

CURRENT PROBLEMS OF TEACHING THE HISTORY OF JOURNALISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

PROBLEMAS ATUAIS DO ENSINO DA HISTÓRIA DO JORNALISMO NA EDUCAÇÃO SUPERIOR

PROBLEMAS ACTUALES DE LA ENSEÑANZA DE LA HISTORIA DEL PERIODISMO EN LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR

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ABSTRACT: The study examines some problems of teaching the history of journalism, their causes, and the nature of their influence on the learning process and outcomes. The place and role of journalism history in training future specialists are revealed and recommendations allowing to partially reduce the impact of the existing negative factors are provided.

KEYWORDS: History of journalism. Current problems of teaching. Bologna process. Unified State Exam.

RESUMO: *O estudo examina alguns problemas do ensino de história do jornalismo, suas causas e a natureza de sua influência no processo de aprendizagem e nos resultados. O lugar e o papel da história do jornalismo na formação de futuros especialistas são revelados e são fornecidas recomendações que permitem reduzir parcialmente o impacto dos fatores negativos existentes.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *História do jornalismo. Problemas atuais do ensino. Processo de Bolonha. Exame de Estado Unificado.*

RESUMEN: *El estudio examina algunos problemas de la enseñanza de la historia del periodismo, sus causas y la naturaleza de su influencia en el proceso de aprendizaje y los resultados. Se revela el lugar y papel de la historia del periodismo en la formación de futuros especialistas y se brindan recomendaciones que permitan reducir parcialmente el impacto de los factores negativos existentes.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Historia del periodismo. Problemas actuales de la docencia. Proceso de Bolonia. Examen del Estado Unificado.*

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Introduction

The Federal Law “On Education in the Russian federation” (RUSSIA, 2012) defines the goals of higher education as “providing for the training of highly qualified personnel and satisfying a person’s needs for intellectual, cultural, and moral development, advancing and expanding education and scientific and pedagogical training”.

The key to successfully achieving the goals set by the state, in our opinion, is to further improve the organization of students’ activities of acquiring knowledge, skills, and competencies, i. e. learning [1, article 2, paragraph 3]. In this, the content of the educational process acquires decisive importance. A prominent place in the content of education as a verified system of knowledge, abilities, skills, and competencies formed for students’ successful mastery of their future professions has to be reserved for studying the history of the respective profession.

While knowledge of the world and national history is the basis of a citizen’s worldview, the knowledge of the history of the profession serves as a foundation for the worldview of a specialist, helps them choose the right moral guidelines and values, and realize the responsibility imposed on them by their profession.

Moreover, studying the history of the profession enhances the humanitarian component of the learning process, ensures students’ professional orientation from very early stages of training, and stimulates the development of the necessary competencies.

Thus, the study of the history of the profession provides for resolving the critical task posed for education by the Law “On Education”: to ensure students’ mastery of the required knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies.

Methods

The object of the present study is the topical problems of teaching the history of journalism in universities.

The hypothesis put forward is that the problems associated with teaching journalism history at universities have a direct influence on the content, organization, and results of students’ training.

The methodological basis of the study is formed by the general principles and methods of scientific research, primarily the principles of historicism, determinism, the social approach, methodological pluralism, etc. and the research methods based on them, the most important of which (within the framework of this study) are the historical-comparative and historical-genetic

methods, the method of structural-functional analysis, and some other methods allowing to solve the main research objectives:

- to determine the place and role of studying the history of journalism in the content of future specialists' training;
- to demonstrate that the study of the history of the profession shapes the worldview of future specialists, the system of their professional and moral values, and assists their mastery of the required knowledge, abilities, skills, and competencies;
- to analyze some relevant problems of teaching journalism history in universities;
- to study the causes of the latter and the nature of their influence on the process and results of teaching journalism history;
- to develop recommendations allowing to partially reduce the negative impact of the problems affecting the process of teaching journalism history at universities.

The resolution of the established objectives allows concluding that the formulated study hypothesis is mainly confirmed.

Results and discussion

Let us consider the example of the academic discipline "History of Journalism".

The requirements of the Federal State Educational Standard of Higher Education for Bachelor's degrees in the area of training 42.03.02 "Journalism" approved by the Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation of June 08, 2017, № 524, suggest that there are several general and special professional competencies, which are at the very least challenging to form without studying the discipline "History of Journalism".

To such competencies, we can primarily attribute graduates' ability to:

- account for the trends in the development of social and public institutions to cover them comprehensively in the created media and communication products;
- utilize the variety of the advancements of Russian and world culture in creating media and communication products;
- carry out creative work accounting for Russian and global experience.

Thus, the study of the "History of Journalism" discipline has to result not only in the solid theoretical knowledge of the subject but also the ability to establish cause-and-effect relationships between historical phenomena and processes and, based on that, identify the trends in the development of social and public institutions, as well as implement the achievements of the world and Russian culture in professional activity.

Nevertheless, several topical issues have a significant impact on both the content of the “History of Journalism” discipline but also the organization and results of its study.

Let us examine some of them in detail. A range of challenging problems is due to the Russian federation having joined the so-called Bologna Process and transitioned to a two-tier system of higher education in 2003. The pursued goal appears to be rational and promising – to create a unified European space of higher education and integrate Russia into it.

However, some specialists believe that due to a rather superficial approach to this issue, some critical circumstances failed to be considered (CHERNIAKHOVSKII, 2021).

First and foremost, the initiators of Russia's accession to the Bologna Process did not consider that the Russian and European systems of higher education have different objectives at hand.

Developed European countries, for the most part, already live in the conditions of post-industrial society and, accordingly, have demand for specialists with the so-called “instructional action” skills, who are typically Bachelors.

To ensure further development, European countries also require some highly qualified specialists, who are not often referred to as “heuristic labor” workers. With certain reservations, masters’ program graduates can be attributed to this category.

On the other hand, to make a breakthrough into a post-industrial society, contemporary Russia with its significant technical and technological lagging behind economically developed countries requires primarily the “heuristic labor” workers able to successfully meet the challenges of catch-up modernization. This appears to be one of the reasons why neither the state, nor the universities or the labor market have been able to determine the place and role of Bachelor graduates clearly and definitively in the system of social production and, accordingly, clearly and unambiguously formulate the requirements for their competence and training. We believe this to be evidenced by the constant changes, renewals, and corrections of the Federal State Educational Standards.

The issue is that the institution of bachelorship did not appear in Russia as a result of a stable demand of social practice for the further progressive development of the country. It was instead mechanically transferred from a different education system functioning under conditions dissimilar to those in Russia. This has led to the fact that neither the state, nor higher education institutions, nor employers have a clear understanding of the Bachelor’s degree and the role of its graduates in the development of our society. As a result, the Bachelor’s degree was treated as a shortened specialist degree and generally reduced to shortening the duration of the latter without any change in the essence and content of the learning process. The result was

a significant “compression” or even removal of the so-called “non-core” disciplines from the educational programs. Among them were the disciplines that used to contribute to broadening the outlook of future journalists, such as philosophy, history, sociology, psychology, and so on. Furthermore, the so-called “core” disciplines also suffered a major reduction.

The reduction in the number of academic disciplines coupled with an emphasis on increasing the number of students’ independent work has led to a drastic reduction in the class load. As rightfully noted by Professor A. B. Kamenskii, the head of the School of Historical Sciences at the National Research University Higher School of Economics, “...it is clear that if a course includes a certain discipline for which, for example, 36 hours of classes are allotted, the student can only get the most superficial idea of it” (KAMENSKII, 2010).

As previously noted, the historical disciplines were the first to suffer from the shortened duration of study. Unsurprisingly, historians were among the first to voice concerns. Their position was supported by respected experts from other fields. They all agreed that a course of historical disciplines (which most certainly have to include the history of journalism) should have a volume of classwork that would allow the teacher not only to present the students with the necessary minimum of material, but also to introduce them to the opinions of various historians, to organize a discussion, and to support it with video material (POPOVA, 2005).

Another negative trend commonly noted is the constant increase in the workload of teachers, which not only complicates for them the use of extracurricular forms of work, such as visits to museums, archives, editorial offices, and trips to places of historical events but also impairs the quality of preparation for classes (POPOVA, 2005).

One more issue directly affecting the effectiveness of teaching the history of communication professions is the consequences of the introduction of the Unified State Exam in the Russian federation in 2009.

We do recognize that at present, Russian society still “...lacks a foundation for constructive dialogue regarding the USE – opinions on it vary not due to differences in views or interests but because of differences in the depth of understanding of the issue” (MALINETSKII; PODLAZOV, n.d.).

Therefore, without going into the discussion, we turn exclusively to the facts. According to A. Nikolaeva, Associate Professor of the Department of Russian Language Stylistics at the Moscow State University, first-year students of the MSU Department of Journalism who scored the maximum number of points on their USE in the Russian language “make a lot of mistakes in their first test dictation. “...In particular, in 2009 (*before the introduction of the USE – author’s note*), 18% of students made less than eight mistakes in written text, while in 2016,

only 4% did so” (IVANOV, 2019). V. L. Artemov, professor of journalism at the Moscow Humanitarian University, is even more categorical and indicates that in recent years, “students’ general level of training dropped substantially, the interest in the in-depth study of the material and independent work reduced. Fewer and fewer students are capable of continuous effort, without which it is impossible to develop one’s own creative approach or create a proper work” (ARTEMOV, 2016, p. 58). Finally, according to the Associate Professor of the Department of Russian History and Historiography of the Institute of History and International Relations of Saratov National Research University V. Khasin, “A person graduates school with the knowledge of Russian and mathematics and two other subjects [in which they take the USE]. The other subjects they do not know at all” (IVANOV, 2019).

Former university applicants have great gaps in their knowledge of Russian and world history. Journalism history teachers typically have to spend a lot of effort and academic hours to arm them with the historical knowledge required to master the profession successfully. The accumulated experience shows that a valuable instrument for overcoming this problem is the collaborative work of history (Russian and world) and journalism history teachers on coordinating the content of certain topics of their courses.

Overall, the described problems will persist, as it is difficult to argue with the experts suggesting that the USE not only does not resolve the current problems but generates new ones leading to a general decline in the quality of education in the country (IVANOV, 2019).

In addressing the task of filling journalism history courses with new content, it is necessary to account for the specific characteristics of the current civilizational and cultural moment in time. One of such characteristics is the increasing effect of Western, particularly American, approaches to training journalists on the Russian system of journalism education. These approaches are quite specific. Specialists note that foreign schools of journalism, primarily in the United States of America, suffer from further aggravation of the so-called “craft approach” to education (ARTEMOV, 2016, p. 55). Students do not receive any broad humanitarian education. They are not required to understand contemporary social and cultural processes, nor to be erudite, nor to have a broad outlook. The main objective of education is training a specialist in collecting and promptly processing information, who is primarily required to “grasp the expectations and tastes of their audience without straying away from their utilitarian goals”. It is no coincidence that in journalistic circles there is an established opinion that “the American reporter can describe everything, but cannot explain why” (KHOROLSKII, 2010).

Noting the alarming trend of the introduction of the “descriptive reporting” canons into the Russian system of journalism training, the president of the Faculty of Journalism at the Moscow State University, Iakov Zasurskii, argues that we cannot be satisfied with the approach to journalism training adopted in Western schools of journalism (ZASURSKIJ, 2007). Indeed, the widespread introduction of this approach results in the loss of the most important achievements of domestic journalism, such as high professionalism, in-depth analysis of phenomena, events, and facts, responsibility to society, and readiness to defend the interests of the Russian state.

In solving the problem of filling the courses of the history of communication professions with new content, one more peculiarity of the present state of the Russian system of higher education is necessary to consider. This feature is the complicated financial situation of the main participant in the educational process – the student. According to the study conducted by 13 Russian universities on behalf of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation from April to mid-July 2021, which covered 36,000 students, 24,000 teachers, and 800 parents, three-quarters of the students showed signs of “psychological distress” during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Researchers found that the state of a student is considerably affected by the financial situation in the family (SHEIKINA, 2021). According to V. A. Falkov, the Minister of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation, the psychological well-being and mental health of students is a major threat to the quality of education (SHEIKINA, 2021). The Minister’s statement is difficult to disagree with.

Indeed, the effect of the aforementioned factors on the quality of future journalists’ training clearly shows in the fact that

many editors report facing a challenge, which ... they formulate as ‘There is no one to write in the paper’. The main issue is the striking lack of erudition in young journalists, the primitiveness of their thinking, their degraded range of interests, and their laziness of thought. Young journalists read little or nothing, their horizons are so narrow that they are confined to domestic problems, they have a poor vocabulary in Russian, they are not inquisitive, they prefer uncomplicated methods of reasoning, and they are not inclined to look for cause-and-effect connections in the events and facts they describe (ARTEMOV, 2016, p. 58).

A partial resolution of the indicated problem can be achieved through an adequate organization of students’ independent work. This appears to have been the goal when the volume of students’ independent work in the curricula was decided to be increased at the cost of classroom hours.

Nevertheless, as noted above, the excessive workload of teachers and the difficult financial situation of a significant share of students will hinder the successful progression along this path. As a result, experts draw an alarming conclusion: “the reorganization of the educational process in favor of individual independent educational activities can lead to the profanation of the educational process” (SUSLOV; SALIMGAREEV, 2017, p. 81).

Concluding the examination of the current problems directly affecting the content, organization, and outcomes of students’ study of the history of communication professions, it should be noted that we are well aware that these problems will not disappear in the near future and their impact on the learning process will persist.

Conclusion

Thus, meeting the objectives of higher education established by the Russian state requires further improvement of the learning process and its content:

- an important place in the content of education is reserved for studying the history of the profession being mastered;

- the study of the history of the profession shapes the worldview of a future professional, the system of their professional and moral values, contributes to their mastery of the required knowledge, abilities, skills, and competencies;

- a specific characteristic of the present state of the Russian system of higher education is the presence of several topical problems directly affecting both the process of filling the “History of Journalism” course with new content and its organization and learning outcomes;

- among the problems influencing the results of studying the “History of Journalism” disciplines, as well as its content, are Russia’s accession to the Bologna Process and the transition to the two-tier system of higher education, the consequences of the introduction of the Unified State Exam, the increasing influence of Western approaches to training journalists on the Russian system of journalism education, the challenging financial situation of a major part of students, the increase in the volume of students’ independent work in the curricula at the expense of classroom hours, and some other factors.

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