

# SURVEY ON THE CURRENT STATUS OF CORE COMPETENCIES OF JOURNALISM STUDENTS IN GUANGXI UNIVERSITY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES\*

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## Abstract

The objectives of this study are: (1) to assess the current level of core competencies among journalism students at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages (GUFL); (2) to analyze the key factors influencing the development of these competencies; (3) to examine the relationship between students' demographic characteristics and their competency performance; and (4) to develop practical recommendations for enhancing journalism education and improving students' employability in the digital media era. This study employed a quantitative research design with a structured survey approach. The population consisted of undergraduate journalism students at GUFL, and a total of 340 participants were selected using random and stratified sampling methods. Data were collected through a validated questionnaire measuring six competency dimensions—political literacy, moral literacy, professional ability, innovation ability, practical ability, and professional ethics—and analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability testing, factor analysis, and multiple regression.

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The results reveal that journalism students demonstrate high levels of political literacy, moral literacy, and professional ethics, reflecting strong ideological awareness and ethical standards. However, their innovation and practical abilities are relatively weaker, indicating limited exposure to digital tools, interdisciplinary learning, and hands-on experience. Significant differences were found across grade levels, with senior students showing stronger professional skills but lower creativity and adaptability. The study concludes that journalism education at GUFL remains largely theory-oriented, with insufficient emphasis on innovation and media practice. To enhance competency development, the research recommends: (1) optimizing curricula to integrate data journalism, AI-assisted reporting, and digital media literacy; (2) strengthening internships and project-based learning; (3) fostering interdisciplinary collaboration; (4) expanding school-enterprise partnerships; and (5) promoting bilingual and cross-cultural journalism education. These strategies aim to help local foreign language universities transform toward competency-based and innovation-driven journalism education that aligns with the demands of global media convergence.

**Keywords:** Journalism Education, Core Competencies, Guangxi University of Foreign Languages, New Media, Intercultural Communication

## Introduction

In the era of digital transformation, journalism education is undergoing unprecedented changes driven by the rapid development of information technology, artificial intelligence, and social media platforms. Traditional journalism programs that once emphasized writing, editing, and ethical standards are no longer sufficient to meet the demands of today's converged media environment. Modern journalists must possess not only strong ideological literacy and moral judgment but also advanced digital skills, cross-platform communication ability, and global awareness. These transformations have

reshaped the definition of journalistic professionalism and the competencies required for success in the modern news industry. China, as one of the world's most dynamic and technologically advanced media markets, has placed growing emphasis on cultivating “new-type communication talents” who can integrate theoretical knowledge with technical application and innovative practice. The National Standards for Undergraduate Education in Journalism and Communication (2018) issued by China's Ministry of Education explicitly highlight three key dimensions—quality, ability, and value shaping—as the foundation of journalism education reform. These standards call for strengthening political and moral literacy, enhancing professional and practical skills, and fostering creative and interdisciplinary capacities among journalism students. Consequently, journalism programs across China are expected to transition from theory-oriented teaching models to competency-based and practice-driven approaches. However, previous research shows that this transformation has been uneven across institutions. Studies such as Chen (2019), Hu (2021), and Li & Zhang (2022) reveal that local universities, compared with “Double First-Class” institutions, still face challenges in integrating digital literacy, interdisciplinary learning, and industry collaboration into their curricula. Many journalism students graduate with strong ideological foundations but limited practical experience, creativity, and technological adaptability. This imbalance underscores a critical gap between educational outcomes and the real demands of the media industry in the digital age. Within this national context, Guangxi University of Foreign Languages (GUFL) represents a distinctive case. As a regional foreign language institution, GUFL carries the dual mission of cultivating bilingual communication talents and supporting China–ASEAN cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative. Its journalism program emphasizes language competence, intercultural understanding, and social responsibility. Yet, despite these advantages, existing

challenges remain limited integration between language training and media practice, insufficient digital media exposure, and weak collaboration between the university and professional media organizations. These issues have constrained students' ability to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts and limited their overall employability in the new media industry. Given these gaps, there is an urgent need to conduct a systematic empirical investigation into the core competencies of journalism students at GUFL. While many studies have explored journalism education in top-tier Chinese universities, relatively few have focused on application-oriented and regional foreign language institutions, where the combination of bilingual education and journalism training presents unique opportunities and challenges. This study therefore addresses an underexplored research area and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of journalism education in the context of China's local universities. By examining the current competency levels, identifying influencing factors, and analyzing the relationships between students' demographic characteristics and performance, this research aims to provide empirical evidence that supports curriculum reform and professional development. Ultimately, the study seeks to develop practical recommendations for enhancing journalism education and improving students' employability in the digital media era—bridging the gap between theoretical education and professional practice, and promoting the transformation toward innovation-driven, competency-based journalism education in regional universities.

## Objectives

1. To assess the current level of core competencies among journalism students at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages (GUFL).
2. To analyze the key factors influencing the development of students' core competencies.

3. To examine the relationship between students' demographic characteristics and their competency performance.

4. To develop practical recommendations for enhancing journalism education and improving students' employability in the digital media era.

## Literature Review

Journalism The global journalism landscape has undergone a profound transformation in response to the rise of digital technology, social media, and artificial intelligence. Traditional journalism education, which once focused on news writing, editing, and ethical norms, is now evolving toward multimedia, data-driven, and cross-platform communication (Deuze, 2020). Scholars such as Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) emphasize that while the core mission of journalism—truth, verification, and public service—remains unchanged, the skills required to fulfill these principles have expanded to include digital literacy, algorithmic awareness, and intercultural communication competence.

In China, this transformation is reflected in the National Standards for Undergraduate Education in Journalism and Communication (2018) issued by the Ministry of Education. The standards promote a “three-in-one” model of quality, ability, and value shaping, underscoring the importance of political integrity, moral cultivation, and professional skills. They further encourage journalism programs to integrate theoretical learning with applied practice, preparing students for a rapidly changing media ecosystem characterized by convergence, innovation, and globalization.

The concept of core competencies refers to an integrated set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that enable individuals to perform effectively in professional contexts (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Within journalism, core competencies encompass both foundational qualities (e.g., political and

moral literacy, ethical reasoning) and applied abilities (e.g., writing, multimedia production, innovation, and digital adaptation). Liangrong (2010) classified journalism competencies into six key domains: political literacy, moral literacy, professional ability, innovation ability, practical ability, and professional ethics—an approach that aligns closely with the measurement framework adopted in this study. Recent research highlights the growing importance of technological and interdisciplinary competencies. Yu (2018) and Pavlik (2019) note that journalists must master new tools such as data analytics, AI-assisted reporting, and cross-platform storytelling. Peng (2014) and Zhang (2023) further argue that cross-cultural communication and bilingual proficiency are critical for global journalism in the context of China's Belt and Road Initiative. These dimensions reflect a broader shift from purely cognitive learning to integrative competency development, combining ethical, technological, and intercultural skills.

This study is grounded in three major theoretical perspectives that collectively explain how journalism competencies can be cultivated and assessed.

Competency-Based Education (CBE) emphasizes measurable learning outcomes that integrate knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). It supports curriculum design that prioritizes performance indicators and evidence-based evaluation. Constructivist Learning Theory, based on Vygotsky (1978), suggests that learners construct knowledge through social interaction, experience, and reflection. In journalism education, this implies that hands-on learning such as internships, fieldwork, and collaborative projects plays a central role in developing critical thinking and practical skills.

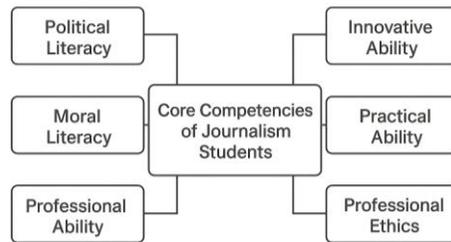
Technology Adaptation Theory (Pavlik, 2019) proposes that journalism programs must continually adapt to technological advancements to remain relevant. This theory underlines the need to integrate AI, data journalism, and digital storytelling into journalism curricula to match the realities of the modern newsroom. Together, these theories provide a robust framework for examining

how journalism students develop professional competencies in environments characterized by rapid technological change.

Despite national reforms, several studies (Chen, 2019; Hu, 2021; Li & Zhang, 2022) indicate that local universities still struggle to align their journalism curricula with industry expectations. The main challenges include an imbalance between theory and practice, limited integration of digital tools, weak collaboration with media enterprises, and insufficient training in innovation. At Guangxi University of Foreign Languages (GUFL), these challenges are amplified by the dual focus on language and journalism. While GUFL excels in bilingual and intercultural communication, its journalism students often demonstrate stronger ideological and moral qualities than digital and innovative abilities. This imbalance reflects the broader trend identified in national research, emphasizing the urgent need for curriculum optimization, experiential learning, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Most existing studies on journalism education in China have concentrated on elite “Double First-Class” universities or metropolitan institutions. Few have systematically examined application-oriented universities that combine foreign language instruction with journalism training. As a result, there is limited understanding of how such institutions cultivate the competencies necessary for journalism in the digital age.

This research addresses that gap by focusing on GUFL as a representative case of a regional foreign language university. It contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence on journalism students’ competency levels in local universities, identifying key factors influencing competency development, offering actionable recommendations for curriculum and partnership reform, and expanding theoretical understanding of competency-based journalism education in the context of China’s new media transformation. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, this study supports GUFL and similar institutions in

transitioning toward a competency-driven, innovation-oriented, and internationally focused journalism education model that prepares graduates for success in global media industries.



**Figure 1:** Conceptual Framework of Journalism Students' Core Competencies

## Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research design using a structured survey to investigate the core competencies of journalism students at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages (GUFL). The population comprised all undergraduate journalism students, and a total of 340 participants were selected through random and stratified sampling to ensure representativeness across grade levels.

A validated questionnaire was employed as the research instrument, consisting of six dimensions: political literacy, moral literacy, professional ability, innovation ability, practical ability, and professional ethics. Data were collected through online and in-class survey administration during the academic semester.

Descriptive statistics were used to determine competency levels, while reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) and factor analysis were conducted to verify the instrument's validity. Multiple regression analysis was applied to examine the influence of demographic variables and educational factors on students' competency performance.

## Result

The study collected valid responses from 340 journalism students at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS to examine the level of students' core competencies across six major dimensions: political literacy, moral literacy, professional ability, innovative ability, practical ability, and professional ethics.

Objective 1: To assess the current level of core competencies among journalism students at GUFL

**Table 1** Summary of Journalism Students' Core Competency Levels

Dimension	Mean	Interpretation
Political Literacy	4.35	High
Moral Literacy	4.28	High
Professional Ability	4.02	Moderate-High
Innovative Ability	3.85	Moderate
Practical Ability	3.79	Moderate
Professional Ethics	4.30	High

The results indicate that students demonstrate strong performance in political literacy, moral literacy, and professional ethics, showing a firm understanding of ideological and ethical standards. However, innovative ability and practical ability scored comparatively lower, revealing weaknesses in creativity, interdisciplinary application, and real-world experience. Professional ability received a moderate-to-high score, reflecting a balanced but improvable level of journalistic skills such as writing and editing.

These findings suggest that while journalism students at GUFL possess solid moral and political foundations, their digital skills, innovation, and hands-on training require further strengthening. The result aligns with national concerns

that local universities focus more on theoretical knowledge than practical implementation. Therefore, curriculum reforms emphasizing innovation, multimedia practice, and school–enterprise collaboration are essential to enhance the comprehensive competency of future journalists.

Objective 2: To identify and analyze the key factors influencing the development of students’ core competencies

The analysis revealed three major factors that significantly affect the development of journalism students’ core competencies: curriculum design, digital media exposure, and practical experience.

Students who participated in internships, workshops, or field training exhibited noticeably higher scores in professional ability and practical skills compared with those who lacked such experiences. Similarly, those who had taken digitally integrated or project-based courses showed greater innovation ability and adaptability to new media technologies.

On the other hand, students with limited access to new media tools or few opportunities for real-world practice performed lower in innovation and application-oriented competencies.

These results confirm that experiential learning and curriculum relevance play crucial roles in shaping students’ competency development and readiness for professional work.

Objective 3: To examine the relationship between demographic characteristics and competency performance

Statistical tests indicated that grade level had a significant impact on students’ competency performance, while gender did not.

Senior students (Year 4) achieved higher scores in professional and practical abilities, reflecting the benefits of accumulated coursework and field experience. However, their innovation ability remained moderate, suggesting a continued need for creativity-oriented instruction.

Students who possessed prior digital media or bilingual learning backgrounds performed better in innovation, communication, and cross-platform competencies. The results show that educational experience and academic exposure, rather than demographic factors such as gender, are the key determinants of competency performance among journalism students.

Objective 4: To propose evidence-based strategies for enhancing journalism education and employability

Based on the findings, the study proposes several strategies to improve journalism education and strengthen students' employability:

Curriculum Innovation: Update and diversify courses to include digital journalism, data storytelling, and AI-assisted reporting.

Practice-Based Learning: Expand internship programs, media laboratories, and collaborative projects to enhance hands-on skills.

Interdisciplinary Integration: Combine journalism with technology, communication, and business courses to foster creativity and innovation.

School-Enterprise Partnerships: Strengthen cooperation with local and international media organizations to provide authentic learning environments.

Bilingual and Intercultural Training: Utilize GUFL's strength in foreign language education to build bilingual journalism modules that prepare students for global media engagement.

These recommendations highlight the importance of transforming journalism education toward a competency-based, innovation-driven, and globally oriented.

### **Conclusions**

The findings of this study reveal that journalism students at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages (GUFL) demonstrate a generally strong foundation in political literacy, moral awareness, and professional ethics,

consistent with the ideological goals of Chinese higher education in the field of communication. Students display a clear understanding of journalistic values, social responsibility, and the importance of truthfulness and fairness in reporting. These strengths reflect the success of the university's emphasis on ethical and ideological education in journalism training. However, the study also highlights several areas requiring improvement. Students show relatively weaker performance in innovative and practical competencies—particularly in digital journalism, cross-platform production, and data-driven storytelling. The limited exposure to real-world professional environments and insufficient integration of new media technologies in the curriculum have constrained students' readiness to meet the demands of the rapidly evolving media landscape. Moreover, differences among student grades suggest that higher-year students develop stronger professional skills but still lack interdisciplinary creativity and critical thinking. From an institutional perspective, the current curriculum at GUFL still emphasizes traditional theoretical courses over experiential learning. While the “foreign language + journalism” model provides a strong basis for intercultural communication, it has yet to be fully leveraged to build bilingual, globally minded journalism professionals. The university's collaboration with industry partners remains limited in both depth and scale, which reduces opportunities for students to apply their classroom knowledge in authentic contexts.

Therefore, to enhance the quality and relevance of journalism education, this study proposes the following strategies:

**Curriculum Optimization** – Update and balance the curriculum by integrating data journalism, AI-assisted reporting, and digital media literacy courses to reflect technological advancements.

**Practice-Oriented Learning** – Strengthen internships, media labs, and project-based learning to cultivate hands-on abilities and creative problem-solving skills.

Innovation and Research Integration – Encourage interdisciplinary collaboration, allowing students to combine journalism with technology, business, or social science fields.

School–Enterprise Partnership – Expand cooperation with domestic and international media organizations to create long-term, high-quality internship and training platforms.

Global Communication Competence – Utilize GUFL’s language advantage to establish bilingual journalism modules, enhancing students’ ability to communicate China’s stories internationally.

In conclusion, this research underscores the need for journalism education at local foreign language universities to evolve from a theory-oriented to a competency- and innovation-driven model. By integrating ethics, practice, technology, and intercultural communication, GUFL and similar institutions can better prepare their students to thrive as professional journalists in the era of media convergence and global digital transformation.

Future studies should expand the scope beyond Guangxi University of Foreign Languages to include comparisons with other regional and national institutions. Researchers are encouraged to adopt mixed-method or longitudinal designs to track the development of journalism students’ competencies over time.

Further research should focus on digital media innovation, such as the integration of AI, data journalism, and multimedia storytelling, to assess their impact on students’ learning outcomes. Studies on cross-cultural and bilingual journalism education would also be valuable, exploring how language proficiency enhances international communication skills.

Lastly, developing standardized competency assessment tools and strengthening school–industry collaboration models will help align academic

training with professional demands, supporting continuous improvement in journalism education for the digital era.

## Discussion

The findings indicate that journalism students at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages possess strong moral and political literacy but demonstrate weaknesses in innovation and practical abilities. This pattern supports the Competency-Based Education (CBE) framework, which emphasizes the integration of knowledge, skills, and values as measurable learning outcomes. While GUFL students show strength in ideological and ethical dimensions, the limited emphasis on practical and creative training suggests a need to rebalance curriculum priorities toward performance-oriented competencies.

The results also align with Constructivist Learning Theory, highlighting that students develop deeper understanding through active participation, reflection, and real-world experience. The higher competency levels among students with internship or workshop experience confirm that hands-on learning environments effectively enhance professional and innovative abilities.

Furthermore, the influence of digital exposure on competency performance validates the Technology Adaptation Theory, indicating that journalism programs must continuously adapt to technological advancements. Students with greater engagement in digital journalism or cross-platform learning achieved higher innovation and adaptability scores, showing the importance of embedding technology and digital literacy within the curriculum. The discussion suggests that GUFL and similar institutions should shift from theory-dominant instruction to competency-driven, technology-integrated, and practice-based learning models. Such transformation will better align academic training with the evolving demands of the media industry and strengthen students' employability in the digital era.

## Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

**Curriculum Enhancement:** Integrate digital journalism, data analysis, and multimedia storytelling into the curriculum to strengthen innovation and practical abilities.

**Experiential Learning:** Increase internship programs, media workshops, and project-based activities to improve students' hands-on experience.

**Technology Integration:** Utilize digital tools and AI applications in teaching to enhance students' adaptability to modern media environments.

**School-Industry Collaboration:** Establish partnerships with professional media organizations to provide authentic learning and employment opportunities.

**Bilingual and Global Focus:** Develop bilingual journalism modules to enhance intercultural communication and international competitiveness.

These recommendations aim to support the transition of journalism education toward a competency-based, technology-oriented, and practice-driven model that prepares students for professional success in the digital era.

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