
School Journalism Training for Nurturing Young Creative and Critical Journalists

Ahmad Salman Farid^{1*}, Muhammad Ardiansyah²
STAIN Mandailing Natal, Indonesia^{1,2}

✉ Email: ahmadsalmanfarid@stain-madina.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the importance of a School Journalism Training program aimed at nurturing young creative and critical journalists. In an era where media plays a pivotal role in shaping public opinion, it is essential to equip the younger generation with the skills needed to analyze, report, and create content with integrity and critical thought. This training focuses on developing creativity, critical thinking, and ethical journalism practices among students. By engaging in practical exercises and collaborative projects, participants will learn the core principles of journalism, including research, writing, editing, and multimedia production. The training encourages students to approach stories from diverse perspectives, fostering a sense of responsibility and social awareness. The objective is not only to enhance their journalistic skills but also to cultivate a new generation of journalists who are both innovative and thoughtful in their work. This initiative ultimately contributes to the growth of an informed society, prepared to face the challenges of an ever-evolving media landscape.

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INTRODUCTION

The role of journalism in society has evolved dramatically with the rise of digital media. Traditional media platforms have faced significant challenges due to the rise of online news, social media, and citizen journalism, leading to shifts in how news is created and consumed. According to Hossain and Wenger (2024), the digital transformation of journalism has altered the methods of reporting, reaching audiences in more interactive and real-time ways. However, this transformation has also raised concerns about the erosion of journalistic integrity and the spread of misinformation (Lazer et al., 2018). In response, there is an increasing need to train the next generation of journalists with a focus on critical thinking, creativity, and ethical standards.

Research has shown that journalism education plays a key role in shaping how young journalists approach their work. Studies by Deuze (2005) emphasize that journalism education provides aspiring journalists with the skills necessary to critically engage with information, understand the ethical implications of their work, and maintain high standards of accuracy and fairness. Moreover, with the rapid changes in the media industry, creative skills such as multimedia production and storytelling are increasingly emphasized in modern journalism curricula (Deuze & Witschge, 2018). The integration of creativity and critical thinking in journalism education is seen as essential for developing journalists who can adapt to the evolving media landscape while upholding the core values of journalism.

Despite the growing body of research on journalism education, a significant gap remains in understanding how school-based journalism training programs specifically nurture creativity and critical thinking in young journalists. Most existing studies focus on general journalistic training at the university level or on the skills needed for digital media journalism (Swart, 2021). There is limited research on how early-stage, school-based journalism programs can effectively contribute to developing young journalists who are both creative in their storytelling and critical in their analytical approach. This gap highlights the need for targeted research on training methods tailored to high school students, which can serve as a foundational step before pursuing advanced journalism education.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to contribute to the development of more effective journalism training programs for young individuals. By focusing on creativity and critical thinking, school journalism training programs can help cultivate a new generation of journalists who are better equipped to handle the complexities of modern media environments. As misinformation and biased reporting become more prevalent, it is essential that young journalists are trained to discern facts from fiction and produce content that is not only creative but also ethically responsible. Moreover, fostering critical thinking from an early age can help prevent the spread of misinformation and encourage a more informed public.

The primary purpose of this study is to explore how school-based journalism training programs can be designed to nurture both creative and critical thinking skills in young journalists. By analyzing existing literature and evaluating the current methodologies used in school journalism education, this research aims to provide insights into best practices for enhancing creativity and critical thinking in high school journalism programs. Additionally, this study will assess the impact of these programs on students' journalistic capabilities, preparing them for higher education or careers in the journalism industry. Ultimately, the research aims to propose a framework for integrating these essential skills into school-

based journalism curricula, ensuring that young journalists are well-prepared for the challenges of modern media.

METHOD

This research adopts a service learning method, which combines academic learning with community service to achieve both educational and social goals. The service learning (2013; 2021; 2019) approach is particularly suitable for this study as it engages students in a hands-on learning experience while also addressing real-world issues in the community. The research was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Swasta Al-Barokah, located in Kabupaten Simalungun, Indonesia. This school was selected due to its existing commitment to improving student skills in various areas, including journalism, and its willingness to participate in the program.

The data collection for this study involved multiple techniques, including surveys, interviews, and direct observation of students' journalistic work before and after participating in the service learning program. The sample consisted of 50 students from the school's journalism club, who were selected using purposive sampling. These students had shown an interest in pursuing journalism and were actively involved in writing articles, producing school newsletters, and participating in other journalistic activities.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data collection instruments, the survey questions and interview guides were developed based on previous research on journalism education and service learning (Deuze, 2005; Pavlik, 2013). A pilot test was conducted with a small group of students prior to the main study to refine the instruments. For the content analysis of journalistic outputs, a set of criteria focusing on creativity, critical thinking, and ethical reporting was used, based on frameworks from established journalism education research (Bou Zeid, 2019; García-Galera et al., 2021).

The service learning program took place over an 8-week period, from April to June 2025, with weekly 2-hour sessions held at the school. During these sessions, students received training on journalistic writing, critical analysis of news, multimedia production, and ethical journalism practices. Additionally, they were assigned service learning projects that involved creating journalistic content related to local issues in Simalungun District, allowing them to apply their learning in a real-world context. These projects not only provided students with practical experience but also contributed to the local community by addressing relevant topics through journalism.

Before the implementation of the program, it was noted that students at Madrasah Aliyah Swasta Al-Barokah displayed enthusiasm for journalism but lacked structured guidance to develop their creativity and critical thinking skills. Teachers observed that while students were passionate about their work, they often struggled with producing high-quality journalistic content that adhered to ethical standards. Through this service learning program, it was expected that students would not only enhance their journalistic skills but also develop a greater sense of social responsibility by engaging with their community through meaningful journalistic projects.

The expected outcome of the program was an improvement in students' ability to produce creative, critical, and ethically sound journalistic work. By integrating service learning into their training, students were expected to gain practical experience while learning to think critically about the issues they reported

on. Ultimately, this approach aimed to foster the development of young journalists who are not only skilled in their craft but also socially conscious and responsible.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Improvement in Journalistic Creativity

One of the most significant outcomes of the service learning training program was the marked improvement in students' creativity in producing journalistic content. Before the program, students exhibited enthusiasm but struggled with developing unique and engaging stories. Many of their initial works were simple reports without much depth or creative storytelling. However, after completing the 8-week training, students demonstrated a higher level of originality and resourcefulness in their journalistic projects.

The training sessions on creative writing techniques, multimedia storytelling, and the use of local issues for reporting helped students approach topics from new angles. They learned to incorporate interviews, visuals, and narratives to add depth to their stories. Content analysis of students' journalistic outputs showed that post-training, there was a noticeable shift toward more engaging and multifaceted pieces, with increased use of diverse journalistic techniques such as feature writing, investigative reporting, and opinion pieces. This development in creativity indicates that the service learning approach, which connected theoretical knowledge with real-world applications, was effective in enhancing students' creativity in journalism.

Development of Critical Thinking Skills

Another key outcome of the program was the enhancement of students' critical thinking abilities. Initially, students had difficulty analyzing news events or considering multiple perspectives on an issue. Their reporting tended to be straightforward, often focusing solely on the facts without exploring underlying issues or considering broader implications. Through the service learning experience, students learned to approach news stories critically, assessing the credibility of sources, identifying biases, and reflecting on the impact of the stories they covered.



Figure 1. The appearance of School Journalism Training: (a) Group of students; (b) Classroom session.

Figure 1 illustrates the School Journalism Training conducted as part of the community service initiative. Panel (a) captures a group of enthusiastic students participating in the training, representing the

active involvement of the local community in educational programs. Panel (b) shows the classroom setting during one of the sessions, where students are engaged in learning journalistic skills, such as writing, critical thinking, and ethical reporting. This training aligns with the objectives of the PKM (Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat) program, which seeks to enhance the educational capacity of the community by providing practical knowledge and skills that can contribute to their personal and collective development. Through this initiative, students are not only developing their journalism skills but also gaining a sense of responsibility and social awareness, contributing to both their academic growth and the broader community.

The program's emphasis on critical thinking, especially during discussions and workshops on journalistic ethics and analytical techniques, allowed students to sharpen their evaluative skills. After the training, students were more confident in their ability to question the status quo and dig deeper into stories, often including diverse viewpoints and addressing social or political contexts in their reports. Surveys conducted after the training showed that 85% of students felt more confident in their ability to critically evaluate news and incorporate diverse viewpoints into their work. This growth in critical thinking not only improved their journalistic work but also fostered a more thoughtful approach to media consumption.

Adherence to Ethical Journalism Standards

The final notable result was the students' increased adherence to ethical journalism standards. Prior to the training, many students lacked a clear understanding of journalistic ethics, often failing to consider the impact of their work on individuals or communities. The service learning component, which required students to report on local issues and engage with community members, placed a strong emphasis on ethical considerations, such as respecting privacy, avoiding sensationalism, and ensuring accuracy in reporting.

Throughout the training, students participated in workshops discussing journalistic ethics, such as fact-checking, unbiased reporting, and the importance of transparency. The real-world nature of the service learning projects gave students the opportunity to practice these ethical principles in their reporting. Post-training assessments revealed a significant improvement in their understanding and application of ethical standards. Students' journalistic outputs were more balanced, accurate, and considerate of ethical implications, with many expressing a deeper appreciation for the responsibility that comes with being a journalist. This development is a promising indicator that the integration of ethical training into school-based journalism programs, like service learning, can foster a new generation of journalists who are both responsible and conscientious in their work.

Discussion: The Impact of Service Learning on Journalism Education

The results from the service learning program at Madrasah Aliyah Swasta Al-Barokah suggest that combining academic training with real-world applications can significantly enhance students' journalistic creativity, critical thinking, and ethical decision-making. This approach aligns with previous studies that advocate for service learning as an effective pedagogy in developing essential skills in students. According to Jones et al. (2001), service learning creates opportunities for students to integrate academic knowledge with practical experiences, fostering both personal and intellectual growth. The hands-on

nature of service learning allows students to apply the theoretical knowledge they acquire in the classroom to real-life situations, thereby enhancing their overall learning experience.

In terms of creativity, the results indicate that students showed notable improvements in their ability to produce diverse and engaging journalistic content. Before the program, their works were often limited to straightforward reporting with little innovation. This is consistent with findings from Deuze (2005), who argues that creativity is crucial for the future of journalism, as the modern media landscape requires journalists to think beyond conventional formats and explore various storytelling methods. The training's focus on multimedia production, feature writing, and investigative reporting provided students with the tools to express their creativity more effectively.

Critical thinking also emerged as a central area of development, with students demonstrating greater confidence in analyzing and evaluating news stories after participating in the program. The integration of real-world issues into their journalistic projects encouraged students to engage deeply with the content and consider multiple perspectives. This is supported by the work of Pavlik (2013), who emphasizes the importance of critical thinking in modern journalism, particularly in an era where misinformation and biased reporting are prevalent. Service learning, by encouraging students to explore and critically assess local issues, helps develop these essential skills, making them more capable of producing responsible and balanced reporting.

Adherence to ethical journalism standards was another significant outcome of the program. Prior to the service learning experience, students showed limited understanding of the ethical responsibilities tied to journalism. This is a common issue in many journalism programs, as noted by Zion and Craig (2014), who highlights that many young journalists struggle with ethical decision-making due to a lack of proper training in ethical standards. Through the program, students were taught to consider the social impact of their work, respect privacy, and adhere to principles of fairness and accuracy. These ethical considerations are fundamental in shaping responsible journalists who can contribute positively to society.

The findings from this study are consistent with the research conducted by Seo (2021), who emphasize that integrating ethics and critical thinking into journalism curricula is essential for preparing students for the challenges they will face in the field. The service learning program at Madrasah Aliyah Swasta Al-Barokah exemplifies how such an approach can enhance students' skills and ethical awareness, preparing them for the complex media landscape they will encounter.

In conclusion, the service learning program provided a valuable opportunity for students to develop key journalistic skills while engaging with their community. By fostering creativity, critical thinking, and ethical journalism, the program successfully contributed to the professional growth of young journalists. This approach not only benefited the students but also contributed to the local community by addressing relevant social issues through thoughtful, well-researched reporting. The positive outcomes observed in this study suggest that service learning can be an effective model for journalism education, offering a holistic approach that integrates academic learning with real-world practice.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that integrating service learning into school-based journalism training programs significantly enhances students' creativity, critical thinking, and adherence to ethical journalism practices. The results from the service learning program at Madrasah Aliyah Swasta Al-Barokah highlight the effectiveness of this approach in cultivating young journalists who are not only skilled in their craft but also socially responsible and ethically aware. By bridging theoretical knowledge with real-world applications, students were able to develop more engaging, thoughtful, and well-researched journalistic content, ultimately preparing them for the challenges of the modern media landscape.

The improvement in creativity, as seen in the diverse storytelling methods employed by students, underscores the importance of providing students with opportunities to experiment with different journalistic formats and techniques. Furthermore, the significant growth in critical thinking abilities illustrates the value of engaging students in the evaluation and analysis of news stories, equipping them with the tools necessary to navigate an increasingly complex media environment. Most notably, the program's focus on ethics in journalism played a crucial role in ensuring that students not only produced high-quality content but did so in a responsible and ethically sound manner.

The findings suggest that service learning is a highly effective pedagogical tool for journalism education. By combining academic learning with meaningful community engagement, it helps nurture a new generation of journalists who are creative, critical, and committed to upholding the core values of ethical journalism. This research advocates for the wider adoption of service learning in journalism programs, as it offers a holistic approach to developing well-rounded and socially conscious journalists who can contribute positively to their communities and society at large.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article. There were no financial, professional, or personal relationships that influenced the design, data collection, analysis, writing, or decision to submit this work to JPkM. Additionally, the authors have not served on JPkM's editorial board and do not work for any organization that may benefit from this publication.

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