the visit, students completed an open-ended reflective survey that also captured a single-item self-rating of how well classroom lessons had prepared them for the industry's pace. Textual responses were examined using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis, and self-ratings were summarised descriptively. Four themes emerged: the tempo and simultaneity of newsroom operations, coupled with surprise at the professionals' composure; the realisation of media convergence and multi-skilling; technological and infrastructural deficits; and the salience of professional socialisation and teamwork. Although students rated their preparedness highly (4.0 out of 5), their reflections revealed a persistent gap between the sequential, controlled logic of the classroom and the simultaneous, high-velocity logic of the professional newsroom. The study contributes student-level empirical evidence to an institution-level debate, extends the Global South technology-gap literature by distinguishing a deficit of missing equipment, and argues that convergence be treated as a curricular design principle rather than an add-on. To narrow this gap, the study recommends curricula pivot towards experiential learning, integrate cross-platform newsroom simulations under deadline, and address infrastructural deficits.

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Introduction

The practice of journalism has undergone a radical transformation, driven by digital convergence and the continuous demand for multi-platform content delivery. In contemporary newsrooms, the traditional academic silos of print, broadcast, and radio have dissolved, replaced by integrated workflows in which journalists are expected to be versatile content creators, often colloquially termed "jacks of all trades." Comparative evidence shows that platform is no longer a stable organising



principle of journalistic work: a single reporter now routinely produces text, photography, audio, and video for several outputs within one organisation, and the polyvalent, multitasking profile has become the newsroom norm rather than the exception (Connolly, 2024; Mayo-Cubero, 2022). This shift presents a profound challenge for journalism and mass communication pedagogy, particularly in the Global South, where higher-education institutions must balance foundational theoretical instruction with the rapid technological advancement of the industry.

In East and Southern Africa, media houses have moved quickly to adopt converged newsroom models in order to remain competitive in a saturated and increasingly automated digital market (Adjin-Tettey, 2024; Sonni et al., 2024). University curricula, however, frequently lag behind these structural shifts because of institutional resource constraints and a historical reliance on theoretical instruction over practical application. A growing body of scholarship documents a persistent gap between what journalism programmes teach and what newsrooms require, from Nigeria, where students in the age of convergence still held to traditional conceptions of journalism (Emmanuel et al., 2021) and China (Wang, 2022) to South Africa, where systematic review evidence finds only limited emphasis on multimedia storytelling, data journalism, and work-integrated learning across the sector's curricula (Muringa & Adjin-Tettey, 2025). Consequently, mass communication programmes are increasingly scrutinised for their capacity to produce graduates equipped with the technical fluency, cross-disciplinary skills, and professional socialisation required to thrive in high-pressure media environments.

Despite ongoing curriculum revision, a persistent dichotomy separates classroom-based journalism education from the operational realities of the modern media industry. When students move from structured academic settings into the fast-paced atmosphere of a newsroom, they frequently encounter a phenomenon first named in the health professions as "reality-shock" the disorienting gap between anticipatory training and workplace reality (Kramer, 1974; Zhang et al., 2024). Experiential learning theory holds that immersive, hands-on experience is vital for cognitive development and professional socialisation, allowing learners to construct meaning through direct interaction with their future operational environments (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). Field trips, industry tours, and practicums therefore function as critical pedagogical interventions; when purposefully designed, they promote higher-order thinking and connect abstract theory to concrete practice (Foo & Foo, 2022; Nonkula, 2025). By stepping outside the classroom, students move beyond the rote memorisation of media theory and engage with the holistic, high-stakes nature of continuous news cycles.

To address a gap in the empirical literature on East African higher-education, this study examines the educational impact of industry immersion through the perceptions of mass communication students following a field visit to a major, integrated media house. The specific setting of visiting media house is analytically useful because it places a resource-constrained teaching environment directly alongside a fully converged commercial newsroom, allowing students to articulate the gap in concrete, observed terms rather than in the abstract. Two research questions guide the study:

- RQ1.** How do undergraduate mass communication students perceive the operational gap between their university training and a converged professional newsroom following an immersive field visit?
- RQ2.** What technological, skills-based, and pedagogical deficits do students identify in their own curriculum, and what changes do they recommend to close the gap?



Literature Review

This section explores four key areas: experiential learning and the transfer of professional knowledge; reality and transition shock at the boundary between training and practice; media convergence and the contested rise of the multi-skilled journalist; and the academy-industry gap as it manifests specifically in Global South media education.

Experiential Learning and the Transfer of Professional Knowledge

Experiential learning theory provides the pedagogical foundation for industry immersion. Kolb and Kolb (2017) argue that durable learning proceeds through a recursive cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation; learning is understood as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. On this account, classroom instruction supplies abstract conceptualisation, but without concrete experience and structured reflection, the cycle remains incomplete, and knowledge is retained as inert theory rather than actionable competence. Field trips are among the most accessible interventions for supplying the missing phases of the cycle. Foo and Foo (2022) demonstrate that purposefully designed field trips can move students up Bloom's taxonomy towards higher-order thinking, and they emphasise that pre-trip and post-trip activities are as important as the visit itself. In a South African higher-education setting closely comparable to the present study, Nonkula (2025) used an immediate post-trip open-ended questionnaire and thematic analysis with a purposive sample of geography-education students and, working explicitly within the Dewey-Kolb tradition, found that well-structured field trips deepened conceptual understanding, integrated theory with practice, and fostered professional development. These findings establish both the pedagogical rationale and a methodological precedent for using a single, well-bounded field visit as a site for studying experiential learning.

Within journalism specifically, work-integrated learning (WIL) has long been regarded as the most effective mechanism for producing work-ready graduates. Makhadi and Diederichs (2021) show that a structured WIL module, developed in partnership with industry, was widely valued by South African employers and mentors and was crucial to students' sense of employability, provided that students were adequately prepared before entering the workplace. Field trips can be read as a lighter-touch, lower-cost cousin of WIL: they cannot substitute for a full internship, but they offer the concrete experience and professional socialisation that classroom instruction alone cannot, and they can be scheduled for an entire cohort at once. Recent work on scholastic journalism field trips, however, cautions that such interventions face real barriers cost, logistics, and post-pandemic risk aversion and are most valuable when explicitly designed around socialisation and reflection rather than treated as one-off excursions (Hill et al., 2025).

Reality-Shock and Transition Shock

The construct of "reality-shock" originates in Kramer's (1974) study of newly qualified nurses, who experienced acute disorientation when the controlled logic of professional training collided with the unpredictable demands of clinical practice. The construct has proved durable and has since been extended across the professions; recent qualitative work continues to document how newcomers experience a multidimensional "transition shock" as they move from the structured world of the classroom into the simultaneous, high-pressure world of practice (Zhang et al., 2024). Although this literature is centred on nursing, the underlying mechanism is not discipline-specific: it concerns the predictable dissonance that arises when anticipatory socialisation in an educational setting meets the tempo, ambiguity, and accountability of real work. Its transfer to journalism education is apt, because in a standard academic setting students learn the mechanics of reporting under controlled conditions



that rarely replicate the speed, noise, and deadline pressure of professional production. Framing industry immersion as a controlled, low-stakes early encounter with reality-shock reconceives the field visit not merely as motivational enrichment but as a deliberate inoculation an opportunity to experience and reflect on the dissonance before the higher-stakes moment of workforce entry.

Media Convergence and the Contested Multi-Skilled Journalist

The shift towards digital journalism has necessitated a wholesale restructuring of newsroom operations, from isolated editorial departments to fully converged media environments in which the same story is produced and distributed across television, radio, print, and online simultaneously (Mayo-Cubero, 2022). Increasingly, artificial intelligence is layered onto these converged workflows, automating routine production and giving rise to hybrid “journalist-programmer” roles and new demands for AI literacy (Sonni et al., 2024). The professional ideal that emerges from convergence is the polyvalent journalist, the versatile content creator able to move fluently between platforms and formats. It is precisely this ideal that the “jack of all trades” idiom captures, and that a compartmentalised curriculum, organised into separate broadcast, radio, print, and digital tracks, is poorly structured to produce.

Convergence and multi-skilling are not, however, unambiguously positive developments, and a mature curriculum should prepare students to understand their costs as well as their opportunities. A substantial strand of scholarship frames multi-skilling as intensification: the accretion of additional duties such as writing, editing, filming, recording, posting to social media, without commensurate increases in time, resources, or pay, so that the “jack of all trades” can become a mechanism for extracting more labour from fewer workers (Connolly, 2024). Studies of journalistic labour further complicate the celebratory account, showing that convergence can entail deskilling and a loss of professional autonomy, particularly for peripheral news workers such as camera operators, even as it up-skills others (Metykova & Waschková Čísařová, 2023). Presenting convergence to students as an unqualified good would therefore be both intellectually incomplete and professionally naive; the pedagogical task is to cultivate genuine versatility while equipping graduates to recognise, and where possible resist, the precarity that can accompany it.

The Academy-Industry Gap in Global South and African Media Education

The gap between journalism education and industry practice is a global phenomenon, documented from Nigeria, where students in the age of convergence still held to traditional conceptions of journalism even as the surrounding media ecology converges (Emmanuel et al., 2021), to China, where employers increasingly demand new-media, video, and data-analysis skills alongside the capacity to work under pressure (Wang, 2022). Comparable diagnoses recur across Europe and the digital-skills literature, where scholars call for a rethinking of what digital competence should mean in journalism education (Katzenberger, 2024). What distinguishes the African context is the compounding effect of a severe technological divide. Systematic review evidence from South Africa finds that while some programmes have incorporated digital media skills, critical thinking, and ethics, significant gaps remain in multimedia storytelling, data journalism, media entrepreneurship, and the use of newsroom AI tools, and that work-integrated learning receives limited emphasis, leaving graduates underprepared for a fast-paced labour market (Muringa & Adjin-Tetty, 2025).

Scholarship focused specifically on African newsrooms and training institutions sharpens the picture. Adjin-Tetty (2024), reflecting autoethnographically on the transition from classroom to the shrinking African newsroom, argues that training schools must respond to a job market that is low-paying, technology-mediated, rapidly converging, and undergoing a change in work cultures. Comparative work across South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Eswatini shows that the practical, newsroom-dependent



components of journalism training are the hardest to deliver under conditions of resource scarcity, even as educators display considerable creativity and agency in adapting (Tsarwe et al., 2024). Interview and curriculum-analysis evidence from Tanzania and Zambia confirms that educators and journalists alike acknowledge the gap and desire closer alignment, but are constrained by limited industry collaboration and resource shortages (Gondwe & Awami, 2025). Compounding these pedagogical challenges is a persistent infrastructural divide: university programmes in developing regions often operate with outdated studios and a shortage of industry-standard equipment (Gondwe & White, 2022), and the arrival of new demands such as AI literacy risks widening the gap still further where basic infrastructure and staff training are lacking (Ncube et al., 2025). The existing literature, however, tends to frame the deficit primarily as a matter of absent equipment; less attention has been paid to the maintenance dimension—equipment that exists on an institution's inventory but is non-functional in practice—which the present study foregrounds.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by a dual theoretical lens that pairs Kolb and Kolb's (2017) experiential learning cycle with the reality and transition shock tradition (Kramer, 1974; Zhang et al., 2024). Experiential learning theory explains why an industry field visit should generate learning: it supplies the concrete experience and reflective observation that a theory heavy curriculum leaves out, allowing students to convert abstract media concepts into situated understanding. The reality-shock lens explains what students are likely to notice: the dissonance between the ordered, sequential logic of anticipatory training and the simultaneous, accountable tempo of professional practice. The two frameworks position the field visit as a structured encounter in which reality-shock is experienced in a low-stakes form and then metabolised through reflection into learning. This combined lens informs both the design of the reflective instrument, which prompted students to compare expectations with observations, and the interpretation of the resulting themes.

Methodology

This qualitative study investigated the perceived gap between theoretical instruction and industry reality among mass communication students. The research was conducted following a field visit to one of Kenya's oldest and largest integrated media organisations in Nairobi, which operates fully converged television, radio, print, and digital newsrooms. A purposive sample of 16 undergraduate students specialising in television broadcasting (n=8), radio (n=4), digital/online (n=2), print (n=1), and one all-round student participated in the study. This setting provided a critical analytical lens by placing a resource-constrained educational context directly alongside a commercial converged newsroom to observe the academy-industry gap in situ.

Data were collected immediately after the visit using an online structured reflective survey. The instrument captured demographic data, a 5-point self-rated preparedness score, and responses to nine open-ended prompts probing students' observations on operational speed, equipment deficits, convergence, and team dynamics. Textual data underwent reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase procedure, while the quantitative item was summarised descriptively. Trustworthiness was ensured by grounding themes in verbatim extracts and maintaining a reflexivity audit trail to mitigate social-desirability bias. Prior to data collection, students provided informed consent, and all identifiable information was fully anonymised to protect participant confidentiality. Participation in the reflective survey was voluntary, and only after the students consented. Any identifying information collected was removed before analysis, and the dataset was fully anonymised so that reported extracts cannot be traced to individual students. No



sensitive personal data were collected, and the study posed no foreseeable risk to participants beyond the ordinary activities of a supervised academic field visit.

Findings

Reflexive thematic analysis of the post-visit reflections produced four themes concerning the gap between academic instruction and the realities of a converged newsroom. Before presenting them, one descriptive figure frames the qualitative account. On the single closed item, students rated their classroom preparation for the industry's pace at a mean of 4.0 out of 5 (median 4; range 3–5), as summarised in Table 2. No student rated their preparation below the mid-point. This relatively favourable self-assessment sits in productive tension with the qualitative data that follow: students did not feel wholly unprepared, yet their own accounts repeatedly describe encountering an operational logic that classroom training had not conveyed.

Table 2: Students' self-rated preparedness for the pace of a professional media company (N = 16).

Self-rated preparedness (1–5)	Participants (n)	Percentage
5 – very well prepared	6	37.5%
4 – well prepared	4	25.0%
3 – moderately prepared	6	37.5%
2 – poorly prepared	0	0%
1 – not at all prepared	0	0%
Mean = 4.0; median = 4; range 3–5	16	100%

Theme 1: Newsroom Tempo, Simultaneity, and the Surprise of Composure

The most prominent theme was the contrast between the sequential, controlled pace of university instruction and the simultaneous, high-velocity environment of a live media house. A majority of students found the operational speed higher than anticipated. As one put it, the newsroom taught a lesson that a lecture cannot:

"The actual working environment at the media house was much faster and more demanding than I had expected from my university lectures. In class, we learned about the news production process in a structured and organised way, but in the newsroom everything happened simultaneously... This experience showed me that the media industry requires teamwork, quick decision-making, and the ability to perform well under pressure – lessons that are difficult to fully understand from classroom lectures alone." (P8, radio)

The pivotal word in that reflection is "simultaneously." Where the classroom presents news production as an orderly sequence, the newsroom presents it as parallel processes running at once. A digital-track student described the environment as "much faster and busier than I expected... how media professionals work under pressure to meet deadlines" (P6, digital), and another simply noted that "the speed was way high, people were doing work at a very high speed" (P1, television broadcasting). Read through the reality-shock lens, these accounts are textbook descriptions of the dissonance Kramer (1974) first identified: the collision between an anticipatory model of orderly production and the accountable tempo of the real thing.

Crucially, the data did not present a uniform picture of chaos. A substantial minority reported that the newsroom was calmer, more composed, or more organised than they had feared, a kind of inverse surprise. One student found it "rather peaceful and more composed in there than expected" (P5, television broadcasting), while another reflected that it was "more organised and professional than I



expected... everyone knew their role and worked together efficiently" (P10, television broadcasting). Even students who were struck by the speed consistently noted the professionals' equanimity under it that staff "seemed experienced enough to be calm while doing work" (P1, television broadcasting). The shock, then, was less a matter of feeling personally overwhelmed and more a dawning recognition of two things at once: the tempo and simultaneity of real production, and the professional composure required to absorb it. This nuance helps to explain the paradox of a cohort that rated its preparedness at 4.0 out of 5 while still describing an experience its training had not prepared it for; what students lacked was not knowledge of the components of production but exposure to their concurrency and to the disposition that sustains it.

Theme 2: The Convergence Realisation and Multi-Skilling

The operational integration of traditionally separate media silos was a profound realisation for the cohort and gives the paper its title. Students repeatedly described watching a single story move across platforms. One articulated the converged pipeline in detail:

"A story covered by reporters could be used for TV News, reported on Radio, and later developed into a detailed article for newspaper. This teamwork ensured that the same news reached audiences across different media platforms quickly and consistently." (P10, television broadcasting)

Others observed the same convergence in action during a live segment: "I saw them handle the morning show... The story cuts across from print, it's published, and then it's shared across the TV and radio in the same manner" (P7, television broadcasting), and "one news story was shared between the TV, radio, and print departments, allowing the same information to reach audiences through different media platforms" (P4, radio). These student observations closely align with the polyvalent, whole-organisation model of news production documented in the convergence literature, in which journalists no longer work for a single section or programme but for the entire outlet (Mayo-Cubero, 2022). Watching this cross-platform workflow catalysed an understanding of professional versatility. For several students, the lesson crystallised in the familiar idiom: after observing a presenter move fluently between segments, one concluded that "we always say be a jack of all trades but a master of one, but for him this hit different" (P7, television broadcasting), while another stated the takeaway flatly, "You need to be a jack of all trades" (P10, television broadcasting). A radio student described the moment of self-recognition this produced:

"I realised that I can actually multitask and do all as perfect as possible. I found that there was someone who actually did more than three tasks for the media group." (P4, radio)

The theme signals a direct challenge to a compartmentalised curriculum: students left the visit understanding versatility not as an optional strength but as a baseline condition of employment. It is worth noting that students uniformly framed multi-skilling in aspirational terms, without reference to the intensification and autonomy costs that the labour literature associates with it (Connolly, 2024; Metykova & Císařová, 2023)—an omission with pedagogical implications considered in the discussion.

Theme 3: Technological and Infrastructural Deficits

When comparing the media house to their own campus, students identified concrete technological disparities. The single most frequently cited missing item was the teleprompter, named by 9 of the 16 respondents (56%) across every specialisation a small but telling symbol of the distance between a broadcast classroom and a broadcast studio. Beyond it, students catalogued the production gallery with dedicated workstations, the Axel software used for live radio, Sony broadcast cameras, video



switchers in the control room, professional printing presses, separated sound rooms, camera dollies, and tripods. One student captured how the industry's spatial division of labour differed from the improvised, single-room set-up they knew:

"At my university, everything is in one enclosed room and we rely more on OBS. The media house everything has its own allocated room or area and it's more advanced, so I really need to have the skill... the way every person has their own allocated work station, from the graphics to the director, the visuals and sound separated, that caught me off guard." (P7, television broadcasting)

The most analytically important observation, however, concerned not what was absent but what was present yet unusable. The same student described an infrastructural double deficit equipment that exists on the university's inventory but does not function:

"We have equipment but some have issues. When we visit a radio station or the editing room, the ratio of students to functional equipment is not yet 1:1, limiting students operationally." (P7, television broadcasting)

This distinction matters for both diagnosis and remedy, and it extends a literature that has largely framed the Global South technology-gap as one of absent or outdated equipment (Gondwe & White, 2022; Ncube et al., 2025). A deficit framed only as "missing equipment" implies a procurement solution; the students' accounts indicate that maintenance and repair of existing assets may be an equally urgent and considerably cheaper intervention. The equipment theme also intersected with genuine surprise: several students reported that the print production process was the most eye-opening part of the visit "That print has a lot of process" (P9, print), suggesting that even students on a print-adjacent track had limited prior exposure to industrial-scale production and that the deficit is one of exposure as much as of hardware.

Theme 4: Professional Socialisation and Team Dynamics

The visit offered critical insight into the interpersonal fabric of the newsroom, and on this point the data were strikingly consistent. Across specialisations, students reported that staff communicated respectfully, coordinated smoothly, and supported one another despite intense deadlines. One captured the atmosphere vividly: "The energy everyone was happy and relaxed doing their work to bring out the best... definitely teamwork is their name and they are planned thoroughly" (P7, television broadcasting). Another reflected in similar terms:

"The staff communicated respectfully and worked well as a team. They were professional, cooperative, and coordinated their tasks with a lot of seriousness for the production of quality news nationwide." (P4, radio)

For students, this collegiality was not incidental; one described the staff as "working together as one family" (P12, television broadcasting). It reframed communication and collaboration as core professional competencies rather than soft accompaniments to technical skill. This realisation—that professional socialisation is itself a learnable and teachable dimension of media work—is precisely the kind of tacit knowledge that experiential exposure conveys and that classroom instruction typically leaves implicit. It also illustrates the fourth phase of Kolb and Kolb's (2017) cycle in miniature: students did not simply observe teamwork but began to reconceptualise their own future practice around it, several resolving to develop collaborative and communicative capacities they had not previously regarded as trainable.



Discussion

The findings provide empirical evidence, grounded in students' own words, of a meaningful divide between theoretical mass communication pedagogy and operational reality while also complicating the standard reality-shock account in instructive ways. Reading the qualitative themes against the descriptive self-rating produces what might be called a preparedness paradox: students rated their classroom preparation a solid 4.0 out of 5, yet their reflections consistently describe encountering an operational logic that their training had not conveyed. The resolution lies in the object of the shock. It was not that students felt incompetent; it was the transition from a sequential model of production to a simultaneous one, and the professional composure that sustaining that simultaneity demands (Kramer, 1974; Zhang et al., 2024). Classroom instruction can teach the components of news production in order; it struggles to convey their concurrency. This is a more precise target for curricular reform than a blanket claim of unpreparedness, and it suggests that the value of experiential interventions lies less in transmitting new facts than in restructuring students' mental model of how known facts operate under real conditions, exactly the transformation of experience into knowledge that Kolb and Kolb (2017) describe.

The convergence theme reveals a clear misalignment between curriculum architecture and industry structure. While the industry has thoroughly embraced media convergence (Mayo-Cubero, 2022; Sonni et al., 2024), university programmes often remain segmented into broadcast, radio, print, and digital tracks. The students' repeated, unprompted invocation of the "jack of all trades" idiom and their recognition that a single professional may perform "more than three tasks" suggests that they intuited the pedagogical implication before their instructors could state it: versatility must be designed into the curriculum rather than left to chance. This student-level evidence lends concrete weight to the largely institution-level diagnoses of the academy-industry gap in African media education (Adjin-Tettey, 2024; Gondwe & Awami, 2025; Muringa & Adjin-Tettey, 2025).

At the same time, the data invite a note of caution that the enthusiasm of the cohort did not supply. Students framed multi-skilling in wholly positive, aspirational terms, whereas a substantial literature documents its darker face: the intensification of labour, the erosion of professional autonomy, and the precarity that can accompany the demand that one worker do the job (Connolly, 2024; Metykova & Waschková Císařová, 2023). A curriculum that responds to convergence merely by exhorting students to become jacks of all trades' risks preparing them to be exploited as efficiently as it prepares them to be employed. The pedagogical implication is that convergence should be taught critically as well as practically: students should acquire multi-platform competence while also learning to recognise reasonable workloads, to value the deep expertise that "master of one" implies, and to understand the labour dynamics of the newsrooms they will enter. Even handedness here is not a digression from employability but part of it.

The infrastructural findings extend the existing literature in a specific way. Prior work frames the Global South technology-gap primarily as one of absent, outdated equipment (Gondwe & White, 2022; Ncube et al., 2025). The distinction is consequential for resource-constrained institutions precisely because repair is typically far cheaper than replacement, and because a stock of broken equipment represents sunk capital that competent maintenance could partially recover.

Finally, the study surfaces a context-specific opportunity that speaks to the wider question of how immersion is best delivered. The field-trip and work-integrated-learning literatures agree that one-off visits achieve most when embedded in sustained, reflective, partnership-based arrangements rather than treated as isolated excursions (Foo & Foo, 2022; Hill et al., 2025; Makhadi & Diederichs, 2021). ...the student argued, "would greatly give exposure to students before they get to the media world"



(P3, all-round). While this reflection highlights a strong student appetite for experiential learning, it also reveals a common blind spot regarding the economics of media production. It is financially prohibitive for an educational institution, which operates outside of commercial broadcasting revenues, to replicate the capital-intensive infrastructure of a fully converged, commercial media house. Therefore, the pedagogical value of such corporate linkages lies not in attempting to build competing campus studios, but rather in facilitating structured industry immersions, access to proprietary workflows, and realistic newsroom simulations using available technology. The precise corporate relationship, which lies beyond the scope of this study verify, the observation points to a pragmatic pathway that resource-constrained programmes elsewhere might emulate: converting one-off tours into standing partnerships with nearby commercial newsrooms, so that convergence, professional socialisation, and industry-standard practice are encountered repeatedly and reflectively rather than glimpsed once.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, the study demonstrates the value of pairing experiential learning theory with the reality-shock tradition when studying industry immersion: the former explains why the visit produced learning, while the latter explains what students noticed and why it unsettled them. The preparedness paradox shows that the two lenses are complementary rather than redundant, since a purely experiential reading would miss the affective dissonance that made the experience formative. Practically, the findings imply that even a single, low-cost field visit can function as a diagnostic instrument, surfacing curricular and infrastructural gaps that internal review had not made vivid, and as a pedagogical one, restructuring how students understand the work they are training to do. The implications are transferable: mass communication programmes across the Global South that face similar resource constraints could use structured, reflective industry visits both to prepare students for reality-shock and to generate an evidence base for curriculum and infrastructure reform.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations bound these findings. The study is a single-case design with a small sample (N = 16) drawn from one university cohort following a single experiential intervention, which constrains statistical generalisability to other institutions in the Global South; the intention, as in comparable qualitative field-trip research (Nonkula, 2025), is analytical rather than statistical transferability. The data are cross-sectional, collected immediately after the visit, and therefore capture initial perceptions rather than durable learning or behaviour change. The responses carry some risk of social-desirability bias, mitigated but not eliminated by anonymisation and by reflexive attention to disconfirming cases. The single-item preparedness measure is a blunt instrument and should be read as contextual colour rather than as validated quantitative evidence. Furthermore, it is a methodological limitation to use an online form to collect data with only one quantitative question alongside multiple open-ended prompts, as this may have constrained the depth of responses compared to intensive interviews. Future research should pursue longitudinal, multi-institution designs that track graduate cohorts into the workforce to measure the long-term effect of experiential interventions on professional competency and retention; comparative studies across several East African universities would help to establish which findings are local and which are structural; and mixed-methods designs incorporating validated instruments could test the preparedness paradox identified here on a larger scale.

Conclusion

An over-reliance on theoretical instruction leaves mass communication students able to describe the components of news production but unprepared for its concurrency, its converged logic, and its professional tempo. A single immersive field visit was sufficient to make these gaps vivid to students



who rated themselves reasonably well prepared yet articulated, in their own words, precisely what their training had not conveyed. Experiential learning interventions thus do more than motivate; they diagnose. To produce graduates capable of thriving in high-pressure converged newsrooms, universities must actively reconcile the disparity between academic abstraction and industry practice.

Based on the students' own recommendations and the wider evidence base, four key priorities emerge to dissolve the boundary between classroom theory and industry reality. First, curricula must embed cross-platform newsroom simulations that move beyond sequential, single-medium exercises towards high-pressure environments where students produce television, radio, print, and online versions of the same story under real deadlines. Second, institutions should adopt a "repair before procuring" strategy, prioritising the restoration of existing but non-functional equipment while budgeting for ongoing maintenance to prevent recurring infrastructural deficits. Third, educational programmes need to institutionalise industry partnerships by converting one-off tours into standing arrangements, such as recurring placements and guest sessions, ensuring professional socialisation is learned in situ. Finally, it is imperative to teach convergence critically; educators must cultivate multi-platform versatility while equipping students to navigate the labour dynamics, workload, and autonomy issues inherent in converged newsrooms. Taken together, these measures would help to dissolve the boundary between classroom theory and industry reality, and prepare graduates for a media environment that increasingly expects every entrant to be, in the students' own phrase, a jack of all trades, ideally without exacting the costs that phrase can conceal.

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