

Barriers to Journalism Competency Development: An Applied Linguistics Perspective on Language, Literacy and Pedagogy

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KEYWORDS Applied Linguistics. Grounded Theory. Hindering Factors. Journalism Competencies. Student Journalists

ABSTRACT This study explored the factors that hinder the development of journalism competencies among aspiring writers using an applied linguistics perspective. A qualitative design was employed, involving 12 professional journalists from print and broadcast media as key informants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using the Grounded Theory Method. Findings revealed five major hindering factors of self-doubt, inadequate training, unfit mentorship, discouragement, and difficulty in time management. These factors limited confidence, skill development, and sustained engagement in journalism practice. Participants addressed these challenges through supportive academic environments, participation in training programs, and strategic time management. The findings highlight the need for structured pedagogy, mentorship, and literacy-focused interventions to strengthen journalism competencies and better prepare aspiring writers for professional practice.

INTRODUCTION

Journalism plays a critical role in democratic societies by enabling the circulation of credible information and informed public discourse. This function relies on advanced literacy, critical thinking, and ethical communication. From an applied linguistics perspective, journalism competency is both professional and language-based, shaped by literacy practices and pedagogical processes.

Recent studies emphasise that writing competence remains a central challenge in journalism education. Writing requires cognitive processing, linguistic control, and rhetorical precision (Brink 2020; Graham 2021). Empirical evidence shows that weak writing skills limit students' ability to produce accurate and meaningful journalistic content (Hyland 2022). While structured instruction improves literacy outcomes, disparities in access to training and mentorship continue to constrain skill development (UNESCO 2021; Li 2023).

In the Philippine context, the Campus Journalism Act of 1999 promotes journalism as a platform for critical thinking and civic engagement. However, participation in student publications remains limited. Language proficiency, particularly in English, often functions as a gatekeeping mechanism. This condition raises concerns on equity and access to journalism training. Recent local studies further indicate that institutional support and pedagogical

guidance are uneven across schools (Santos 2022; Dela Cruz 2024).

Mentorship plays a central role in developing journalism competencies. Publication advisers serve as language facilitators and skill developers. Studies show that effective teacher-student relationships enhance learning outcomes and motivation (Roorda et al. 2020). However, limited research examines how adviser practices influence competency development in campus journalism. Existing literature also tends to isolate psychological, educational, or social factors, rather than examining their interaction.

Despite these contributions, there is no comprehensive framework that explains the barriers to journalism competency development from an applied linguistics perspective. Empirical studies integrating language proficiency, literacy practices, and pedagogical interaction remain limited. Research using grounded theory to explain these dynamics is also scarce.

Addressing this gap, this study examines the barriers to journalism competency development among aspiring writers. It focuses on the interaction of language proficiency, literacy practices, and pedagogical relationships. The study aims to generate a grounded theory that explains how these factors constrain or shape competency development. The findings provide insights for improving journalism education and promoting inclusive and effective training practices.

Objectives

This study aimed to examine the barriers to journalism competency development among aspiring writers. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Identify the psychological, educational, and social factors that hinder journalism competency development,
2. Analyse how these factors affect the development of writing and journalistic skills,
3. Determine the strategies used by participants to address these challenges.

Literature Review

The literature reveals that the development of journalism competencies is shaped by a combination of academic, linguistic, psychological, and pedagogical factors. Across studies, the journey toward becoming a competent journalist is marked not only by skill acquisition but also by recurring barriers that hinder professional growth.

One major theme is academic and writing-related struggle. Journalism students often experience difficulty adjusting to the discipline's rigorous demands, particularly its specialised writing conventions (Smith 2017). Writing in journalism requires clarity, accuracy, and ethical responsibility, yet many students enter programs without sufficient language and literacy foundations. These deficiencies affect confidence, performance, and opportunities for publication. Failure to get published and making repeated writing errors further reinforce feelings of inadequacy, which may discourage continued engagement in journalism practice.

Another consistent concern is ethical complexity. Johnson (2018) notes that students frequently struggle with ethical decision-making, especially in relation to objectivity, privacy, and responsibility. Ethical challenges are not merely moral in nature, as they are deeply connected to language use, framing, and judgment. When students lack guided pedagogical support in navigating these dilemmas, adherence to journalistic standards becomes difficult, weakening overall competency development.

The literature also emphasizes the impact of feedback and criticism. Davis (2019) highlights that while critical feedback is essential to growth, many students find it difficult to process and use constructively. Harsh criticism, rejection, and compet-

itive pressures often lead to discouragement (Soloski 1989). Without supportive instructional environments, these experiences may result in burnout, reduced motivation, or withdrawal from journalism pathways.

From a psychological perspective, self-doubt and low self-efficacy emerge as significant barriers. Kaufman and Beghetto (2013) explain that self-doubt limits creativity and risk-taking, both of which are essential in journalistic work. Bandura (1997) argues that self-efficacy develops through guided success and positive reinforcement, suggesting that pedagogy plays a crucial role in shaping learners' confidence and persistence.

Pedagogical limitations are likewise evident. Several studies point to inadequate or outdated training models that fail to align with current industry practices (Mensing 2010; Carpenter 2013). The disconnect between academic instruction and professional expectations leaves students underprepared, particularly in adapting to evolving media platforms and technologies. Similarly, ineffective or mismatched mentorship relationships can hinder learning, as students may not receive guidance suited to their linguistic and professional needs (Eby et al. 2008).

In contrast, the literature identifies seminars, constructive feedback, and collaborative learning as facilitators of competency development. Exposure to industry experts through seminars enhances practical knowledge and professional awareness (Deuze 2006). Meaningful feedback supports reflection and skill refinement (Hattie and Timperley 2007), while collaborative learning environments promote shared knowledge construction and peer-supported growth (Lave and Wenger 1991; Vygotsky 1978). These practices highlight the importance of social interaction and guided participation in learning journalism.

Overall, the literature suggests that failures in journalism competency development stem from the interaction of language limitations, weak literacy practices, psychological barriers, and insufficient pedagogical support. However, existing studies tend to examine these factors in isolation. There remains a lack of an integrative framework that explains how language, literacy, and pedagogy intersect to either hinder or facilitate journalism competency development. This gap underscores the need for an applied linguistics-informed inquiry that accounts for instructional practices, adviser-

student relationships, and learning contexts in the formation of student-journalists.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design guided by the principles of qualitative inquiry (Yin 2011). It utilised the Grounded Theory Method to generate a theoretical explanation of the factors that hinder journalism competency development. This approach was appropriate for examining participants' lived experiences within real-world contexts.

Participants and Sampling

The study involved 12 professional journalists working in print and broadcast media. Participants served as writers, anchors, or reporters producing news, features, editorials, and development communication outputs.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants with relevant professional experience. Snowball sampling enabled the inclusion of additional informants recommended by initial participants. This approach ensured the selection of information-rich cases.

Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews using an interview guide with open-ended questions. The guide elicited participants' experiences, motivations, and challenges in developing journalism competencies. The instrument underwent content validation and pilot testing to ensure clarity and relevance. Interview questions were refined during data collection based on emerging insights, consistent with theoretical sampling in grounded theory.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were gathered through in-person and online interviews. Zoom was used for online sessions due to its accessibility and recording capability. Each interview was audio-recorded with participant consent. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to

withdraw at any time. Informed consent was secured prior to data collection. Pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using the Grounded Theory Method. Open coding was conducted to identify initial concepts. Axial coding was used to establish relationships among categories. Selective coding was applied to develop core themes and generate a theoretical framework. Constant comparison guided the analysis. Memos were written throughout the process to document reflections, emerging codes, and conceptual linkages. These procedures supported the development of a theory grounded in empirical data.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness was ensured through data triangulation, member checking, and systematic documentation. Data were triangulated using interviews and supporting documents. Member checking was conducted to validate the accuracy of participants' responses.

RESULTS

As shown in Figure 1, the findings identified Impeding Factors as the core category influencing the development of journalistic competencies among the informants. Five descriptive categories emerged from the participants' narratives: self-doubt, inadequate training, unfit mentors, discouragement, and difficulty in time management. Among these, unfit mentors and inadequate training were the most frequently reported, each being described by nine participants, followed by self-doubt (six participants), discouragement (four participants), and difficulty in time management, which also consistently surfaced in the participants' accounts. These findings indicate that the development of journalistic competencies extends beyond individual ability and motivation, as it is substantially influenced by the quality of mentoring, institutional support, and access to meaningful learning experiences.

The prominence of unfit mentors and inadequate training demonstrates the indispensable role of effective mentorship in journalism education.

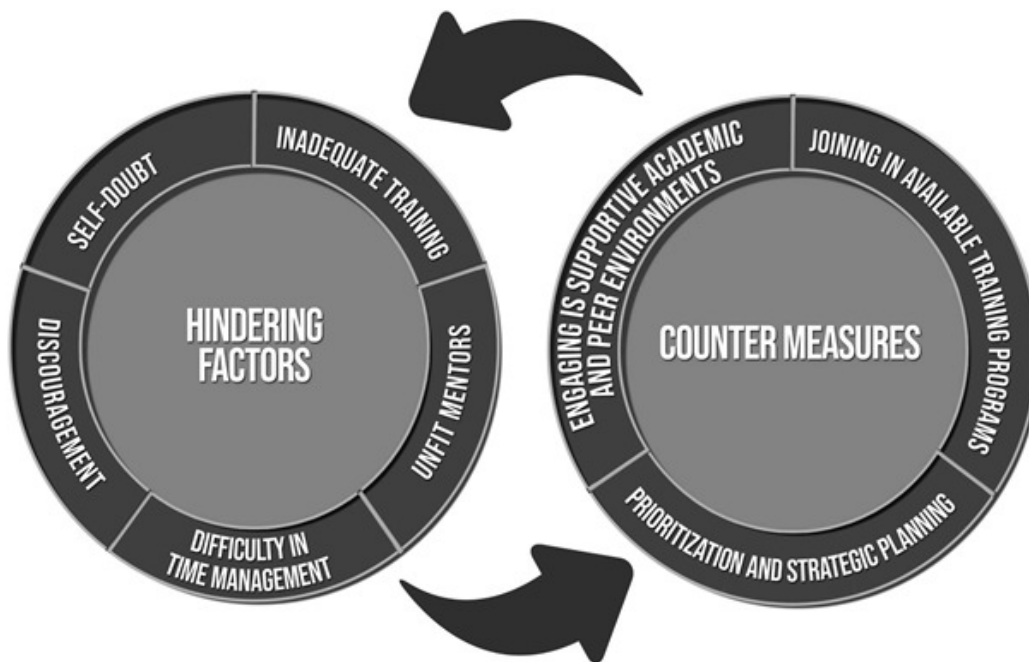


Fig. 1. Factors that hindered the development of competencies in journalism

Journalism is fundamentally an experiential discipline in which competencies are developed through guided practice, constructive feedback, and authentic newsroom experiences. However, when mentors lack the necessary expertise or when training opportunities are insufficient, aspiring journalists encounter significant barriers to developing both technical and professional competencies. This finding corroborates the work of Bacea (2025), who emphasized that effective journalism coaching extends beyond teaching writing mechanics to nurturing critical thinking, confidence, reflective practice, and professional identity among student journalists. Similarly, Docallas (2025) reported that inadequate institutional support, limited professional development opportunities, and insufficient adviser preparation significantly constrain the effectiveness of campus journalism programs despite the recognized educational value of journalism activities.

The present findings further suggest that merely participating in journalism organizations is insufficient to ensure competency development. Rather, participants consistently emphasized that

the quality of mentoring relationships and the adequacy of training opportunities determine whether journalism experiences become developmental or discouraging. This observation extends previous scholarship by demonstrating that successful competency development depends on sustained instructional guidance and supportive learning environments. Consequently, educational institutions should prioritize continuous capacity-building programs for journalism advisers, structured mentoring systems, and regular skills enhancement activities that respond to the evolving demands of contemporary journalism. Recent discussions on journalism education likewise argue that journalism programs must continuously adapt their mentoring practices and instructional approaches to prepare students for increasingly complex professional environments characterized by technological innovation, misinformation, and rapidly changing media ecosystems.

Another important finding is the emergence of self-doubt as a major psychological impediment to journalistic competence. Participants frequently questioned their own capabilities despite active

engagement in journalism activities, suggesting that confidence is gradually cultivated through repeated mastery experiences, supportive mentoring, and constructive feedback. This finding is consistent with Bandura's (1997) Self-Efficacy Theory, which posits that individuals' beliefs in their capabilities directly influence persistence, resilience, motivation, and performance. Likewise, recent qualitative research among campus journalists revealed that self-doubt commonly develops within competitive journalism environments where students continuously compare their performance with that of their peers. Such psychological barriers may reduce participation, creativity, and willingness to assume challenging journalistic tasks unless appropriate mentoring and emotional support are provided (Alfaro 2025).

The findings also reveal that discouragement and difficulty in time management constitute significant external and personal barriers that impede competency development. Student journalists often face competing academic, organizational, and personal responsibilities, making it difficult to allocate sufficient time for research, writing, editing, and participation in journalism-related activities. These findings are consistent with recent phenomenological investigations showing that campus journalists continuously negotiate multiple responsibilities while managing academic expectations, publication deadlines, leadership roles, and competition requirements. Despite these challenges, many student journalists gradually develop resilience, adaptability, and organizational skills through supportive peer networks and effective prioritisation strategies (Dasalla and Protacio 2025).

An equally significant contribution of the present study is the identification of participants' adaptive responses to these impediments. Although the narratives revealed multiple barriers to competency development, they simultaneously demonstrated that these obstacles are not insurmountable. Participants described several countermeasures, including engaging in supportive academic and peer environments, participating in available training programs, and practicing prioritization and strategic planning. These coping mechanisms suggest that competency development is a dynamic and developmental process resulting from continuous interaction between personal agency and institutional support. Rather than viewing challenges solely as constraints, the findings indi-

cate that appropriately designed mentoring systems, sustained professional development opportunities, collaborative learning communities, and responsive institutional policies can transform these barriers into opportunities for professional growth. Therefore, journalism education programs should adopt a holistic approach that simultaneously develops technical competence, psychological resilience, leadership capacity, and professional identity among aspiring journalists.

DISCUSSION

Hindering Factors

For each descriptive category presentation, the following is an in-depth discussion focusing on the core category.

Self-doubt

Self-doubt refers to the lack of confidence in one's abilities, skills, and decisions. It can manifest as constant second-guessing, fear of criticism, or hesitation to put one's work out into the world. One of the most significant internal challenges experienced by the informants was self-doubt. This psychological barrier can significantly impede the growth and development of budding journalists, as consistently reflected in their narratives. Justin was expressive when he explained how self-doubt disrupted his writing process:

"When I doubt myself, I lose focus. It makes it even harder for me to write."

When further asked when he first experienced self-doubt, he shared:

"I used to think it was easy. I was encouraged by a classmate to join the student publication, and during the recruitment, I thought it was like an audition, so I submitted my article. They liked it, so I got in. But in my experience as a member of the school publication, there were times when I doubted if I could really write. If I could keep up with the other members of the school publication. Self-doubt is always there, but it is up to us how we manage it."

Justin's account demonstrates that self-doubt is not merely an emotional response to failure but an integral part of developing a journalistic identity. Although he initially perceived journalism as manageable, his exposure to authentic newsroom

expectations, editorial scrutiny, and comparisons with more experienced writers challenged his confidence. Such experiences illustrate that competency development in journalism is neither immediate nor linear. Rather, aspiring journalists continually negotiate their confidence while learning to meet increasingly demanding professional expectations.

Interestingly, not all participants viewed self-doubt as entirely detrimental. Angeli, Nik, and Chu claimed that self-doubt eventually became a source of motivation. For them, recognizing and confronting their insecurities encouraged continuous learning and personal improvement, enabling them to navigate their journey toward becoming competent journalists. Their experiences suggest that self-doubt can function as a developmental mechanism that encourages greater perseverance, reflection, and self-improvement rather than simply hindering professional growth.

This finding corroborates the work of Burson and Dweck (2013), who argued that self-doubt may become a motivating force among academically inclined students by encouraging them to challenge themselves and exert greater effort toward achieving their goals. Likewise, Roberts and Woods (2016) reported that students who experience self-doubt often devote greater attention and effort to academic tasks because they become more conscious of the need to improve their performance. Collectively, these earlier studies suggest that self-doubt does not invariably undermine achievement; rather, its influence depends on how learners respond to feelings of uncertainty.

The present findings, however, extend these earlier perspectives by demonstrating that within journalism education, self-doubt operates as a continuous developmental process rather than a temporary psychological condition. The participants did not simply experience occasional uncertainty; instead, they repeatedly confronted self-doubt while producing news stories, receiving editorial feedback, and comparing themselves with more experienced writers. These recurring experiences gradually shaped their confidence, resilience, and professional identity. Thus, self-doubt emerged not only as a hindering factor but also as an important catalyst for reflective learning and competency development.

Recent scholarship further reinforces this interpretation. A study by Balëytienė (2025) emphasized that contemporary journalism increasingly

requires self-efficacious professionals who can confidently exercise editorial judgment, adapt to technological changes, and maintain ethical standards amid rapidly evolving media environments. The study argues that confidence in one's professional capability is fundamental to responsible journalism because journalists constantly make complex decisions under conditions of uncertainty. Consequently, journalism education should intentionally cultivate students' confidence alongside technical competencies to prepare them for the realities of professional practice.

Similarly, recent educational research demonstrates that self-efficacy is closely associated with students' psychological resilience and their capacity to overcome academic challenges. Xu (2025) found that learners with stronger self-efficacy exhibited greater resilience because they were better able to regulate anxiety and adapt to demanding learning situations. These findings suggest that although self-doubt may initially weaken confidence, educational experiences that strengthen self-efficacy and emotional regulation enable learners to transform uncertainty into resilience and sustained academic engagement.

Furthermore, contemporary studies indicate that learners' confidence is strengthened through supportive learning environments that promote self-regulation, mindfulness, and psychological well-being. Such environments encourage students to view mistakes and criticism as opportunities for growth rather than evidence of incompetence, thereby fostering greater academic self-efficacy and persistence (Shareefa et al. 2025). This perspective closely aligns with Justin's realization that "self-doubt is always there, but it is up to us how we manage it," highlighting that the successful development of journalistic competence depends not on eliminating self-doubt but on learning how to respond to it constructively.

Viewed collectively, the narratives of the participants and the contemporary body of literature suggest that self-doubt should not be regarded solely as a psychological obstacle. Instead, it represents a critical stage in the formation of professional journalists, during which aspiring writers evaluate their capabilities, refine their skills, and gradually construct a stronger sense of professional identity. The findings therefore underscore the importance of journalism educators creating supportive editorial environments characterized by

constructive feedback, reflective practice, mentoring, and authentic writing experiences. Such learning environments may enable student journalists to transform self-doubt from a hindering factor into a driving force for continuous professional growth, thereby contributing to the development of the competencies necessary for effective and ethical journalism.

Inadequate Training

Inadequate training also surfaced in the narratives of the informants as a significant factor that hindered the development of their competencies in journalism. This factor refers to the lack of adequate education, structured training, and meaningful exposure to the knowledge, skills, and professional experiences necessary for competent journalistic practice. The transition from an aspiring writer to a professional journalist is a complex and multifaceted process that requires continuous learning, guided practice, and authentic newsroom experiences. Consequently, inadequate training limits not only the acquisition of technical competencies but also the development of confidence, critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and professional identity.

PB shared that during her secondary schooling, opportunities to participate in journalism training and seminars were extremely limited.

"There were rarely any training and seminars about journalism back then."

She further explained:

"Before the DSPC, which is a contest about journalism, writing, and broadcasting, we should have already had training and seminars. I wished we could attend training back then, but they were really rare. Aside from the high cost, sometimes the training was far away. So, what usually happened was our coaches were the ones teaching us. For me, it is still different when you attend seminars and training outside because, of course, we would learn new styles and approaches. That is what we lacked."

PB's narrative illustrates that the challenge was not merely the absence of training but the unequal accessibility of professional learning opportunities. Financial constraints, geographical distance, and the scarcity of organized journalism programs limited her exposure to contemporary journalistic practices. Although school advisers attempted to

compensate by mentoring student journalists locally, PB recognized that external seminars offered broader perspectives, innovative writing techniques, and opportunities to learn from experienced practitioners. Her experience suggests that competency development is strengthened through diverse learning environments that expose aspiring journalists to multiple approaches to reporting, writing, and news production.

Clark similarly highlighted the inequitable distribution of training opportunities within school publications. Although journalism seminars were available in his school, participation was largely restricted to student leaders.

"Perhaps if it was a priority for all members of the school publication back then to attend seminars, I would be a better writer. I would have learned more."

Clark's experience demonstrates that institutional practices may unintentionally create disparities in competency development. Restricting professional development opportunities to editorial officers limits the growth of contributing writers who likewise require systematic training to refine their journalistic skills. His reflection further suggests that competency development should be viewed as a collective educational responsibility rather than a privilege reserved for a select group of student leaders.

Although the participants described different educational contexts, they consistently identified inadequate training as a major obstacle to developing journalistic competence. Their narratives reveal that competency development depends not solely on classroom instruction but also on sustained engagement in authentic learning experiences such as journalism workshops, writing clinics, newsroom simulations, press conferences, competitions, mentoring, and interactions with practicing journalists. These experiences provide opportunities for aspiring journalists to refine their technical abilities while simultaneously developing professional confidence and ethical judgment.

The importance of training in competency development has long been emphasized in educational and professional learning literature. Bandura (1986) argued that competence develops through repeated mastery experiences that strengthen individuals' beliefs in their capabilities. Earlier educational research likewise demonstrated that inadequate training may weaken students'

confidence, reduce mastery of essential competencies, and adversely affect long-term academic and professional success (Brookhart 2001). While these foundational studies remain relevant, the rapidly evolving media landscape necessitates a broader understanding of journalism training than traditional instruction alone.

The present findings extend this body of scholarship by demonstrating that inadequate training influences multiple dimensions of journalism competency. Rather than affecting only writing proficiency, insufficient training limited participants' investigative skills, source verification, interviewing techniques, ethical decision-making, critical thinking, and adaptability to professional newsroom practices. This broader interpretation is reflected in Anj's observation:

"It is not just about learning how to write in the training; we also need to learn how to verify information, how to qualify who should be interviewed for a particular issue, and the strategies that can be applied to make our write-up more credible."

Anj's statement highlights the evolving nature of journalism education, where competence extends beyond writing mechanics to include information verification, ethical reporting, source evaluation, and credibility assessment. These competencies have become increasingly essential in contemporary journalism because journalists operate within an information environment characterized by misinformation, artificial intelligence, user-generated content, and rapidly changing digital technologies. Consequently, journalism training must prepare students not only to produce stories but also to evaluate information critically and uphold professional standards of accuracy and accountability.

Recent scholarship strongly supports this interpretation. Jiang and Rafeeq (2025) argued that journalism education across Asia is undergoing substantial curricular transformation to respond to technological innovations and changing newsroom demands. Their analysis of journalism programs revealed that contemporary curricula increasingly emphasize experiential learning, digital competencies, ethical reasoning, interdisciplinary collaboration, and continuous curriculum innovation to prepare graduates for rapidly evolving professional environments. The authors further contend that journalism education should integrate practical experiences with emerging technologies rather

than relying solely on conventional classroom instruction.

Similarly, Babacan (2025) emphasized that journalism education should provide students with authentic opportunities to develop competencies in artificial intelligence, digital journalism, multimedia storytelling, and data-driven reporting. The study found that journalism programs that rely predominantly on theoretical instruction often leave graduates insufficiently prepared for the realities of contemporary newsrooms, thereby underscoring the importance of practical and competency-based training throughout journalism education.

These contemporary perspectives deepen the interpretation of the participants' experiences. PB's and Clark's narratives suggest that inadequate training was not simply characterized by the absence of seminars but by limited opportunities to engage in authentic professional learning that develops confidence, adaptability, and higher-order journalistic competencies. Their experiences therefore extend previous literature by illustrating how structural inequalities in access to training can influence the trajectory of professional development among aspiring journalists.

The participants' narratives also reveal that competency development is a continuous process that extends beyond formal schooling. Jolens reflected on the importance of lifelong learning after entering the profession:

"When I first started at my job, I knew I had a lot to learn. What I did was attend online training and seminars. Online training was available during the pandemic."

Jolens' experience demonstrates that professional competency continues to evolve through self-directed learning and continuing professional development. Her initiative to participate in online seminars illustrates how emerging learning platforms may compensate for earlier limitations in formal journalism education. At the same time, her narrative suggests that aspiring journalists should be encouraged to cultivate lifelong learning habits that enable them to respond effectively to technological innovations and evolving professional standards.

Overall, the findings suggest that inadequate training should not be understood merely as the absence of instructional activities. Rather, it represents a structural constraint that limits aspiring journalists' opportunities to develop technical expertise, ethical competence, critical thinking, pro-

fessional confidence, and adaptive learning capacities. Consistent with recent developments in journalism education, the findings underscore the need for journalism programs to provide equitable access to sustained, competency-based, and experiential learning opportunities through mentoring, newsroom simulations, multimedia production, digital verification training, and continuous professional development.

Unfit Mentors

A mentor is someone who provides guidance, encouragement, and professional support to a less experienced individual. Within journalism, mentors are expected to facilitate the development of technical competencies, professional ethics, critical thinking, and journalistic identity by sharing their knowledge and practical experiences. However, the findings of this study reveal that mentorship can become a hindering factor when mentors lack the professional expertise, disciplinary preparation, or practical experience necessary to guide aspiring journalists effectively. Rather than facilitating competency development, mismatched mentors may inadvertently restrict students' learning opportunities, weaken their confidence, and limit their exposure to authentic journalistic practices.

As revealed in the narratives of the informants, several participants considered mismatched mentors as one of the major factors that hindered the development of their competencies in journalism. Doll, an AB Mass Communication graduate, deliberately enrolled in a university with the expectation that she would learn from experienced journalism practitioners. Instead, she expressed disappointment with the limited presence of journalism professionals among the faculty.

"That is why I enrolled in Mass Communication to further enhance my writing skills. However, I have to admit, there's a lack of journalists teaching in the university. There's a shortage of experts in the field. I was expecting practicing journalists to be our professors, but most of the semesters, our teacher wasn't really a journalist."

Doll's experience illustrates that students associate effective mentorship not merely with classroom instruction but with authentic professional expertise. Her expectations reflect the belief that journalism educators who possess substantial newsroom experience are better positioned to

bridge theoretical knowledge with the realities of professional journalistic practice. The absence of practitioner-mentors consequently limited her opportunities to acquire industry-based insights, newsroom culture, and contemporary reporting practices that are difficult to develop through theoretical instruction alone.

Similarly, Anj emphasized that the mismatch between teachers' academic preparation and the subjects they handled affected her expectations regarding the quality of journalism education.

"Our teacher for the foundation subjects was also our teacher for the major subjects. My teacher didn't graduate with a degree in journalism. Her course was different from mine, but she was our teacher for the major subjects. I was somewhat disappointed because, for instance, I know that for nursing students, their teachers for their major subjects are nurses or doctors. I expected the same for our course."

Anj's reflection demonstrates that students perceive disciplinary expertise as an important component of effective mentoring. Her comparison with other professional programs suggests that journalism students likewise expect mentors who possess specialized educational preparation and practical experience in their discipline. Such expectations underscore the importance of mentor credibility in fostering students' confidence and facilitating meaningful competency development.

PB echoed similar concerns regarding the limited number of qualified faculty members available throughout her undergraduate education.

"I wish we had more than just one teacher back then. From my second year in college until I graduated, I only had one or two teachers for all my major subjects. One of them didn't even graduate with a degree in journalism or mass communication. I wish my teacher back then really had a solid foundation in the principles of journalism. Because, in my opinion, it seemed like the only qualification for her to teach our major subjects was that she was an adviser for the school publication."

PB's narrative suggests that effective mentorship extends beyond supervising student publications. While serving as a publication adviser may provide valuable instructional experience, participants believed that formal academic preparation and professional journalism experience provide mentors with broader perspectives, deeper disciplinary knowledge, and richer

professional insights that strengthen students' learning experiences.

The findings support Parsloe's (2009) definition of mentoring as a process of supporting individuals in managing their own learning, maximizing their potential, developing their competencies, and becoming the professionals they aspire to be. Crisp and Cruz (2009) described mentoring as a developmental relationship that promotes personal growth, professional achievement, psychosocial support, and reciprocal learning experiences between mentors and mentees.

While these foundational perspectives emphasize the positive influence of mentoring, the present findings extend the literature by demonstrating that mentorship is effective only when mentors possess the appropriate disciplinary expertise and professional competence required by the field. The participants' narratives indicate that the issue was not simply the availability of mentors but the alignment between mentors' qualifications and the professional competencies expected in journalism education. Consequently, mentorship quality should be evaluated not only in terms of interpersonal support but also in terms of mentors' capacity to provide authentic professional guidance grounded in contemporary journalistic practice.

Recent scholarship reinforces this interpretation. Mullen (2025) argues that effective mentoring in higher education requires mentors whose expertise, professional identity, and disciplinary knowledge align with the developmental needs of learners. Rather than functioning solely as academic advisers, mentors should facilitate professional socialization, reflective practice, competency development, and career preparation through meaningful and sustained interactions. This perspective suggests that mentoring relationships are most productive when mentors possess the knowledge, experience, and professional credibility necessary to guide students toward their desired careers.

The findings likewise resonate with contemporary discussions on journalism education, which emphasize the increasing importance of practitioner-informed instruction as journalism adapts to technological innovation, artificial intelligence, multimedia storytelling, and rapidly changing newsroom practices. Recent studies argue that journalism educators should integrate industry experience, experiential learning, and authentic newsroom practices into teaching to ensure that graduates ac-

quire competencies aligned with contemporary professional expectations. Such integration enables students to develop not only technical writing skills but also editorial judgment, ethical reasoning, digital literacy, and professional adaptability necessary for modern journalism.

The present study therefore contributes a more nuanced understanding of mentorship within journalism education. Rather than viewing mentors solely as sources of encouragement, the findings demonstrate that mentor-mentee compatibility, disciplinary expertise, and professional experience significantly influence the development of journalistic competencies. Participants consistently associated effective mentorship with exposure to practicing journalists capable of connecting classroom instruction with authentic newsroom realities. This finding suggests that journalism programs should prioritize recruiting qualified journalism educators, strengthening faculty professional development, fostering partnerships with media practitioners, and expanding mentorship opportunities involving experienced journalists.

Overall, the findings indicate that mismatched mentors represent a structural barrier to competency development because they may inadvertently limit students' acquisition of professional knowledge, confidence, and authentic journalistic experiences. Establishing mentoring systems that intentionally match aspiring journalists with qualified educators and experienced media practitioners may therefore strengthen competency development, facilitate professional identity formation, and better prepare future journalists for the increasingly complex demands of the contemporary media industry.

Discouragement

Discouragement from others emerged as another significant factor that hindered the development of the participants' competencies in journalism. Discouragement may take various forms, including negative comments, criticism, skepticism, or the absence of emotional support from family members, peers, teachers, and significant others. During the formative stages of becoming a journalist, such experiences may diminish self-confidence, weaken motivation, and create uncertainty regarding one's ability to succeed in the profession. As the narratives of the participants reveal,

however, discouragement did not invariably terminate their aspirations. Rather, many transformed these adverse experiences into opportunities for resilience, perseverance, and personal growth.

For Nik, discouragement was an inevitable part of the journey toward becoming a writer. Instead of allowing negative remarks to weaken his determination, he perceived them as a source of motivation. He explained:

"Not everyone will be supportive of what we want. Sometimes, those closest to us are the ones who will discourage us. In my experience, I had friends who told me that I wasn't good at writing. That was the time when I was auditioning to be part of the school publication."

Reflecting on this experience, Nik emphasized:

"It is important to not let it stop you from achieving your goals."

Nik's account demonstrates that external criticism does not necessarily impede competency development. Rather, its influence depends largely on how individuals interpret and respond to discouraging experiences. Instead of internalizing his friends' negative comments as evidence of incompetence, Nik viewed them as challenges that strengthened his determination to improve. His experience reflects the notion that resilience enables individuals to reinterpret adversity as an opportunity for growth rather than as a reason to abandon their aspirations. As Amoadu et al. (2025) argued, academically resilient learners remain committed to their goals because they perceive setbacks as developmental experiences that strengthen persistence and motivation rather than diminish them.

Similarly, Chu acknowledged that discouragement initially affected her confidence but eventually became a source of personal strength.

"Maybe if I had listened to them, I wouldn't have become a writer. At first, I was starting to believe them that maybe I couldn't do it, but eventually, I still tried. I thank the Lord because He gave me the confidence to face it."

Chu's reflection illustrates the dynamic process through which aspiring journalists negotiate self-belief. Her narrative suggests that discouragement initially generated uncertainty regarding her capabilities; however, sustained perseverance and faith enabled her to regain confidence and continue pursuing journalism. This finding supports the work of Xu (2025), who found that learners with

stronger self-efficacy and effective emotional regulation demonstrate greater psychological resilience when confronted with academic challenges. Likewise, Shareefa et al. (2025) reported that supportive psychological resources, including self-regulation and positive coping strategies, strengthen learners' academic self-efficacy and persistence despite experiencing criticism or failure. Together, these studies reinforce the present finding that confidence is not an innate characteristic but a developmental capacity strengthened through overcoming adversity.

Like some of the other participants, Doll experienced discouragement within her own family. She recounted:

"I really wanted to be a part of the school publication. I tried to audition, but even before I started, I seemed to hear again what my father told me, that I wouldn't gain anything by joining the school publication. What he wanted back then was for me to just focus on my subjects. I was weak in math, so just to motivate myself to study, I wanted to at least be a part of the school publication. I still got into the student publication. It continued until I graduated."

Doll's experience demonstrates that discouragement from significant family members may create emotional conflict during career exploration. Nevertheless, rather than abandoning her aspirations, she chose to participate in the student publication, where she gradually developed her journalistic competencies. Her narrative illustrates that professional identity develops through continuous negotiation between personal aspirations and external expectations. Participation in journalism activities became not only a means of improving her writing skills but also an avenue through which she affirmed her capability despite receiving discouraging messages from her family.

Several participants likewise reported that parental discouragement was primarily influenced by perceptions of journalism as a financially unstable profession. Justin shared:

"I really pushed to enroll in AB Mass Communication. At first, my parents, especially my mom, were really against it. They said that journalists don't earn much. That stuck with me, but I still wanted to pursue my passion. I love writing, and they used to say that you should take a course that aligns with your interests so you won't have a hard time in college."

Similarly, Angeli explained:

"My father didn't want me to take up journalism as my course. He said I should become a nurse so I can work abroad. He said that if I become a reporter, I would earn only a little."

The narratives of Justin and Angeli suggest that discouragement was not rooted in a lack of confidence in their abilities but rather in parents' concerns regarding financial security and career stability. Such perceptions reflect broader socioeconomic realities in which career decisions are frequently influenced by employment opportunities and expected income. Nevertheless, both participants chose to pursue journalism because of their intrinsic passion for writing. Their experiences demonstrate that vocational commitment may outweigh external pressures when individuals possess a strong sense of purpose and professional identity.

The present findings support previous literature emphasizing the influence of social support on students' motivation and persistence while extending existing scholarship by demonstrating that discouragement may simultaneously function as both a hindering factor and a catalyst for competency development. Although discouragement initially generated uncertainty among the participants, their eventual persistence illustrates the dynamic relationship between adversity, resilience, and professional identity formation. This observation is consistent with Amodu et al. (2025), who argued that resilient learners are more likely to sustain academic engagement despite experiencing adverse circumstances because they reinterpret challenges as opportunities for learning and self-improvement. Likewise, recent evidence indicates that resilience, psychological resources, and intrinsic motivation significantly contribute to sustained academic engagement even when learners encounter repeated setbacks (Bagdžiūnienė et al. 2025).

The findings further contribute to contemporary discussions on journalism education by demonstrating that aspiring journalists frequently confront discouragement from multiple social contexts, including peers, parents, and significant others. Unlike previous studies that primarily examine discouragement as a barrier to educational persistence, the present study reveals that participants actively reconstructed these negative experiences into motivational resources that strengthened their determination to succeed. This finding enriches

current scholarship by suggesting that resilience among aspiring journalists develops not in the absence of adversity but through continuous engagement with criticism, rejection, and conflicting social expectations.

Viewed collectively, the participants' narratives indicate that discouragement should not be understood solely as an obstacle to competency development. Rather, it represents a developmental experience through which aspiring journalists clarify their professional goals, strengthen their resilience, and cultivate a deeper commitment to journalism. The findings therefore underscore the importance of journalism educators, advisers, and mentors in creating supportive learning environments characterized by constructive feedback, encouragement, reflective practice, and mentoring relationships. Such educational environments may enable aspiring journalists to transform discouragement into a source of motivation, thereby fostering the competencies, confidence, and professional identity required for successful and ethical journalistic practice.

Difficulty in Time Management

Difficulty in time management likewise emerged as one of the hindering factors that influenced the development of the participants' competencies in journalism. The journey from student journalist to professional journalist requires individuals to balance multiple academic, professional, and personal responsibilities while continuously developing essential journalistic competencies. Journalism is inherently characterized by strict deadlines, unpredictable assignments, and rapidly changing news environments that demand effective prioritization, organization, and adaptability (Keeble and Tulloch 2018). Consequently, ineffective time management may limit opportunities to refine writing skills, conduct thorough research, participate in journalistic activities, and engage in reflective learning experiences that are fundamental to professional growth (Wenger 2019).

Among the participants, Phoebe vividly described how balancing academic responsibilities and employment became one of the greatest challenges during her formative years as a journalist. She shared:

"I was a working student during my time in college, as I needed to financially support my

education. My circumstances were challenging at that time due to being an irregular student, primarily because I was a transferee. My employment involved contributing news content to a radio station. I was responsible for generating news items that the radio anchor would mention on air. While I found satisfaction in my responsibilities at that point, the situation was difficult due to the division of my time between work and studies."

Phoebe's narrative illustrates that time management extends beyond merely organizing daily schedules. Her experience reflects the realities faced by many aspiring journalists who simultaneously fulfill academic requirements, employment responsibilities, and professional aspirations. The competing demands of work and education required her to make continuous decisions regarding the allocation of time and effort, demonstrating that competency development often occurs within complex personal and socioeconomic circumstances. Rather than simply delaying skill acquisition, these competing responsibilities challenged her capacity to participate fully in journalism-related learning experiences while maintaining satisfactory academic performance.

Despite these challenges, Phoebe demonstrated remarkable perseverance. Her experience reveals that managing multiple responsibilities strengthened rather than diminished her commitment to journalism. The necessity of balancing work and study cultivated resilience, discipline, and adaptability—qualities that later became valuable professional competencies. Her narrative suggests that effective journalists develop not only technical expertise but also the capacity to manage competing priorities in demanding professional environments.

Deeply rooted in her convictions, Phoebe consistently regarded writing as her lifelong passion. Her determination to continue pursuing journalism despite considerable personal challenges illustrates that intrinsic motivation served as a protective factor against the adverse effects of time constraints. This finding aligns with Amoadu et al. (2025), who reported that intrinsically motivated and academically resilient learners remain engaged despite demanding circumstances because they perceive challenges as opportunities for growth rather than barriers to achievement. Likewise, Bagdsifinienė et al. (2025) found that resilience enables university students to sustain academic engagement even when confronted with competing responsibilities and persistent stressors.

The present findings also extend previous scholarship on time management in journalism education. While Keeble and Tulloch (2018) and Garrison (2019) emphasized the importance of effective time management for meeting professional deadlines and adapting to newsroom demands, the experiences of the participants demonstrate that time management should also be understood as a developmental competency that influences opportunities for experiential learning, professional networking, and competency acquisition. Phoebe's experience illustrates that aspiring journalists who must simultaneously fulfill educational and economic responsibilities may encounter fewer opportunities to participate in journalism seminars, competitions, newsroom activities, and mentoring experiences that are essential to professional development.

Bagdžiūnienė et al. (2025) emphasized that university students who possess strong personal and study-related resources—including self-efficacy, resilience, and effective self-management strategies—exhibit higher levels of academic engagement and psychological well-being. These findings suggest that effective time management should be viewed not merely as a productivity strategy but as a fundamental competency that promotes academic resilience, lifelong learning, and career readiness.

The findings likewise highlight the relationship between time management and professional identity formation. Phoebe's experience demonstrates that aspiring journalists often acquire valuable professional characteristics—including resilience, responsibility, adaptability, and perseverance—through the process of negotiating competing academic and occupational demands. Rather than functioning solely as an obstacle, time-management challenges became a developmental experience that prepared her for the realities of professional journalism, where multiple assignments, strict deadlines, and unpredictable events are commonplace.

Overall, the findings suggest that difficulty in time management should not be interpreted solely as an individual weakness but as a contextual challenge shaped by academic demands, employment obligations, and socioeconomic realities. Consistent with recent developments in higher education, journalism programs should provide students with opportunities to develop self-regulation, time-management strategies, reflective practice, and workload management alongside technical journalistic competencies.

Counter Measures

The following is an in-depth discussion focusing on the core category of counter measures.

Engaging in Supportive Academic and Peer Environment

One of the most significant countermeasures employed by the participants in overcoming the hindering factors associated with competency development was engaging in a supportive academic and peer environment. Such environments provide emotional encouragement, constructive feedback, collaborative learning opportunities, and meaningful social interactions that enable aspiring journalists to strengthen their confidence and continuously improve their professional competencies. Within journalism education, where students are frequently exposed to criticism, tight deadlines, and demanding performance expectations, supportive academic communities become essential in sustaining motivation and fostering resilience.

For Klaus, the encouragement he received from his peers became an important source of emotional support whenever he experienced self-doubt. He shared:

"When I lose confidence in myself, I mingle with my friends. They are the ones motivating me especially when I'm feeling down."

Klaus' narrative illustrates that peer relationships extend beyond social companionship and function as an important psychological resource that strengthens confidence and promotes persistence. Rather than confronting self-doubt in isolation, he deliberately sought encouragement from his peers, allowing him to regain motivation and continue developing his journalistic competencies. His experience demonstrates that supportive peer interactions contribute to emotional well-being, which subsequently enhances learners' willingness to engage in challenging journalistic tasks.

Another participant similarly emphasized that interacting with fellow student journalists during seminars strengthened both confidence and professional learning. She explained:

"When I attend seminars, I make an effort to mingle with people. I know that we are all writers from different schools. When I talk to them, I gain confidence. We chat about how they work on their school publications."

This narrative suggests that professional learning occurs not only through formal instruction but also through meaningful interactions with peers who share similar interests and experiences. Engaging with student journalists from different institutions exposed the participant to diverse journalistic practices, editorial strategies, and writing approaches, thereby enriching her understanding of journalism beyond the classroom. These interactions also strengthened her confidence by allowing her to recognize that many aspiring journalists encounter similar challenges during their professional development.

Clark likewise described how participation in the student publication transformed his social and academic experiences.

"At first, when I was in my first year of college, I was shy. I didn't interact much with my fellow students in the department, but I promised myself that I have to ace my college years. I shouldn't waste this."

Clark's reflection demonstrates that participation in student journalism fostered not only technical competency but also social confidence and professional engagement. Becoming part of the student publication provided opportunities to collaborate with peers, communicate effectively, and gradually develop interpersonal skills that are indispensable in journalism. His experience suggests that supportive academic communities facilitate both personal growth and competency development by encouraging students to actively participate in authentic journalistic activities.

The present findings support the proposition of Deci and Ryan (2012) that supportive interpersonal relationships satisfy learners' psychological needs for relatedness and competence, thereby strengthening intrinsic motivation and sustained engagement. Likewise, Cuseo et al. (2007) argued that supportive academic environments enhance students' academic persistence by fostering collaboration, mentoring, and a strong sense of belonging within educational communities. While these foundational studies underscore the value of supportive learning environments, the present findings extend their perspectives by demonstrating that peer support within journalism education contributes not only to academic persistence but also to the formation of professional identity and journalistic confidence.

Recent scholarship further reinforces these findings. Bagdžiūnienė et al. (2025) reported that supportive peer relationships and positive academic environments significantly enhance students' academic engagement by strengthening resilience and psychological well-being. Students who perceive greater support from peers and educators are better able to manage academic stress, remain committed to their goals, and sustain active participation in learning activities. Similarly, Amoadu et al. (2025) found that social support and academic resilience jointly predict students' engagement because supportive educational environments encourage learners to interpret challenges as opportunities for personal and professional growth rather than as barriers to success.

Within journalism education specifically, recent scholarship emphasizes that collaborative learning environments have become increasingly important as journalism evolves toward multidisciplinary, digitally connected, and technology-driven professional practice. Jiang and Rafeeq (2025) argued that journalism programs should cultivate collaborative learning cultures where students exchange ideas, participate in experiential learning, and receive continuous feedback from peers and mentors. Such environments enable aspiring journalists to develop communication skills, editorial judgment, ethical reasoning, and professional adaptability while simultaneously strengthening their confidence and readiness for contemporary newsroom practice.

The findings of the present study therefore contribute a broader understanding of supportive academic and peer environments within journalism education. Rather than functioning merely as sources of emotional encouragement, these environments serve as developmental spaces where aspiring journalists collaboratively construct professional knowledge, refine technical competencies, strengthen resilience, and cultivate their journalistic identity. The participants' experiences demonstrate that competency development is fundamentally a social process in which meaningful interactions with peers and educators enhance both individual learning and professional growth.

The findings suggest that engaging in supportive academic and peer environments represents an effective countermeasure against self-doubt, discouragement, inadequate training, and other barriers encountered throughout the journey to-

ward becoming a professional journalist. Journalism educators should therefore foster inclusive learning communities characterized by constructive feedback, collaborative learning, mentoring, reflective dialogue, and authentic newsroom experiences. Such educational environments not only strengthen students' journalistic competencies but also promote resilience, confidence, and lifelong professional learning necessary for successful practice in an increasingly dynamic media landscape.

Joining in Available Training Programs

Actively participating in available training programs emerged as one of the most effective countermeasures employed by the participants to overcome the hindering factors that impeded the development of their competencies in journalism. While inadequate training and limited access to qualified mentors constrained their learning experiences, the participants demonstrated initiative by seeking alternative opportunities for professional growth through journalism seminars, workshops, conferences, and specialized training programs. Such experiences supplemented formal classroom instruction by exposing aspiring journalists to current journalistic practices, emerging technologies, professional ethics, and authentic newsroom experiences.

The importance of continuous professional learning is particularly evident in journalism, where technological innovations, changing audience expectations, and evolving media platforms continually redefine the competencies required of practitioners. Consequently, participation in training programs enables aspiring journalists to update their knowledge, strengthen technical competencies, and remain responsive to the changing demands of the profession. As Hager et al. (2007) argued, learning extends beyond formal educational settings, and continuous professional development provides opportunities for individuals to acquire competencies that cannot always be developed through classroom instruction alone.

The majority of the participants consistently identified journalism seminars and professional training programs as valuable opportunities for competency development. Justin, in particular, emphasized his willingness to participate whenever such opportunities became available.

"When we know that there are seminars, we really join, especially when we are aware that the training will offer new concepts."

Justin's statement demonstrates that aspiring journalists perceive professional learning as a continuous process rather than a requirement confined to formal education. His willingness to participate in journalism seminars reflects a proactive learning orientation characterized by openness to new knowledge, emerging journalistic practices, and innovative approaches to reporting. Rather than passively accepting the limitations of their formal educational experiences, participants actively sought opportunities that would enable them to improve their competencies and remain professionally relevant.

The findings further suggest that participation in training programs served not only to strengthen technical competencies but also to expand participants' professional perspectives. Exposure to experienced journalists, resource speakers, and fellow writers allowed participants to exchange ideas, compare journalistic practices, and gain insights into contemporary newsroom expectations. Such interactions enriched their understanding of journalism by connecting theoretical concepts acquired in the classroom with authentic professional experiences. Consequently, training programs functioned not merely as instructional activities but as communities of practice where aspiring journalists collaboratively constructed knowledge and developed professional identity.

The present findings support the work of Hager et al. (2007), who emphasized that lifelong learning and continuous professional development are essential components of competency development because they enable individuals to respond effectively to evolving workplace demands. However, the present study extends this perspective by demonstrating that, within journalism education, participation in available training programs also serves as a compensatory mechanism through which aspiring journalists overcome structural limitations such as inadequate institutional training and limited access to qualified mentors. Rather than simply enhancing existing competencies, these training opportunities allowed participants to acquire knowledge and experiences that were absent from their formal educational environments.

Recent scholarship further reinforces this interpretation. Jiang and Rafeeq (2025) argued that journalism education is undergoing substantial transformation as institutions respond to rapid technological advancement, artificial intelligence, and changing newsroom practices. Their study empha-

sized that journalism curricula should be complemented by experiential learning opportunities, industry engagement, professional workshops, and continuous training to ensure that graduates possess competencies aligned with contemporary media environments. Similarly, Babacan (2025) maintained that journalism education should integrate practical training in digital journalism, multimedia storytelling, artificial intelligence, and data-driven reporting because contemporary newsrooms increasingly require journalists who possess both technical expertise and adaptive learning capabilities.

Recent studies likewise indicate that participation in professional development programs significantly enhances learners' confidence, professional identity, and career readiness. Learners who actively engage in workshops, conferences, and specialized training demonstrate greater adaptability, improved critical thinking, and stronger commitment to lifelong learning because these experiences expose them to authentic professional challenges and emerging industry standards (OECD 2025). These findings closely correspond with the participants' narratives, which consistently highlight training programs as valuable avenues for broadening knowledge and refining journalistic competencies beyond traditional classroom instruction.

Collectively, the findings suggest that joining available training programs represents more than a supplementary educational activity; it constitutes a strategic response to the challenges encountered throughout the development of journalistic competencies. By actively seeking opportunities for continuous professional learning, the participants demonstrated agency, adaptability, and commitment to excellence—qualities that are increasingly essential in contemporary journalism. The findings therefore underscore the responsibility of higher education institutions, media organizations, and professional journalism associations to expand access to inclusive, competency-based, and industry-responsive training programs. Such initiatives may strengthen not only aspiring journalists' technical competencies but also their professional confidence, adaptability, ethical decision-making, and readiness to navigate the rapidly evolving landscape of modern journalism.

Prioritisation and Strategic Planning

Prioritisation and strategic planning emerged as another important countermeasure employed

by the participants to overcome the various challenges encountered throughout the development of their competencies in journalism. As aspiring journalists navigated self-doubt, inadequate training, discouragement, mismatched mentors, and competing academic responsibilities, they learned that effectively managing their time and establishing clear priorities enabled them to remain productive despite demanding circumstances. Journalism is a profession characterized by strict deadlines, multiple assignments, and rapidly changing situations; consequently, the ability to prioritize responsibilities and plan strategically has become an indispensable competency for both aspiring and practicing journalists.

One of the key informants, Klaus, described how prioritization helped him remain productive while managing competing responsibilities.

“When racing against time, I need to be able to identify which task has the highest priority so that I won’t stress out trying to beat the deadline. Knowing my priorities makes me even more productive.”

Klaus’ experience illustrates that prioritization extends beyond simply completing tasks on time. Rather, it represents a deliberate process of evaluating responsibilities, allocating available resources, and making informed decisions regarding which activities require immediate attention. His narrative demonstrates that strategic prioritization reduced unnecessary stress while enabling him to devote greater attention to activities that directly contributed to the development of his journalistic competencies. Such experiences suggest that effective time management serves as both a cognitive and behavioral strategy that supports sustained professional growth.

The findings further indicate that prioritization and strategic planning functioned as self-regulatory mechanisms that enabled participants to overcome barriers encountered throughout their journalistic journey. Rather than becoming overwhelmed by multiple academic and professional responsibilities, the participants developed the ability to organize their activities, establish realistic goals, and monitor their progress toward competency development. This process allowed them to remain focused on long-term professional aspirations despite experiencing temporary setbacks, thereby strengthening both their resilience and commitment to journalism.

The present findings support the work of Locke and Latham (2002), whose Goal-Setting Theory posits that individuals who establish clear, specific, and challenging goals demonstrate higher levels of motivation, performance, and persistence. Likewise, Hawkins (2019) emphasized that prioritization enables individuals to allocate their time and resources more effectively, thereby improving productivity and reducing work-related stress. While these foundational studies highlight the importance of planning and goal setting, the present study extends their perspectives by demonstrating that prioritization serves not only as a productivity strategy but also as a developmental mechanism through which aspiring journalists successfully navigate the complex demands of professional preparation.

Zimmerman and Moylan (2025) argued that strategic planning enables learners to regulate their motivation, manage competing responsibilities, and sustain high levels of performance even under demanding educational conditions. These findings suggest that prioritization should be viewed as an essential component of self-regulated learning that facilitates both academic success and long-term professional competency.

The findings also resonate with contemporary perspectives on journalism education, which emphasize that future journalists must possess adaptive learning skills in addition to technical competencies. Jiang and Rafeeq (2025) argued that the rapidly evolving media landscape requires journalism graduates who can effectively organize complex tasks, adapt to changing professional demands, and continuously update their competencies throughout their careers. Consequently, strategic planning has become increasingly important as journalists navigate digital newsrooms characterized by accelerated news cycles, technological innovations, multimedia production, and expanding professional responsibilities.

The experiences of the participants therefore suggest that prioritization and strategic planning extend beyond effective time management. Rather, these strategies enabled them to maintain motivation, reduce stress, sustain productivity, and continuously improve their journalistic competencies despite encountering numerous obstacles throughout their professional development. Such findings demonstrate that competency development is not determined solely by talent or educa-

tional opportunities but also by individuals' capacity to regulate their own learning and respond strategically to the demands of journalism.

Overall, the findings indicate that prioritization and strategic planning constitute powerful countermeasures against the hindering factors identified in this study. By intentionally organizing their responsibilities, establishing meaningful goals, and making informed decisions regarding the allocation of their time and effort, the participants successfully strengthened their competencies while cultivating resilience, adaptability, and professional discipline. The findings therefore underscore the importance of journalism educators integrating instruction on self-regulated learning, time management, goal setting, and strategic planning into journalism curricula. Such initiatives may better prepare aspiring journalists to thrive within increasingly dynamic, technology-driven, and professionally demanding media environments.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that journalism competency development is shaped by the interaction of psychological, educational and social factors. Self-doubt, inadequate training, unfit mentorship, discouragement, and time constraints emerged as key barriers that limit confidence, skill acquisition, and professional growth among aspiring journalists. These constraints operate within broader institutional and pedagogical conditions that influence learning outcomes. Despite these challenges, participants employed adaptive strategies such as engaging in supportive environments, participating in training, and practicing effective time management. These responses enhanced resilience, self-efficacy, and competency development. The findings show that journalism competency development is a dynamic process shaped by both constraints and agency. They highlight the need for structured training, effective mentorship, and inclusive learning environments to strengthen literacy, skill development, and professional readiness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Educational institutions should strengthen journalism education by implementing structured and continuous training that integrates language development, writing practice, and applied learn-

ing. Publication advisers should be equipped with relevant professional and pedagogical competence to provide effective mentorship. Schools should promote inclusive participation by reducing language-based barriers and expanding access to student publications. Institutional support mechanisms should address psychological constraints such as self-doubt and discouragement to sustain student engagement. Future research should examine the interaction of linguistic, pedagogical, and socio-cultural factors using broader and more diverse samples to enhance the applicability of findings.

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Paper received for publication in March, 2026
 Paper accepted for publication in June, 2026