

mediální studia

media studies

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To cite this article:

Hacek, J. (2025). Journalism Studies Courses in Post-Communist Countries of Central Europe: An Analysis of Journalism Curricula. *Mediální studia*, 19(1), 54-77.

ISSN 2464-4846

Journal website: <https://www.medialnistudia.fsv.cuni.cz/>

JOURNALISM STUDIES COURSES IN POST-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES OF CENTRAL EUROPE: AN ANALYSIS OF JOURNALISM CURRICULA

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ABSTRACT

The transformation of journalism education after the fall of the communist regimes in Central Europe brought freedom to the academic environment and enabled the establishment of degree programs at universities. This article examines the courses in the curricula of twelve journalism schools in Central European universities. The analysis of the courses (N = 774) offered in bachelor's programs describes how journalism institutions have developed their journalism education since the fall of the Iron Curtain. The study programs show a high degree of similarity in terms of courses aimed at praxis, teaching foreign and official languages, bachelor's final theses, and media law. We also identified common academic disciplines in which journalists are educated. The research found that students are required to enrol in both compulsory and elective courses, with some institutions also offering compulsory elective courses. A strong emphasis is placed on theoretical courses without relation to everyday work in media outlets. The study concludes that the academic environment is not sufficiently responsive to contemporary society and that new topics which reflect the needs of media practice are slow to emerge. This analysis of the courses highlights the differences in curricula among the countries of Central Europe.

KEYWORDS

journalism education • bachelor's degree • courses • praxis • universities • Central Europe

1. INTRODUCTION AND THEORY

In recent years, social changes, digitalisation and the commercial media ecosystem have transformed journalism education across the globe and redefined job position workflows in newsrooms. The free commercial media market and social networks have changed the media environment; the profit motive has replaced the essential principles of the media landscape, forcing news organisations around the world to restructure their operations and workflows, redefine tasks and responsibilities, and restructure the culture and values of journalists (Guo and Volz, 2021). These changes should ideally be integrated into journalism education across the globe and point to important competencies in journalism teaching. The European Journalism Training Association (EJTA) in the Tartu Declaration (2020) (established in Brussels in 1990) has reflected the competences by which journalists should serve the public. They are also integrated into programmatic papers such as the UNESCO Model Curriculum for Journalism Education (UNESCO, 2013). Modern journalism education needs to identify ways of preparing students for their future careers in the media. The dual pillars of teaching journalism and teaching about journalism have long been characterized by journalism education. While journalism training includes developing the skills required for news production, journalism education contextualises those skills and gives them meaning (Kirchhoff, 2022). As Guo and Volz (2021) have argued, recent years have seen efforts by researchers, educators and practitioners to rethink journalistic competences and implement new concepts into curriculum design, professional development, and programme accreditation (Unesco, 2013; Donsbach, 2014; Drok, 2019; Hovden, Nygren and Zilliacus-Tikkanen, 2016). Journalist educators have long been discussing how to teach and prepare students for the media profession and how to deal with the accreditation system in universities (Jaakkola and Uotila, 2022; Nowak, 2019). Most professionals consider the relevance of quality journalistic education and journalistic practical competencies as adequately mirroring the demands of the media landscape (Jaakkola, 2018; Jaakkola and Uotila, 2020; Kirchhoff, 2022) and recognising the enormous diversity of this field (Deuze, 2019).

The profound changes in the media environment, the crisis of traditional journalism and increasing attacks on journalists call for qualified professional journalism and for an education that reflects social changes, and which can enhance students' ability to distinguish between journalism and pseudo-journalism. After the end of the communist regimes, educators and practitioners in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia have responded to the challenges of establishing modern and non-ideo-

logical journalism training and academic education. These programs were inspired primarily by Western institutions and universities, and this influence is apparent in several areas. Firstly, there was a need to educate journalists in media law and journalism ethics. After decades of state censorship with a single official state media outlet, journalists and students had to learn the basic principles of objectivity and impartiality and gain an understanding of the workings of a commercial-free media market. It was essential to follow contemporary trends from the editorial offices of the international media and to collaborate with educational institutions. The intermediaries of that communication between the post-communist countries and the Western world were often non-profit organisations, with these institutions helping to organise exchange visits for teachers and students and to facilitate visits to universities by award-winning journalists. Secondly, we can see the impact of this influence on a technological level in terms of equipping journalism training labs and providing software for editing audio and video material. However, the new challenges have raised questions concerning the adequacy of the reforms introduced by academic institutions in the post-communist countries of Central Europe in response to contemporary demands.

No study to date has examined those changes and compared journalism education across different Central European countries. Our study investigates the current situation in the management of courses in academic journalism programs, including their main orientation and specialisation. Despite the potential for academic cooperation among the above-mentioned countries due to their geographical proximity and shared cultural environment, journalism education can differ significantly in terms of the variety of courses offered and the general structure of the journalism curricula.

1.1. The current situation in journalism education research

The issues of what journalism is, what it should be, and how it should be taught are the subject of ongoing discussion in journalism education institutions, a discourse which is fuelled by various changes in the media and the higher education landscape (Jaakkola and Uotila, 2020). Journalism education traditionally holds a position between academic and professional approaches to the training of future journalists. There is an ongoing debate about the role of journalism educators in the academic environment (Morris and Yeoman, 2021) and about the correspondence between journalism education and professional practice (Oppenhaffen et al., 2013; Kirchhoff, 2022) that also includes work-integrated learning (Valencia-Forrester, 2020) together with the idea of teaching students' digital citizenship as a concept that emphasises the importance of both skills and knowledge

(Tkáčová et al., 2023). By studying these approaches, we can see that the majority of journalistic educational institutions are still universities or higher education bodies along with media practitioners. In contrast, we can also see the ongoing efforts of non-government organisations or journalists in supporting the academic environment in the education of future journalists, primarily through the provision of workshops, training and lectures which often comprise practical know-how from everyday journalistic practice. As Kirchhoff (2022) argues, both journalistic educators and practitioners demand innovative methods of teaching in order to meet the growing needs of young journalists and to maintain societal relevance and respond to the practical demands of professional journalism in the digital age, in which skills and knowledge are considered as the core of journalism education.

As a starting point, studies focusing on journalism education include those concentrated on practical (Henkel et al., 2020; Heravi, 2018; Noain-Sánchez, 2022; Porlezza, C. and Splendore, 2019; Steel, 2007; Reyna, 2021; Valencia-Forrester, 2020) and theoretical bases (Aujla-Sidhu, 2022; Bjørnsen, Hovden and Ottosen, 2009; Deuze, 2002; Morris and Yeoman, 2021), and education mostly at academic institutions (Deuze, 2006; Henkel, 2020; Hovden, 2016; Hovden et al., 2016; Jaakkola and Uotila, 2020; Opgenhaffen et al., 2013; Kirchhoff, 2022). Related to this, other studies and research papers have focused on specific aspects of journalism education, such as global perspectives (Deuze, 2006), literary construction (Jaakkola and Uotila, 2022), the challenges of digital transformation (Kirchhoff, 2022), journalism training in the classroom (Jaakkola, 2018) or the conceptualisation of journalistic competence (Guo and Volz, 2021) and the future sustainability of journalism (Vukić, 2019). On the other hand, an examination of the approaches to journalism education can draw upon some literary sources and extensive studies dealing with journalistic theoretical and practical competencies (Drok, 2019; Hovden et al., 2016; Quinn, 2018; Stanková, 2022; Terzis, 2009). Working within the framework of this basic literature, various research proposals have been developed and researched, including studies that compare journalism education systems in Nordic countries (Gardeström, 2016), describe Norwegian journalism education (Bjørnsen et al., 2009) or examine the Nordic academic journalism training landscape (Jaakkola, 2018) and course literature in the Nordic academic journalism programmes (Jaakkola and Uotila, 2022). In addition to studies of the Nordic countries, other papers examine journalism education and online journalists in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands (Deuze et al., 2007) and responsibility and pedagogy in journalism education in the West (Aujla-Sidhu, 2022) or in Southeast Europe (Jusic and De-

dovic, 2002). Ibold and Deuze (2012) have compared journalism education in the Netherlands and in the United States, and Deuze (2002) produced a comparison of Dutch, German, British, Australian and US journalists.

1.2. Journalism study programs in post-communist countries in Central Europe

The issue of journalism education in Central European countries has not been explored in depth. In the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, no comparative studies of journalism study programs or course curricula have been published to date, and there is therefore a gap in research examining what future journalists and journalism students are currently required to study and achieve at Central European universities.

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, the political boundary that divided Europe, journalism in a free environment gradually took a more professional form with the establishment of press freedom. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia have all developed established journalism education programs, mainly at the university level, which place a strong emphasis on the granting of academic degrees in journalism and media communication study programmes.

During the communist era, the training of journalists focused on the role of socialist journalists as disseminators of the will and ideology of the ruling parties (Jirák and Köpplová, 2009). As Jirák and Köpplová (2009) have described, the general structure of journalism training in Central and Eastern Europe was based on curricula focusing on the history of journalism and linguistics, with obligatory courses in Marxist-Leninist philosophy and related subjects. Topics such as the checking of sources, the importance of balanced coverage, independence, professional ethics and law were unknown concepts in journalism curricula in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. Journalism education in Hungary was also strongly subject to the state-socialist regime, and journalists were selected according to political rather than professional criteria, with loyalty to the party and its official ideology of Marxism-Leninism serving as an important criterion for determining the suitability of candidates for key positions in the state media (Bajomi-Lázár, 2009, p. 425). In Poland, the journalist profession was politically motivated, and many of the fraternities belonged to the Polish Communist Party (PZPR) or other political parties. In the seventies, almost every journalist was a party member, and journalists as a professional body held top positions in the state (Szot, 2009).

A study paper focusing on the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland has confirmed that printed media played a major political role in the fulfillment of propaganda and educational functions in the communist era (Gulyas

2003). As Gulyas (2003) reminds us, state control of the media was extensive, determining the content, production, and distribution of print media products, enforcing formal and informal control mechanisms, and ensuring an absence of diversity and press freedom.

There is currently no detailed understanding of the extent to which journalism education differs among the post-communist countries of Central Europe. Bachelor's and master's study programs in these countries are largely the result of political processes enacted in the wake of the radical changes brought about by the end of the communist regimes. After 1999, many European countries implemented reforms and transformed their educational systems in order to ensure greater compatibility with European norms to increase international mobility and facilitate transnational employability (Jaakkola and Uotila, 2022). Both bachelor's and master's degrees are defined by the EHEA qualification framework (European Higher Education Area 2009), with a bachelor's degree with 180 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) and requiring 3–4 years of full-time study, although journalism programs require only three years. Master's degree programs with 120 ECTS generally take two years. Bachelor's journalism programmes should offer the essentials for journalism students, whereas master's programmes involve more specialized courses that encourage them to study in a specific field of journalism, and common practice shows that after completing a bachelor's degree, students generally continue to master's study programs. According to *The Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area*, students awarded a bachelor's degree can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences (Bologna Working Group, 2005), while the master's degree requires students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding that is founded on and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with the first cycle and that provides an opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context (Bologna Working Group, 2005).

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of this study is to answer the overall research question that focuses on journalism education in Central Europe:

How developed is journalism education in the four studied post-communist countries in Central Europe (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia)?

We are primarily interested in those aspects that reflect journalism education in terms of the courses to which students are required to enrol at

universities in these countries. The study examines compulsory courses, compulsory elective courses, elective courses and their syllabi in academic institutions offering bachelor's study programs in journalism in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. As was mentioned above, these countries previously had long-term experience of training journalists under communist regimes, and this article explores how universities in Central Europe have developed their journalism study programs since the fall of the Iron Curtain. An analysis of the academic courses and their curricula provided by different universities can enable comparisons of journalism educational programmes in bachelor's degree programmes. The potential discrepancies in our findings among the countries analysed show the main differences in journalism study programmes, and the study should allow us to identify the main characteristics of a graduate journalist after completing a bachelor's degree at the institutions in the studied countries.

The aim of this study is to determine how journalism study programmes are designed by examining the courses offered to students. The first research question consists of three parts because it reflects the three types of available courses. The first part examines the compulsory courses to which students are required to enrol; these compulsory courses also include courses for state exams. Students can select specialisations during their journalism studies through compulsory elective courses, which offer a degree of freedom in their enrolment. This is also the case with elective courses that allow a more in-depth specialisation in journalism studies and training.

- *RQ1a: What compulsory courses feature in bachelor's study programs in journalism?*
- *RQ1b: What compulsory elective courses feature in bachelor's study programs in journalism?*
- *RQ1c: What elective courses feature in bachelor's study programs in journalism?*

Because journalism education is closely related to media practice and training, educators face the challenge of achieving a balance between industry needs and the demands of an academic education. Deuze (2006) describes analytical categories in journalism education such as curricula and the balance between practical and contextual knowledge, while Guo and Volz (2021) note that recent years have seen efforts by researchers, educators and practitioners to rethink the range of journalistic skills and apply new concepts to curriculum design, professional development and program accreditation, with processes integrating practical courses and direct co-

operation which reflect requirements in the industry. Employers nominate their representatives to Study Program Committees which guarantee the practical aspects of journalism education. Journalistic professional competencies call for practical training and participation in the everyday activities of the editorial office. Some journalism departments hire journalists from media outlets to participate in the study process and to become involved in internal academic education and training, primarily by teaching practical courses and providing students with contact with media outlets, but also by offering the opportunity to gain professional experience in newsrooms.

The ratio of practical to theoretical courses is the focus of the following research question:

- *RQ2: Which courses in bachelor's study programs in journalism are practical and related to media practice, and which courses are theoretical and related to the academic environment?*

Journalism is a largely autonomous discipline, and the issue of the training and education of journalists remains subject to considerable debate. Some journalism programs are mainly built around practical training courses in which students gain skills in academic training newsrooms. As Jaakkola (2018) has noted, training newsrooms and news laboratories serve as a possible means of providing practical courses in journalistic practice. The number of practical courses in journalism training usually depends on the type of study program and whether the bachelor's study program continues into a master's program. However, students are usually taught about the media and society from different perspectives in an interdisciplinary approach encompassing, among others, history, sociology, psychology and political science. However, this method requires a more academic approach with a greater number of theoretical courses featuring appropriate academic literature. The aim of the third research question in this paper map the academic disciplines that form part of the journalism curricula at selected universities.

- *RQ3: Which academic disciplines are included in the courses of bachelor's study programs in journalism?*

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to conduct a systematic review of the courses, we employed basic techniques of document analysis. The total number of courses offered to students by universities ($N = 12$) was analysed. The sample consisted of a list of courses ($N = 774$) of bachelor's study programs in journalism (180 ECTS) in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia during the ac-

ademic year 2023–2024. For each country, we identified three universities that offer bachelor’s study programs in journalism. The unit of analysis was the sum of compulsory, compulsory elective and elective courses, although it should be noted that not all of the courses in the study programs fall within these categories, and we can see some variety in the study process, which will be described below. The institutions included in the research (*N* = 12) are listed in Table 1. These universities are established academic institutions in journalism studies in the Central European region. In order to identify the most relevant institutions in these countries, we applied criteria such the awarding of complete academic degrees, a practical focus on the journalistic profession, the possibility to continue with a master’s degree, and an established reputation as institutions with praxis in journalism education, with universities offering specific study programs in journalism being prioritised. These programmes were selected on a priority basis, and if none of the institutions in a particular country offered a study program in journalism, the selection was extended to similar programs that educate journalists. The titles of the bachelor’s study programs in the studied institutions were mainly *Journalism* (*N* = 4), *Communication and Media Studies* (*N* = 3), *Journalism and Social Communication* (*N* = 2), *Journalism and Media Studies* (*N* = 1), *Media Studies and Journalism* (*N* = 1) and *Communication Studies* (*N* = 1). Only two of the selected universities were members of the European Journalism Training Association (EJTA), an organisation of 79 institutions in 33 countries (see: ejta.eu/list-members). Current study program lists (*N* = 12) and course syllabi were found on the official websites of the universities, with most of the information presented visually in the official languages of the respective countries; the study programs were all offered in the respective official language.

Table 1: Selected institutions with journalism study programs.

Source: Author

Country	Institution	Bachelor’s degree program
Czech Republic	Masaryk University Department of Media Studies and Journalism	Media Studies and Journalism
	Palacký University Department of Media and Cultural Studies and Journalism	Journalism
	Charles University Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism	Communication Studies

Hungary	Budapest Metropolitan University Institute of Communication	Communication and Media Studies
	Corvinus University of Budapest Institute of Communication and Sociology	Communication and Media Science
	Eötvös Loránd University Department of Media and Communication	Communication and Media Science
Poland	Jagiellonian University Institute of Journalism, Media and Social Communication	Journalism and Social Communication
	University of Warsaw Faculty of Journalism, Information and Book Studies	Journalism and Media Studies
	University of Wrocław Institute of Journalism and Social Communication	Journalism and Social Communication
Slovakia	Catholic University Department of Journalism	Journalism
	Comenius University Department of Journalism	Journalism
	Constantine the Philosopher University Department of Journalism	Journalism

For the purposes of the analysis, all course information and course syllabi were downloaded and any duplicated courses offered across different levels of study programs were eliminated. The courses were then divided into three categories of compulsory, compulsory elective and elective courses (RQ1a, RQ1b, RQ1c). The courses were then analysed to identify those that were taught at all of the studied universities. Two further categories were then created to identify which courses were practical and related to media practice and which courses were theoretical and related to the academic environment (RQ2). Then we identified groups of courses which focused on identical or similar academic disciplines (RQ3) in bachelor's study programs. In carrying out this analysis, we drew upon the Frascati Manual, the OECD Classification, and Distribution by Fields of Research and Development (OECD 2015).

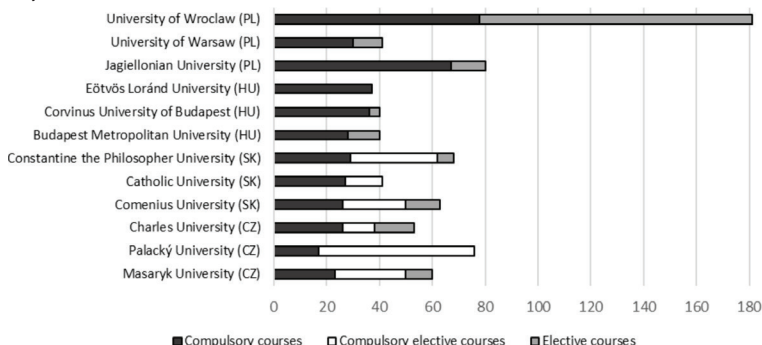
4. ANALYSIS

4.1. Compulsory, compulsory elective and elective courses

In our analysis of the lists of courses in the selected universities in four countries, we first identified the courses belonging to one of the following groups: compulsory, compulsory elective and elective courses (RQ1a, RQ1b,

RQ1c). By studying the lists of courses, it is possible to trace the compulsory courses onto that students must enrol in during their bachelor's study program. The main differences between the studied countries are outlined in Table 2. While the universities in the Czech Republic and Slovakia offer courses across all three categories, Hungary and Poland do not offer compulsory elective courses. One Hungarian university, Eötvös Loránd University, offers its courses in a single study module as a compulsory unit. One of the main differences between the studied countries is the fact that some institutions (in the Czech Republic and Slovakia) offer accredited study programs with all three groups of courses (Figure 1). Students are required to take compulsory courses, some compulsory elective courses with a defined number of credits and some elective courses.

Figure 1: Three groups of courses in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Source: Author



The similarity is not only a result of the linguistic proximity of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, but also by the similarities between the study programs and courses which the universities of these countries offer.

Regarding the total number of available courses, the results show that Polish institutions offer the most courses on average ($N = 101$), with Slovak institutions offering the fewest courses on average ($N = 55$). As Table 2 shows, an average of 87% of courses in Hungary ($N = 33.7$) are compulsory, followed by Poland (67%, $N = 58.3$), Slovakia (51%, $N = 27.3$) and the Czech Republic (37%, $N = 22$). The curricula in Hungary correspond mostly to compulsory courses, with only two institutions offering 4 and 12 elective courses, respectively. As the results indicate, students in Poland are required to complete the highest average number of compulsory courses ($N = 58.3$), while students in the Czech Republic must take only 22. Poland also offers bachelor's students the most elective courses ($N = 42.3$). The results show that

approximately one-third of courses can be selected by students, thereby enabling them to choose the subjects and focus that best suit their needs. This is particularly the case with the study program in music journalism offered by the University of Wroclaw in Poland. A fuller explanation of the system of student choice in terms of compulsory courses in the Czech Republic (average N = 27.3) and Slovakia (average N = 22) is perhaps necessary because institutions in these countries require students to take fewer compulsory courses than other institutions. As was mentioned above, the lack of these courses is compensated by the greater range of compulsory elective courses (average, Czech Republic N = 32.7, Slovakia N = 24). Both countries offer similar systems of course management, which offer students considerable latitude over the compulsory elective courses in which they can enrol in line with the minimum number of credits for compulsory elective courses.

Table 2: Bachelor’s degree courses in universities in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. Source: Author

Country	University	Compulsory courses		Compulsory elective courses		Elective courses		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Czech Republic	Masaryk University	23	38%	27	45%	10	17%	60	100%
	Palacký University	17	22%	59	78%	0	0%	76	100%
	Charles University	26	49%	12	23%	15	28%	53	100%
	AVERAGE (CZ)	22.0	37%	32.7	48%	8.3	15%	63	
Hungary	Budapest Metropolitan University	28	70%	0	0%	12	30%	40	100%
	Corvinus University of Budapest	36	90%	0	0%	4	10%	40	100%
	Eötvös Loránd University	37	100%	0	0%	0	0%	37	100%
	AVERAGE (HU)	33.7	87%	0	0%	5.3	13%	39	
Poland	Jagiellonian University	67	84%	0	0%	13	16%	80	100%
	University of Warsaw	30	73%	0	0%	11	27%	41	100%
	University of Wroclaw	78	43%	0	0%	103	57%	181	100%
	AVERAGE (PL)	58.3	67%	0	0%	4.3	33%	101	
Slovakia	Catholic University	27	66%	14	34%	0	0%	41	100%
	Comenius University	26	41%	24	38%	13	21%	63	100%
	Constantine the Philosopher University	29	47%	33	53%	0	0%	62	100%
	AVERAGE (SK)	27.3	51%	24	42%	4.3	7%	55	

In order to gain an overview of the courses ($N = 774$) that are taught in all selected universities, the range of available courses was summarised, and any similar or identical courses were identified.

Table 3 presents the results of the analysis of the courses offered by the studied institutions ($N = 12$) and displays courses that are provided by a minimum of two universities in each of the selected countries. The Table also offers an overview of the courses included in the university curricula as compulsory elective and elective courses. The results show the focus of journalism education in universities in each country and give some insight into which courses are considered key in the education of future journalists.

If we examine the courses available to journalism students, four are common to all universities, namely the bachelor's final thesis seminar, Foreign Language, Practice and Language (official). Most universities ($N = 11$) offer courses in the theory of mass media communication and communication, and this is also the case with Media Law of New Media/Online Journalism. Almost all the institutions ($N = 11$) offer courses in Philosophy, Political Science and Television Journalism as compulsory courses for future journalists. Despite the broad similarity of most courses, Media Sociology or Sociology is found in only three countries. One major discrepancy between the countries is seen in the case of investigative journalism and only one institution in Slovakia and the Czech Republic teaches this course, while Data-Driven Journalism is also absent from the bachelor's study programs in all the studied institutions, although the basics of the subject may be covered by other courses. As Kirchhoff (2022) reminds us, data skills are becoming increasingly important for future journalists, and Lucia Virostková (2021) also notes the significant role of investigative journalism and its position in society. In contrast, most of the studied institutions ($N = 10$) deal with economics or economic journalism in which data journalism is partially involved. All of the studied institutions focus their attention on history or media history, a fact which is perhaps an inheritance from the past, in which academics and students needed to address the legacy of the communist regime and understand the role of journalism and media in a democratic state. Furthermore, within the journalism study programs, we find courses that can be considered as contemporary, offering students an education in issues reflecting current issues in society. Examples of such courses include Media and Migration (Charles University), Basics of Criminology (Palacký University), Solutions Journalism (Masaryk University), Safety and the Work of a Journalist in the Online Environment (Comenius University), Propaganda, Hoaxes and Manipulation (Catholic University), Discourses of Identity (Eötvös Loránd University) and Psycholinguistics (Corvinus University of Budapest).

Table 3: Comparison of all courses across all institutions. Source: Author

Courses	Czech Republic				Hungary			Poland			Slovakia			
	Compulsory	Compulsory elective	Elective	Total N (0-3)	Compulsory	Elective	Total N (0-3)	Compulsory	Elective	Total N (0-3)	Compulsory	Compulsory elective	Elective	Total N (0-3)
Bachelor's final thesis seminar	3	0	0	3	3	0	3	3	0	3	3	0	0	3
Foreign Language	2	1	0	3	2	1	3	3	0	3	0	3	0	3
Practice (practical courses)	3	0	0	3	3	0	3	3	0	3	3	0	0	3
Language (official)	3	0	0	3	3	0	3	3	0	3	3	0	0	3
Theory of Media/Communication	3	0	0	3	3	0	3	3	0	3	2	0	0	2
Media Law	3	0	0	3	3	0	3	2	0	2	3	0	0	3
Online Journalism/New Media	1	2	0	3	2	0	2	2	1	3	1	2	0	3
Philosophy	2	0	0	2	3	0	3	3	0	3	2	0	0	3
Political Science	1	1	0	2	3	0	3	1	1	2	1	1	1	3
TV Journalism	0	3	0	3	1	1	2	2	1	3	2	1	0	3
Communication and Culture	1	2	0	3	2	0	2	2	1	3	0	1	0	1
Journalistic Ethics	3	0	0	3	1	0	1	3	0	3	1	0	0	1
Media Sociology/Sociology	3	0	0	3	2	0	2	3	0	3	0	1	0	1
Photojournalism	0	3	0	3	1	0	1	3	0	3	1	0	0	1
Psychology	1	1	0	2	2	0	2	1	1	2	2	0	0	2
Technology Skills	2	0	1	3	1	0	1	2	0	2	2	0	0	2
Economic Journalism/Economy	1	1	0	2	2	0	2	3	0	3	1	1	0	2
History	3	0	0	3	2	0	2	3	0	3	0	0	0	0
Introduction to Journalism	2	0	0	2	2	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Radio Journalism	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	1	3	2	1	0	3
Rhetoric/Voice training	1	2	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	3	2	0	0	2
Media Research Methodology	3	0	0	3	3	0	3	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Audiovisual Journalism	1	2	0	3	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0
Desktop Publishing	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	3
Journalism Genres	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	3	0	0	3
Marketing/PR/Advertising	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	3	0	3	0	0	0	0
Media History	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	3	0	0	3
Workshop	0	2	1	3	0	0	0	3	0	3	0	0	0	0
Media Studies	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	0	2	2	0	0	0	0
Journalism/Reportage	2	1	0	3	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0
Anthropology	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0
Information Sources	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0
Media Language	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	0	0	0	0
Media Literacy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
Presenter	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Regional Journalism	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
News Reporting	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Science	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sport Journalism	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Statistics	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stylistics	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3
Visualization in Journalism	0	0	0	0	2	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

4.2. Practical vs. theoretical courses in journalism studies (N = 774)

There is a strong need for suitable practical courses in study programs in journalism, although there is still considerable debate over the balance between academic and professional orientation (Jaakkola and Uotila, 2020). Kirchhoff (2022) refers to survey findings that suggest that the general opinion of journalists and journalism educators is that reflective practice requires a suitable knowledge base. Based on course titles and descriptions, we identified courses that offer students the opportunity to gain practice in a journalistic environment, with the remaining courses being categorised as theoretically orientated.

Table 4 provides an overview of the fields covered by practical courses for journalists in selected Central European universities. The most common practice is to allow students to create media content directly in the classroom (24.9%) or to attend workshops led by practising journalists (23.1%). The focus of the practical courses gives us an insight into the way journalists are taught practically in Central Europe.

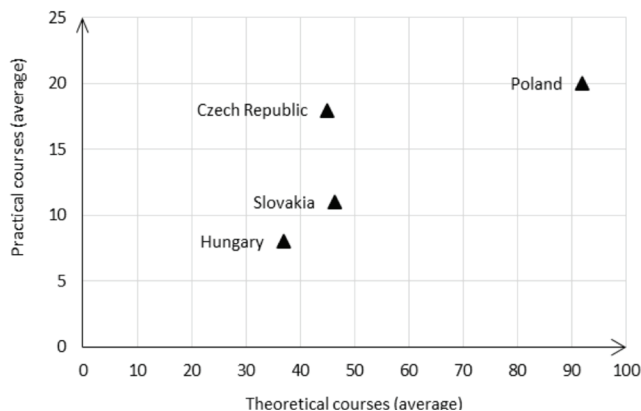
Table 4: Focus areas of practical courses. Source: Authors

Area	Areas of practical courses (%)	Student abilities
Media Studio	24.9	Creating media output during the course.
Media Workshop/Lab	23.1	Working on assignments mostly under the guidance of media professionals.
Professional Practice/Training	9.7	Looking for internships and work with journalists.
Television Journalism	8.2	Creating content for television broadcasting.
Radio Journalism	6.7	Creating content for radio broadcasting.
Technological Competences	6	Editing video and audio material using software.
Desktop Publishing/Typography	5.2	Preparation of text for printing and Web without typographical errors.
Audiovisual Journalism	4.5	Creating content for television and radio broadcasting.
Creative Writing/University Radio	4.5	Ensuring the functioning of the university radio and the university's periodic.
Infographics	3.7	Visualising data, placing data on the map.
Editing	3.5	Proficiency in editorial activities.

Figure 2 shows the status of each country relating to the ratio of practical to theoretical courses. Poland is in the first place with the highest average number of practical courses (N = 20), while institutions in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary offer 18, 11 and 8 courses, respectively. Uni-

versities in Poland offer courses named Practice which incorporate specialisations in all media areas, including Creative Writing, New Media and Technical Skills, and the option of audio, video and online editing. Students in the Czech Republic can enrol on workshop courses that are aimed at television, radio, print and online media, such as those titled Photojournalism Workshop, Editorial Workshop and Desktop Publishing Workshop. A similar approach to practical learning is also found in other countries. Institutions in Hungary favour Creative Writing, Writing Articles, Media Project, Typography, and University Radio Course, while Slovak institutions offer Media Workshops in each study year, which include radio, television, online media and print journalism. Practical skills are enhanced by courses where students can create their own faculty journal or learn about safety and the work of a journalist in the online environment. The most common areas in practical teaching in Poland and Slovakia are in the Journalistic Genres. Unsurprisingly, an inherent part of university journalism training is audio and video journalism with an emphasis on online media.

Figure 2: Position of the institutions for each country in practical vs. theoretical courses. Source: Authors



The most noticeable differences between institutions can be observed in relation to the implementation of practice and regular contact with the media and their editorial process. While some study programmes require journalism students to spend specific periods of time during each semester in newsrooms (e.g., Slovakia, Poland), students in the Czech Republic can participate in boot camps at the university during the semester, which are organised by journalists currently working in media outlets.

Some universities organise practical courses with the participation of journalists or former journalists. The faculties in Poland and Slovakia make

agreements with editorial staff in media outlets for practical cooperation and providing opportunities for students to gain practical skills. Additionally, training, internships and educational excursions also offer students the chance to gain work experience and, in many cases, a future position in newsrooms. The most obvious discrepancies in practical implementation are found in the extent to which the media are involved in the educational process. All this seems to indicate that, despite the presence of practical courses in the curriculum, there is a predominance of practical courses that lack any connection to everyday work in media outlets.

Given the academic nature of the university environment, it is perhaps unsurprising that theoretical courses outnumbered practical courses in all the studied institutions. The smallest difference was recorded in the study programs offered in the Czech Republic (N = 27), followed by Hungary (N = 29), Slovakia (N = 35) and Poland (N = 71).

4.3. Academic disciplines in study programs in journalism

This research question refers primarily to the analysis of theoretical courses taught in bachelor study programs. A university education is typically made up of courses based on different academic disciplines, and while a greater emphasis is placed on theoretical education at the master's level, a significant number of courses also reflect this approach in bachelor's study programs. Table 5 lists the academic disciplines that feature in the bachelor's study programs in journalism at all the studied institutions. According to the Frascati Manual (OECD 2025), we identified all of the academic disciplines (N = 11) that are associated with journalism studies. As the results show, disciplines like Languages, Media and Communication, Political Science, and Social Science are taught at all of the studied institutions, and despite minimal differences, scholarly subjects such as Arts, Economics and Business, History, Law, and Philosophy are also present in the majority of the universities (N = 11). All institutions in the Czech Republic and Poland (N = 6) emphasise Journalism Ethics, but the subject is taught at only one institution in both Slovakia and Hungary; this is also the case with Sociology.

We can conclude that there are only minor variations between institutions in traditional and core disciplines. In some cases, we can observe slightly different course names with similar educational content (e.g., Ethics, Journalism Ethics, or Ethics in Journalism), and it is natural that we would perceive these cases to be the same courses and academic disciplines. Moreover, journalism study programs often apply integrated approaches that bring together different modes of knowledge in their course modules. For example, the objectives of theoretical, practical, and contextual learn-

ing have been merged into work-integrated learning (Ripatti-Torniainen and Mikkola, 2023). However, in the institutions examined in this study, there is a clear distinction between practical and theoretical education.

Table 5: Academic disciplines in the journalism study programs. Source: Authors

Academic disciplines											
Country	Arts	Economics and business	Ethics	History	Languages	Law	Media and communication	Philosophy	Political science	Social science	Sociology
	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Czech Republic	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Hungary	3	3	1	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	2
Poland	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3
Slovakia	2	2	1	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	1

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The period after the fall of the Iron Curtain transformed the environment in which Central European journalists operated, and this sea change was also reflected in the new opportunities made available to universities in the education and training of future journalists, with institutions now being required to incorporate the newly emerging trends of the media industry into their study programs. This study has attempted to show how the academic sector has risen to this challenge and to describe the contemporary environment for journalism students in Central Europe.

As we have seen, the background of the academic curricula in Central Europe shows some degree of flexibility in terms of introducing new courses for journalism students. Although most compulsory and elective courses require time to be accredited, institutions have the opportunity to tailor the education that they offer to future journalists. It can be said that, as far as elective courses are concerned, they are included in the curriculum mainly based on reflection on practice and on the basis of the rules of the individual universities and also on the basis of cooperation with the media editorial offices. Our analysis of the courses also indicates that institutions mostly accredit their programmes with compulsory and elective courses based on the university’s internal policies, in contrast to introducing elective courses

that can be offered to students immediately because they are not part of the core study programs. The special nature of these courses allows universities to respond to the education that they offer to the contemporary situation and reflect the unpredictable circumstances in which journalism students could find themselves in their future careers (e.g., war coverage, coverage of migration crisis, exposure to death threats, etc.).

The structure of the elective course list allows educational institutions to develop study programmes that are more realistic and practical. In both the Czech Republic and Slovakia, universities offer a series of compulsory elective courses, some of which students are required to take during their bachelor's studies. The findings indicate that most journalism students have access to elective courses that are in accordance with their professional leanings. As Kirchhoff (2022) reminds us, programs and their courses are limited by the discourse and practice of journalism because they are largely dependent on professional journalists as teachers and are required to meet the expectations of media and journalism students.

Compared to other related academic degree programmes, journalism is also a practice-oriented discipline with a need for teachers who are connected to professional media practice; the quality of the lecturers available depends on effective managerial decisions, which can attract external lecturers with professional experience in the media industry. While most of the senior lecturers on journalism courses are academics, former journalists who have chosen an academic career may also teach in such programs once they have completed their doctoral studies, as a Ph.D. is a standard requirement for working in the academic field in Central Europe.

This paper has mapped the scale of practical and theoretical courses, and our analysis indicates that all of the studied universities offer their students a series of practical courses. We identified greater differences in the ways in which students gain experience in the media. While some institutions provide internships during their studies, other universities encourage students to seek out such opportunities on their own. Our analysis shows that there are courses where students gain practice regularly during the semester and those where students practice in newsrooms in their free time, with credits being awarded for their published content. This approach is in line with the recommendations made by Valencia-Forrester (2020), who argues that practical journalism education must move beyond traditional internship models to equip students with the skills they need to flourish in this challenging industry environment.

Since the establishment of free journalism education after the end of the communist regimes, Central European universities have been heavily influenced by Western institutions with well-established curricula in me-

dia education, in particular by institutions in Nordic countries. The background of this process, which has been initiated and continues to this day, and above all the aforementioned Western influence, is now also being approached and criticised by authors who examine the so-called De-Westernisation of Journalism and describe the causes of this process (Glück, 2018; Háló and Demeter, 2023; Waisbord and Mellado, 2014). De-Westernisation can be described as a critique of Eurocentric and American-centric world-views in the academic field, but also in journalism education. The essence of this concept is the enrichment of academic knowledge through the acquisition of experiences, research findings and theoretical frameworks also developed in other parts of the world (Waisbord and Mellado, 2014). Simply put, de-Westernisation is a broader concept that focuses on reducing the influence of exclusively Western ideas and values in various fields (Glück, 2018) and this perspective of de-Westernisation is often necessary in the field of global journalism, for example, to avoid stereotypical perceptions and factual distortions that can alter the global perspective (Ivanič, 2024, p. 38).

Our analysis has shown that Central European curricula are slow to adopt specific courses that reflect the current situation in society and integrate new knowledge and skills, with notable failings in the context of large-scale data analysis, data-driven journalism and mobile reporting. There is little evidence that regional or local journalism forms an important component of curricula, even though some students live in the regions in smaller towns where such news portals operate. Similarly, we might expect a greater focus on war reporting because of the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, but there is no sign that this has occurred to date. The lack of such an approach is concerning, especially given the fact that, as Guo and Volz (2021, p. 106) remind us, “for front-line journalists, the required competencies are mostly task-based and emphasise functional skills such as shooting, reporting, and interviewing.”

When we examine the issue of other academic disciplines studied by students in journalism study programs, we can see a broad similarity among the institutions in the studied countries, and this is likely related to the period and manner in which academic journalism courses and programs were established in the region (Terzis, 2009). The findings suggest that journalism is often classified as a social science and humanities and that it is seen as having much in common with political science and sociology. Our research shows that the departments and institutions are closely related not only to Journalism, but also to Media Studies, Communication Studies, and Social Communication programmes. The academic system and the extensive use of elective courses enable course coordinators to adapt

the composition of courses in response to developments in contemporary society and the changing demands of practice in editorial offices (for example, an increased reliance on data-driven journalism, solution journalism, migration issues, and the safety of journalists online).

After examining the subjects available to students, we can conclude that there are clearly areas that have not received enough attention in the education of future journalists in Central Europe. There is a distinct lack of courses focused on artificial intelligence or mobile journalism in the curricula, and there is considerable scope to strengthen the teaching of journalistic ethics (in Hungary and Slovakia in particular) and psychology, all aspects which are largely absent at the undergraduate level. On the other hand, we can also see an insufficient focus on, for example, journalism genres, with many study programs failing to reflect the changes that the industry has undergone in relation to online content.

This article has focused on the bachelor's study programs in academic institutions across Central Europe and provided a comparative analysis of the courses that these bodies offer. It should be noted, however, that journalism education is a more general issue that could be more broadly researched across a more diverse range of academic institutions in Europe. Our research into the teaching of journalism studies could yield further important findings if it is extended to examine the subject at the master's level. Lastly, the preparation for this research also revealed the need for a literature review addressing the issue of academic journalism programs.

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This work was supported by the KEGA project – grant number 025UK-4/2025.

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning this article's research, authorship, and publication.

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