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From Soviet Communist Concepts to Libertarian Journalism: Reform, Change and Evolution of Mongolian Journalism Curriculum

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Abstract

Our main goal is to study the changes and evolution of the curriculums that trained journalists for more than 80 years' experience within the history of Mongolian journalism education.

Journalism training in Mongolia, which began in the middle of the 20th century, based on the social and political theories and concepts of the Socialist system. However, in 1990, when Mongolia chose Democracy, the theory, methodology, and concepts of that education underwent radical changes and were reformed.

The authors compared all the curriculums and determined the changes and evolutions.

Keywords: communist press concept, libertarian journalism, curriculum reform, curriculum change, curriculum evolution

1. Introduction

Mongolia is the only democratic country in Central Asia. Until 1990, Mongolia was a socialist country with a communist regime for 70 years, but since 1990, it has transitioned to a democratic and free market society. Since then, Mongolia is considered as a democratic country that has developed a free press, and values freedom of the press. In 1990, the victory of the Democratic revolution led to the birth of a large number of free press. In 1998, the "Law on Freedom of the Press" was passed, and the legal framework for the free press was guaranteed.

Following the trend of media conglomeration and convergence, major changes are taking place in today's journalism and free press. Because of these changes, the universities that graduate journalists who are an important infrastructure of Mongolian journalism, have been reforming their curriculum with certain steps. Specifically, in the past 30 years, the main reform of the principle was a change of the curriculum concept based on the Communist press theory of the previous society, into the curriculum based on the free press theory. Because of this change, new curriculum developed in accordance with the principles of democracy and training of journalists followed it. Also, changes and updates were made to the curriculum by incorporating theoretical knowledge with practical skills, such as new trends in mass communication, new trends in journalism, and multimedia information processing of new media. However, schools that have journalism programs have adopted and used curriculum with two fundamentally different concepts.

In one hand, old communist content is still being integral to the curriculum. Therefore, it is necessary to comprehensively analyze the development, evolution, and revision of the curriculum of universities that train specialists in the field of journalism in Mongolia from a historical point of view. Also, we can see that the tradition of "Soviet-style journalism" curriculum during the communist period cannot be completely abandoned, and therefore research was conducted based on the assumption that there is still a problem that the reforms of the journalism curriculum with the concept of free press cannot fully execute the changes. For doing so, the curricula of two main universities were selected from the universities that provide journalism training in Mongolia. It is the journalism curriculum of National University of Mongolia (NUM) and Mongolian National University of Education (MNUE). The journalism curriculum of NUM has been implemented since 1960, while that of MNUE started its journalism program in 1990. Therefore, in general terms, the results of research and analysis covering both the 30 years of the communist press era from the 1960s to the present, and the current 30 years since the transition to a democratic society are presented.

Research on curriculum of Journalism training has started 1970ies, in abroad. In their article "The Study of Curriculum

Change", J. M. Harding, P. J. Kelly & R. B. Nicodemus concluded optimally. They confine the review to curriculum innovations that originate in one part of the educational system, are subjected to formal development and involve some planned strategy for dissemination to other parts of the system (Harding, 1976).

Gradually, the curriculum started to be considered for the training program for specialists. Searles noted that "It is worth remembering that the results necessary for the development of science curriculum are determined by research" (Searles, 1981). This was considered important at the time in the concept of curriculum development, especially for the Macdonald's three models of curriculum development.

Later, it was deepened by Orpwood's (1985) view, which claimed, mastering the practical arts of curriculum making is extraordinarily difficult. The challenge confronting the academic community, therefore, is to find ways to think about curriculum processes which can be of use to those engaged in them.

Kraeplin et al.'s (2005) study provides an innovative approach to journalism program research. They examine the growth of convergence journalism training in the academy.

Also, researchers have been making changes in the journalism curriculum within the programs of the country's universities. For example, the article "Revisiting the journalism and mass communication curriculum: Some experiences from Swaziland" can be mentioned here. This article (Rooney, 2007) reports on the changes the University of Swaziland is making to its journalism and mass communications curriculum. But this study sought to identify ways that curricula of communication skills courses might be changed to train journalists in more ethical and less harmful practices.

Many studies have been conducted on the challenges faced by journalism education during the transition from communist to democratic rule and how they were overcome. The difficulties of transition in Eastern European countries were studied by Lauk (2009), and the transition in Russian education by Pasti (2005). There is also a comparative analysis of the transition in Southeast Asia and Vietnam by Nguyen, A (2016).

Study of Shay et al. (2013) has implications for educators interested in curriculum design that enables cumulative learning in discipline specific contexts.

Of the curriculum studies, Stabback's (2016) concept is the most appropriate. He argues that:

> Moreover, an ideal curriculum should remain broad and balanced, as well as open and flexible. While it should cater to students' diverse needs, interests, and abilities, it should simultaneously reflect and respond to the series of local, regional, and global contexts and changes. In order to achieve these ends, a curriculum is usually made up of three interlocking elements, namely, knowledge, generic skills, as well as values and attitudes.

Curriculum is one of the many ways for academics to organize, structure knowledge, and make it meaningful to students (Lam, 2022).

In the study of the curriculum, the study of the unit curriculum should not be omitted. The ideal idea for such research is formulated as "Curriculum can be regarded as a connective bridge between teacher and students" (Sara et al., 2020).

Journalism curriculum research in Mongolia has been discussed since the beginning of 2000. Batbaatar (2008) analyzed current journalism curriculum in Mongolia and expressed his idea how to reform the methodology very first. Zulkafil et al. (2013) studied the reform of the curriculum. Davaadorj (2011) clarified the history of journalism training, made some analyzes of the curriculum that preparing journalists and not only highlighted their achievements and successes (Davaadorj, 2020) but also mentioned the problems faced in current training.

Most recently, Sukhee (2023) published an article entitled "Exploring the Relationship Between Personal Values and Professional Attitude of Journalism Students" in which he studied the relationship between the personal values of journalism students and the results of the training program and raised the issue of developing professional attitudes through training. This study has implications for educators interested in curriculum design that enables cumulative learning in discipline specific contexts (Shay, 2013).

Lauk (2009) concluded that "...the main problem facing journalism education after the collapse of the communist regime was the huge gap between the mental inertia of the old teachers who trained "propagandists" and the practice of free-market journalism...". On the other hand, Pasti (2005), noted that "...despite the penetration of libertarian theory into journalism education in post-Soviet countries, the curriculum remains stuck between the Western "watchdog" and domestic "statism" cultures..." and saw a gap between the aspirations and reality of the Russian curriculum change. Most importantly, "journalism in the self-perceptions of journalists has come to mean much more" (Deuze, 2005).

Studies of journalism curriculum reform in post-communist countries have examined the current situation (Moyo, 2020; Ziani 2018; Kazami, 2018), practical and qualitative issues in the region. Studies show that both the curriculum and the teaching methods have shifted towards a scientific approach (Nguyen, 2018; Almabrouk et al., 2024).

Research on journalism curricula in post-communist countries is similar to research on “decolonization” times in that it highlights the radical changes and reforms associated with social change. Example; about “decolonization” articles of Garman (2017), Steenveld, L. (2006).

Althouth, Deuze (2006) remined that journalism is a more or less autonomous field of study across the globe, yet the education and training of journalists is a subject much debated—but only rarely researched.

Although there are such studies, there is a lack of detailed research on the development, changes, and reforms of journalism curriculum.

This research will not only fill this gap to a small extent, but it is also unique in that it was conducted within the framework of the training program that prepares the personnel of the free press of the only democratic country in Central Asia.

For doing that, our research based on the following assumptions.

1. Although in 1990, following the transition to a democratic society, Mongolian journalism chose the path of free press, and the training course for training journalists began to reflect this idea, but the curriculum of higher education of journalism in Mongolia was still based on the concept of "communist press" or "Soviet-style journalism". It was difficult to get rid of the communist content for a long time. It has been an obstacle to the development of free press and democratic journalism.
2. Even though there have been phased reforms in the curriculum of universities and colleges, as the schools have been subject to the national higher education system and policy decisions, they have updated their curriculum for a long time, thus the development of the curriculum is slow. While it is good that the experience of other developed countries is reflected in the development, implementation, and formation of a curriculum with the concept of free democratic journalism that respects human rights, freedom of opinion, and freedom of the press, it is not a sufficiently decisive change.

Based on the hypothesis, the following questions are asked to research the problems.

Q1: Has the "Soviet-style Journalism Curriculum" of the communist era been completely reformed into the "free press" concept of the democratic society?

Q2: Do the curriculum concepts fully reflect the concepts of freedom of the press, responsible journalism, and a free press?

Q3: What are the changes and reforms in the programs of universities in the era of digital transition? Do these changes reflect the evolution of journalism curricula for professionals? Or is there a problem?

2. Methodology and Materials

2.1 Methodology

Method research design involving both qualitative (document and descriptive analysis) and quantitative research were adopted to undertake the research.

Comparison, framework theory, methodology, and content analysis methods were used.

2.2 Object:

Journalism training curriculum 8 used: 2014, 2019, 2023 Bachelor of Journalism Curriculum of NUM, MNUE.

Course plans 8 used: 1961, 1978, 1995, 2004, 2012, 2019 Bachelor of Journalism Curriculums of NUM, MNUE.

6 Accreditation Reports: Course plans for Journalism Bachelor's Courses 2014, 2019, and 2023 Bachelor's Program Report of NUM, MNUE.

We compared the titles and contents of the courses written in the diplomas of those who graduated from the journalist program in 1964, 1982, 1999, 2009, and 2023, and made some conclusions.

3. Results

3.1 Characteristics of the Mongolian Communist Period Press /1960-1990/ and the Concept of Journalism Training of that Time

During communism, the mass media served as a propaganda and ideological tool, and a single party was used to inform the public about the government's policy decisions and it was dedicated to lead people ideologically. For example, at that time, "our Marxist press becomes a powerful ideological weapon of the party in the struggle for the complete victory of socialism and communism" (Dambajav, 1989), follows the principle "media is a collective propagandist, a collective agitator, and a collective organizer". This would easily be proven by the fact that journalists were considered "warriors of party ideology" during the communist period (Batbaatar, 2023).

In the period of socialist society, the civil right to express opinions, to speak and to publish was included in the Constitution, but it was allowed only in the case if they about the establishment and welfare of a socialist society. This fact restricted rights of speech and publishing in such a way that some of them determined as "against the interests of society".

Galaarid (2018), writing about the social era during the socialist era, accurately expressed the orientation of journalistic activities during the communist era, based on the constitutions of 1924, 1940, and 1960. The history of ideological journalism in the past clearly shows us that the idea of free press was just a declaration.

If we look back at the history, in the early 1960s, journalists who had acquired the profession of journalism in the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, and East Germany began working in Mongolian journalism, where people from different profession, but have some writing skills used to work.

In the autumn of 1960, the Journalism class was opened at the Faculty of Philology of the National University of Mongolia, the first 32 people were enrolled, thus the foundation of Journalism education was laid In Mongolia. In 1964, 30 people graduated from that class and received professional diplomas of journalists, and the national journalist personnel started working in the field of journalism in our country (Zulkafil et al., 2020).

In 1967-1977, the department was transferred to the Party Institute under the Central Committee of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, and since 6 graduations were held. Also, from 1971 to 1987, journalists were trained at the Evening University of Marxism-Leninism under the Party Committee of Ulaanbaatar, and more than 370 people graduated (Dagiimaa, 2011).

The newly established department was staffed by expert teachers from the Soviet Union, who began to prepare journalists and ideological fighters for the Party (Zulkafil et al., 2020).

It shows that due to the influence of that period, trainers to train journalists in accordance with the ideology of the Communist Party have been coming from the Soviet Union.

The 1960 Constitution of the MPR stated that "... the governing force of the state and society of the Mongolian People's Republic is the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, which uses the all-conquering Marxist-Leninist theory in its activities..." (p. 1). It shows that the Marxist-Leninist theory was used as a basic concept in all aspects of society.

We can see clearly the communist approach of preparing their ideology specialists form the following:

> "... In 1967, a journalism class was opened at the Party Institute under the Central Committee of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party. In fact, it was the transfer of the Department of Journalism of NUM to the Party Institute. There reasons was an increased need for the MPRP to pay special attention to their ideological work and need to place it in the hands of its trusted members." (Zulkafil et al., 2020).

In such way, Party Institution finished six graduations and prepared more than 100 journalists.

Also, the Evening University of Marxism-Leninism under the Party Committee of Ulaanbaatar enrolled seven times for the three-year journalism course, and graduated six times, training journalist specialists.

> "Journalism is a type of social activity that regularly distributes important news through mass communication channels, and a major form of mass propaganda and agitation." (Deleg, 2014).

This was the concept and direction for preparing journalists in that time.

In 1978, the journalism course was reopened at NUM, and then in 1979, the Department of Journalism was established under the Faculty of Social Sciences. Until now, more than 1,500 journalists have been trained by continuous training activities of that Department. This shows that it was a historical experience to prepare journalists with the ideology of communism and was conducted according to the model of the Soviet Union. Since the 1990s, this tradition has gradually changed its direction in connection with Mongolia's transition to democracy, and it has shifted to the training journalists according to modern theories and methods.

Between 1960 and 1990, the Mongolian journalism curriculum directly emulated Soviet communist press theory, aiming to train journalists as “party ideologues”. This was fundamentally linked to the dominance of Marxist-Leninist theory, which occupied the majority of the curriculum. Such a phenomenon was not unique to Mongolia but was a common characteristic across post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. During the initial stages of transition, the primary challenges were the “mental inertia” of the old system (Lauk, 2009) and the pedagogical backwardness of the teaching faculty.

3.2 Features of Journalism Training in the Period of Democratic Society /After 1990/ and Change and Reform of the Curricula for Training Journalists

In Mongolia, a post-secondary bachelor's program for training journalists was first developed in 1960. However, the

program was a direct copy of the Soviet curriculum, characterized by the total dominance of the ideology of socialist society and the authoritarian nature of the Communist regime. The curriculum based on Marxist theory and the concepts of a journalism of authoritarianism.

For example, Deleg (2014), a journalism professor and researcher at that time, wrote in his textbook *Press Theory and Practice*:

> "... in order to make the work of our journalism staff more effective, the following classes should be taught:
>
> 1. Fundamentals of Marxist-Leninist theory
> 2. Historical experience of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party
> 3. Foreign and domestic political policy of our Party
> 4. Mastering the Party's ideological work methods
> 5. Study of the current important issues of the socialist economy
> 6. Introduction to the scientific and technical progresses
> 7. Methods of organizing socialist contests
> 8. Introduction to the basis of party and state organization
>
> Those 8 classes are recommended. In addition, there are three basic and important activities required in the practical work of a journalist on a daily basis: to have a Leninist method of persuading the workers politically on any issue, to learn to connect the promotion of the goal of establishing socialist communist society with daily practice, and mastering the ability to fight sharply against the party's ideological enemy with confidence...".

Deleg's text reflects the key concepts and trends of that time. The National University of Mongolia alone trained journalist specialists, with a curriculum based these same principles.

The Journalism Course at NUM has been directly copied and translated from the curriculum of the Soviet Union, as can been seen in following statement:

> As of 1983, the graduates of the full professional journalism course during their four years of study took 27 exams and 31 reviews, and spent 4,200 hours studying across a total of 37 courses, including "History of Russian Journalism", "History of the Soviet Party and State Press", “Press history of communist labor parties”, “Press history of the Mongolian People’s Republic”. In addition to these classes, they took 11 professional courses, such as "Mongolian press theory and practice", "Newspaper technique and decoration", "Photography", and other elective courses for a total of approximately 1300 hours. Among them, history lessons took the dominant share (Zulkafil et al., 2020).

However, in 1990, Mongolia's social system completely changed. As a fledgling democracy, the ideal of the freedom of the press was paramount, and thus it was necessary to shift rapidly towards libertarian journalism in education.

As higher education institutions were reformed and the standards, criteria, and requirements of the program changed over time, the concept of the journalism curriculum was updated accordingly.

Since journalism as a field reflects social changes, the reform of media personnel training programs was inevitable. Regarding how NUM has changed and improved the curriculum, it has been noted that, "as Mongolia transitioned to democracy and free market economy, and began to pursue an open policy in its foreign relations, completely new principles and methods began to enter both the theoretical training and practical work of journalism. First of all, with the experience, knowledge, support of American and European countries with many years of experience in free journalism, there have been major changes in the teaching standards, teaching methods, and the types of classes to teach..." (Zulkafil et al., 2020).

Regarding how the curriculum is changing, Zulkafil (2013) wrote in 2012:

> NUM approved the bachelor's curriculum again last year and started implementing it from this academic year. This is fundamentally different from the previous curriculum, and is structured as general and basic courses (24 credit, consisting of compulsory and elective courses), compulsory basic professional courses (54 credit), and specialization courses (36 credit, compulsory and elective courses). The main advantage of this curriculum is that the students are able to study in 5 different courses:
>
> Specialize in one main profession (120 credits)
>
> Acquire additional professional training in a similar field (18 credits of additional professional courses, 6 credit of elective studies, such as Journalist-Advertising Manager in Public Media, etc.),

Acquire additional professional training in an unrelated field (24 credits of additional professional courses, such as Journalist-Political Scientist, etc.),

Dual professional training within a similar field (5 years of study, 36 credit of basic professional training, 36 credit of secondary professional training, such as Journalist/Sociologist, etc),

Dual professional training in unrelated fields (7 years study, Bachelor + Bachelor; such as Journalist + Lawyer, etc.).

Journalism in the socialist system was defined as an instrument of propaganda for the party-state, whereas the emerging professional discourse, influenced by libertarian models, emphasizes market demand and information services. In the transition, these two paradigms collide, often resulting in a dominant 'marketing journalism' where professional autonomy is negotiated between state control and commercial pressures (Pan, 2003).

Since the victory of the Democratic Revolution in Mongolia in 1990, with the support and participation of the Mongolian Writers' Union, the "Literary Workers" course was accepted for the first time based on the Department of Literature of MNUE and it became the ground for preparing journalists with libertarian journalism trends.

Regarding their history, MNUE stated that "in the first years of democracy (1991), MNUE expected this future development trend and began to train "Literary worker - Journalist" specialists. MNUE has made a real contribution to the training of information and media specialists over the last 28 years..." (Department of Journalism, 2019a). The curriculum of the school mixed materials regarding concepts and traditions of the previous socialist society with those based in the free press, gradually shifting to training specialists solely in the latter.

In case of MNUE, when it opened the "Literary Worker" professional course, enrolled students did not study party history and ideology as they had previously, and they had a professional background in Mongolian language and literature. Directly related to the purposes of the time, the school aimed to train both writers and journalists through a single program. Gradually focusing on training journalists rather than literary workers, the concepts of the curriculum have been redeveloped.

When the Department of Journalism the conceptual basis of the program was revised to focus on the principles of libertarian journalism.

> “Since the establishment of the Department of Journalism in 2006, we have held the ultimate goal of raising journalism training to international standards. We have consistently revised the content and standards of our training, strengthening it with qualified professional personnel. Subsequently, in 2012, the Department of Journalism was certified successfully with accreditation of the "Journalism" (bachelor's) professional program, based on 20 years of rich experience in training journalists, human resources, material base, and quality of service. Since then, MNUE has continued training competitive, competent specialists with the goal of developing Mongolian news media through their graduates” (Department of Journalism, 2019b.).

It was revised again in 2010, 2014, and 2021. When developing the journalism curriculum, “the concept of libertarian journalism and the theory of the free press were the basis for professional training, “Model Journalism Education Program for Developing and Democracies” issued by UNESCO (2011) was standard, and the framework of the Tartu Declaration of the European Journalism Training Association was reflected (Tartu, Estonia, June 10, 2006) ...” (Department of Journalism, 2019b.).

3.2.1 Comparative Analysis of Journalist Professional Program of NUM

Examining at the 1961 NUM program in journalism, it can be seen that the eight subjects identified by Dr. Deleg, G. were universally studied, with a total of 40 subjects studied. Of these, 18 courses were about political and ideological studies of communism, 10 courses were about literature and language, and only 5 courses were about professional journalism skills. The chart below illustrates the breakdown of classes within the curriculum at that time (see Figure 1).

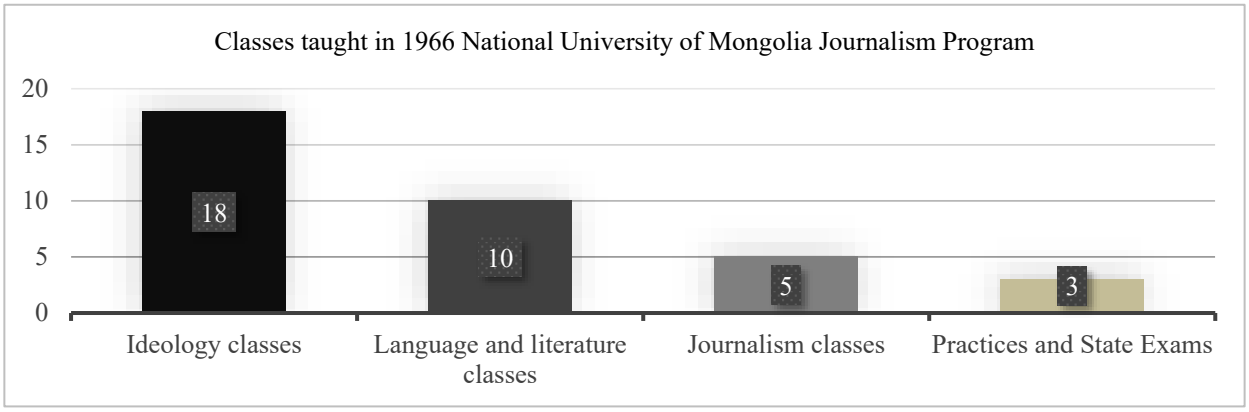


Figure 1. Diploma in Journalism, 1966, NUM

Most of the courses take by the first graduates in journalism at NUM were focused on the study of the history of the Communist press in the Soviet Union. The training aimed to prepare Communist ideological journalists, therefore the most important subjects were ideological classes such as "Atheism" and the "Fundamentals of Marxist-Leninist ethics." On the professional skills of journalism, they studied only "Fundamentals of Polygraphy and Newspaper Illustration Techniques," "Fundamentals of Editing," "Photography," and "Machine Recording," and did not study any special theoretical and practical courses. It appears that the basics of journalism theory were taught through the course of the "History of the Communist press in Soviet Union" and that on "Political ideology."

In 1978, after the re-opening of the journalism course at NUM, the students studied 36 different courses, completed 2 internships, and passed 3 state exams. Of these, 13 courses are related to general knowledge and have political and ideological content, 6 courses are in literature and language, and only 4 courses were on the skills of journalism. The history of the Communist press of the Soviet Union is studied in three different of classes: "History of the Soviet Party Press," "History of the Press of the Communist and Labor Parties," and "History of Russian Journalism." This is exactly same as in the 1966 curriculum.

The primary reforms of the 1978 curriculum were new classes, such as "History of the Mongolian Press", and "Theory and Practice of the Mongolian Press", and making these classes to be main subjects for acquiring knowledge of theory and skills (see Figure 2). Students also studied a few courses necessary to get profession of journalist: "Professional Introductions", "Elective Specialization Course", "Technical Decorations of Newspapers", "Supportive Classes/Photography, Machine Recording".

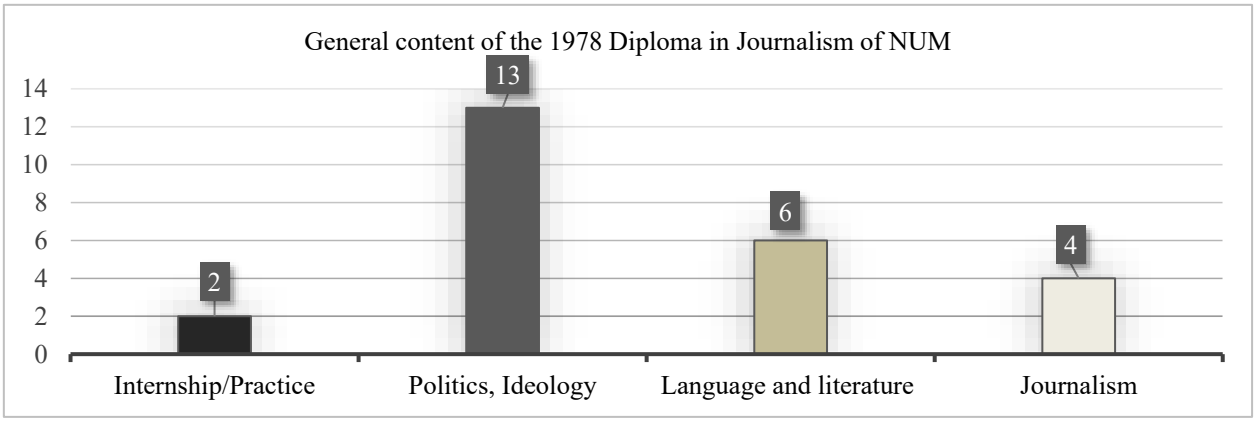


Figure 2. General content of the 1978 Diploma in Journalism of NUM

Focusing on the history of the state press of that time had the purpose of introducing Communist ideology through the history of the press of the Soviet Union and the history of the Communist workers' press. Classes like "Marxist-Leninist Ethics,", "Marxist-Leninist Aesthetics" and "Scientific Atheism" forced students to study communist ethics.

Teaching history in a journalism curriculum is something akin to squeezing the round peg into a square hole. In a program so saturated with skills training, students are unsure that a course on the history and principles of journalism has any discernable value. This then, is our challenge.

Looking at the diplomas of the graduates of NUM's 1994–1998 journalism class, it is clear that the department has started

to reform the curriculum. They have rejected the ultra-ideological training of the previous socialist era, and begun focusing on training journalist specialists based on the concept of the free press.

In its updated program in 2004, NUM added more mass communication course content and added courses in journalism theory and history. However, students also had much more lecture time, which means that the department was still focused on academic teaching methods. Also, it seems that NUM had not yet moved on fully from the traditional concepts based on history and society.

If we observe the curriculum that NUM has been using since 2018, it is clear that the previous socialist ideology has been completely removed and the curriculum changed to one based on the theory and methodology of the free press. Within the framework of the higher education law, 120 credits must be required to acquire a bachelor's degree. The separation of general academic and professional courses by compulsory attendance and selective specialization was developed in accordance with the current policy.

The journalism curriculum consists of 9 general academic subjects for 31 credits, and 4 basic professional subjects for 12 credits. Specialization (how is this different from the curriculum of the previous sentence?) subjects are 14 compulsory subjects for 39 credits, 16 elective subjects for 24 credits, plus 15 credits of other subjects, for a total of 121 credits. The basic professional course includes two courses on journalism and two courses on public relations and society, indicating that the program incorporates theoretical changes based on public relations. Among the 14 compulsory courses in the specialization course, the Production practice/internship is done only twice, for a total of 3 credits. Thus the theoretical or classroom lesson time still dominates over practical learning.

In addition, the fact that there are only 16 elective courses, and only 24 elective credits to be obtained from 8 courses, reduces the opportunity for students to freely choose their courses. On the other hand, there are an additional 15 credits of open classes (see Figure 3). Thus students must choose five subjects from the any field of interest, which seems to be suitable for a specialization. It is adjusted to the free choice program of the university, and this is a major advantage curriculum compared to other curricula.

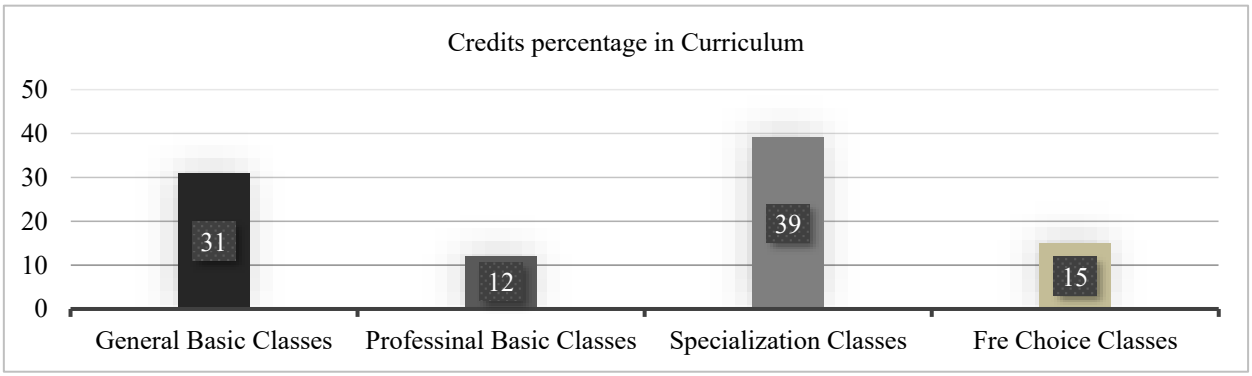


Figure 3. 2023 Study Plan of NUM

When comparing the changes and updates of the NUM curriculum for journalists since 1961, it is clear that initially it was based on the theories and concepts of communist journalism, but gradually, after 1990, the curriculum was changed to one based on the theory and methodology of the free press (see Figure 4).

The fundamental difference lies in the definition of the journalist's role: while the socialist curriculum categorized the journalist as a 'state official,' the libertarian framework reimagines them as an 'independent watchdog'. This conceptual shift demands a radical, 180-degree transformation of the educational content.

Rejecting the authoritarian approach that sees journalists as "State servants" and training them as "Public Watchers" is at the heart of libertarian theory. Jaakkola's (2018) conclusion about this change is consistent with our research results. This paradigm shift necessitates a robust curriculum centered on professional ethics and investigative independence. Journalists share a sense of “doing it for the public” (Deuze, 2005).

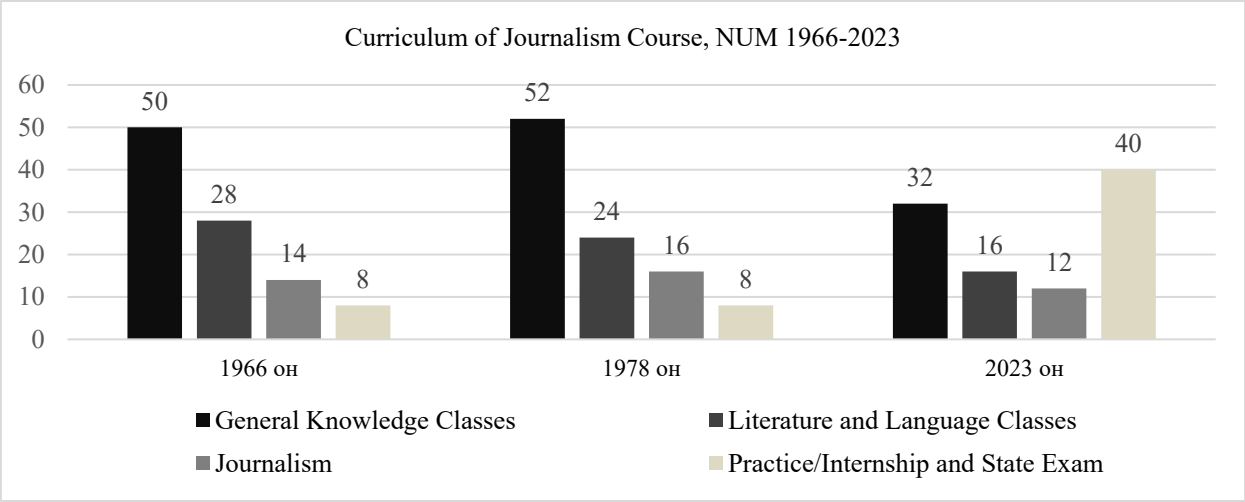


Figure 4. A Comparison of NUM Journalism Curriculums 1966-2023

The journalism curriculum of NUM has also incorporated mass communication theory, as is clear from the following classes: "Theory of Journalism" (3 credits), "Mass communication" (3 credits), "Democratic governance and civil society participation" (3 credit) and "Social statistics" (3 credits). These are the main classes dealing with mass communication theory, but three of these classes are primarily focused on the content of social and public relations. Therefore, we can say that the NUM curriculum is based on the theory and methodology of mass communication, teaches the concept and knowledge of the free press in bundled hours, and provides their students general understanding and knowledge necessary for work in journalism. When NUM first got rid of the journalistic concepts of Communist ideology and moved to the theory of the free press, it made and implemented changes based on the concept of mass communication of the University of Missouri in the United States.

3.2.2 Comparative analysis of the MNUE Journalism Curricula

The traditional approach to journalism training in Mongolia was to prepare Communist ideological journalists based on an education in history, literature and Mongolian language. Most classes focused on creating propaganda content through creative writing. We can see it clearly from the NUM curricula from before 1990. This kind of curriculum was implemented until the early 1990s, but since 2006, it has transformed into a curriculum focused on pure journalistic skills based on the ideals of a free press.

When the Literary Workers' Course opened at MNUE and started to train specialists in the media industry, one of the trends in curriculum reform was to reduce number of classes on the old socialist social ideology and increase professional skills. If we consider the subjects listen on the graduates' diplomas, general knowledge subjects studied by the first enrollers of the Literary Officer class in 1991 appear to be purely science-based, with no ideological content. 10 general knowledge subjects were "History of Mongolia," "Philosophy," "Economics," "Political science," "Russian language," "English language," "Physical Education," "Logic," "Ethnography" and "Aesthetics". The reform of the program was carried out due to Mongolia's transition to a democratic society and the expansion of the free press and free-market system.

In 1991, the reform of higher education began, and it transition to a credit system. Since then, a student graduating with a bachelor's degree must have studied 120 credit hours. The MNUE program was originally established to train literary workers and writers, and the subjects listed on the graduates' diplomas show that literature subjects formed the core of the program. A total of 25 subjects were studied within 120 credits. Of the 25 subjects, 10 subjects were general knowledge, and 14 subjects were purely on literature and linguistics. The subject called "Seminar of Literary Work Experience" was a purely practical course to create literary works and aimed at training literary workers and journalists. The 6-week internship as a journalist was aimed at getting students writing experience. This was the main feature of the first curriculum of MNUE (See Figure 5).

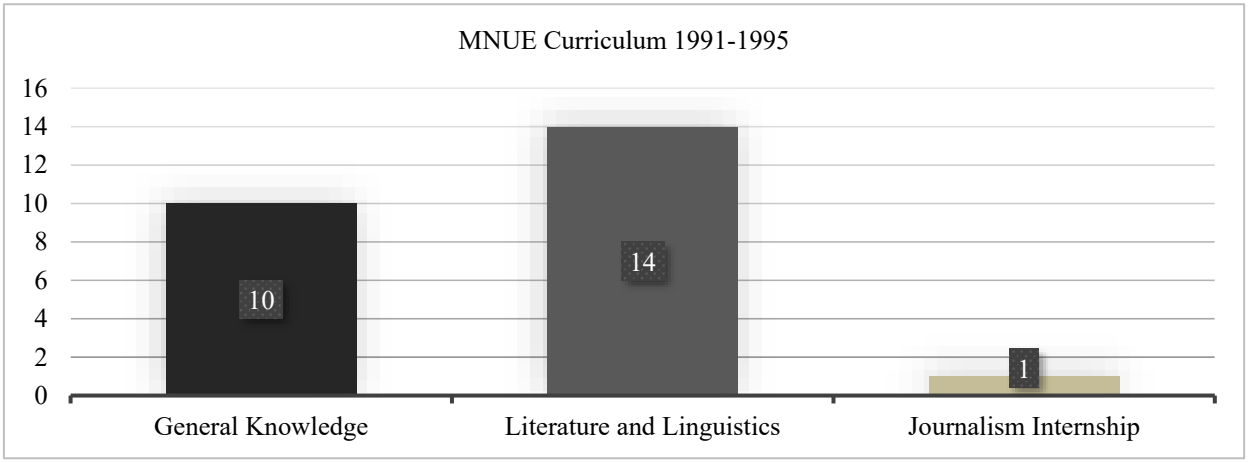


Figure 5. First Curriculum for MNUE Literary Worker Course

The program has been reformed since 1995, and graduates are not only writers and authors, but also journalists. The system of studying higher education within 120 credit hours was still in operation. According to the 1999 diploma, to receive a degree, the graduates studied a total of 24 subjects, executed 2 internships, wrote one thesis, and completed a total of 120 credit hours.

Out of the total 24 subjects, 9 were general knowledge classes, 12 classes were in literature and Mongolian language, and one class was aimed at preparing a literary worker, which was the "Seminar for Literary Work Experience". 2 journalistic subjects were studied, and their credit hours were relatively high. The subject "Journalism" was designed to be 6 credit hours, or a total of 64 hours of lectures and 64 hours of seminars. This course continued for 2 semesters, that is, for a whole academic year. The reform of the curriculum, which transforming from training only "Literary worker" into "Literary worker - Journalist" has been effective. The concept of the curriculum which for training literary workers and journalists with an educational background in language and literature was preserved (See Figure 6).

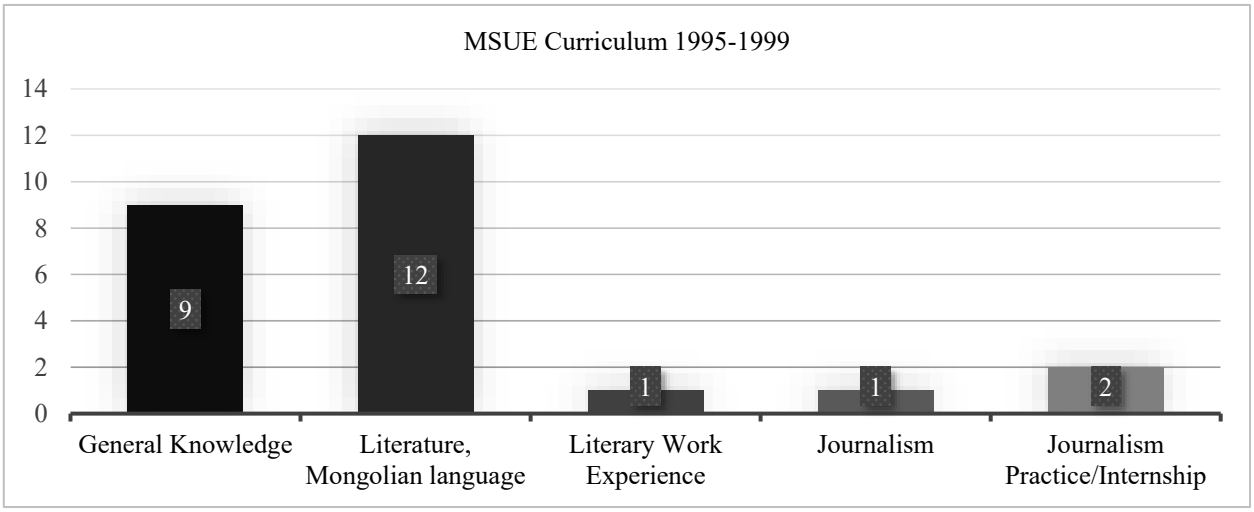


Figure 6. Literary worker and Journalism Curriculum of MNUE

Since 2003, the reform of the curriculum based on the theory and methodology of a free press has been implemented, but until 2006, the number of literature-based courses was relatively high. However, by expanding the program into an independent Department of Journalism and making gradual changes to the curriculum, removing literature classes and adding professional classes, the number and content of journalism subjects has become more dominant. According to diplomas completed in 2009, a total of 31 courses were studied within the framework of this reform. Graduates studied 9 literature classes, 3 Mongolian language classes, and 11 journalism classes. The result of the reform was significant, with more than 30% of the curriculum becoming professional journalism classes (See Figure 7).

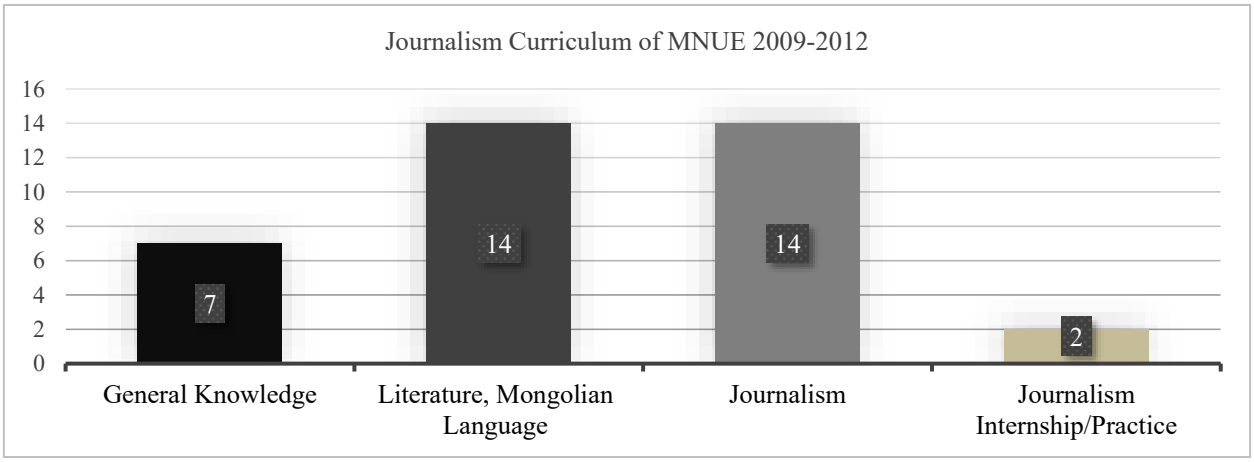


Figure 7. Journalism Curriculum of MNUE

Due to curricula reforms implemented across departments at MNUE in 2014, the Department of Journalism also saw major principles of its curriculum change. The curriculum's sole purpose now is to train professional journalists. The changes in the curriculum, the effect of major changes to the framework of postsecondary education in Mongolia, can be seen in Table 1.

In this regard, according to the self-evaluation report of MNUE's Journalism program,

> The Bachelor of Journalism curriculum, which was developed and implemented in 2014:
>
> > Content is divided into 4 main parts: 1. Values and beliefs of a professional journalist, 2. Basic personal knowledge, abilities, and attitudes, 3. Knowledge, abilities, and attitudes of journalistic education, 4. Academic knowledge, abilities, and attitudes. 21 credits (17.5%) of the content of the curriculum are general basic knowledge classes, 33 credits (27.5%) are basic classes in journalism education, 15 credits (12.5%) are basic professional (package) courses, and 51 credits (42.5%) are professional courses. Based on the repeated proposals to improve the formula of the training program, and as a result of several discussions, the meeting of the Curriculum Committee of MNUE on November 2, 2018 corrected and improved the curriculum. MNUE then approved the new curriculum by the order of the MNUE President No. A/322. With this change, there are 3 parts: 1. Basic knowledge, abilities, and attitudes of the individual, 2. Professional values and beliefs of journalists, 3. Professional knowledge, abilities, and attitudes of journalists. Journalism is different from other professions in that it requires more hours to acquire the practical skills of writing, creating, and preparing broadcasts. Therefore, in order to improve the professional competence of students, the issue of increasing the hours of professional lessons in the curriculum was discussed twice by the Curriculum sub-committee, and the curriculum was improved twice by submitting proposals to the MNUE Curriculum committee.

When developing the revised journalism curriculum, the following concepts and standard programs were used as a basis.

Making the concept of libertarian journalism or the theory of free press the main mission of professional training,

Using UNESCO's "Model Journalism Education Program for Developing and Democracies" (2011) as a benchmark,

Reflecting the ideals of the Tartu Declaration of the European Journalism Training Association (Estonia, TARTU June 10, 2006),

Adhering to the appropriate level of "Journalistic Professional Standards" (2004) approved by the National Center for Standard Metrology of Mongolia.

Taking account the recommendations made by the working group to update the Journalism training curriculum (2014) established under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (Department of Journalism, 2019a)

As a result (Department of Journalism, 2019c), 20.1% of the curriculum studied by the students in the journalism program is occupied by general basic courses, 26.6% by professional basic courses, and 53.2% by professional courses, which shows that the content of the curriculum can meet the learning outcomes of the program (see Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of credits in the Curriculum

Title of the Package Courses	Total credits		Out of them			
			Compulsory		Elective	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
General Basic	25	20.2%	21	16.9%	4	3.2%
Volunteer works	*2*	*1.6%*	*2*	*1.6%*	*0*	*0*
Professional Basic	19	15.3%	13	10.5%	6	4.8%
Professional	66	53.2%	55	44.4%	11	8.9%
Professioanl Internship 1,2,3	14	11.3%	14	11.3%	0	0
Total	**124**	**100%**	**103**	**83%**	**21**	**17%**

According to this change, the choice of courses has increased, the number of elective courses has increased, and the variety has increased. Therefore one advantage of the reform is the opportunity for students to study more courses of their own choice. In addition, the content of journalism education has increased, the number of other field subjects has decreased, and the opportunity to independently study the trends of the free press has increased (see Figure 8).

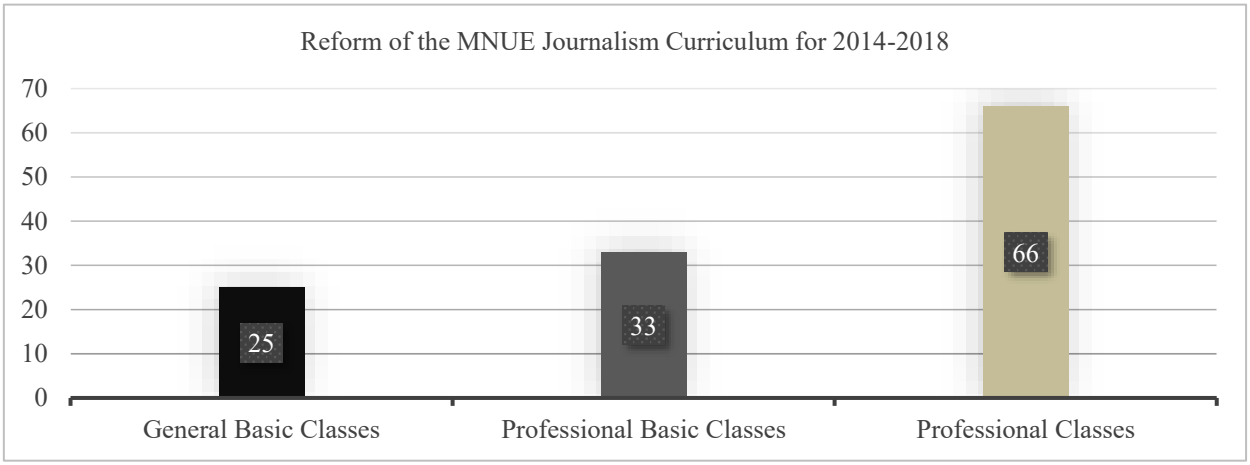


Figure 8. Reform of the MNUE Journalism Curriculum

In comparing the updates and changes of MNUE's journalism curriculum between 1991 and 2018, it should be noted the number of ideological courses was initially already quite low, but the number of literature and Mongolian language courses was relatively high. As part of the latest reform, the number of professional journalism courses based on the theory and methodology of the free press and practical courses or internships has increased. Thus the school's curriculum changes have generally followed a Western libertarian journalism curriculum model (see Figure 9).

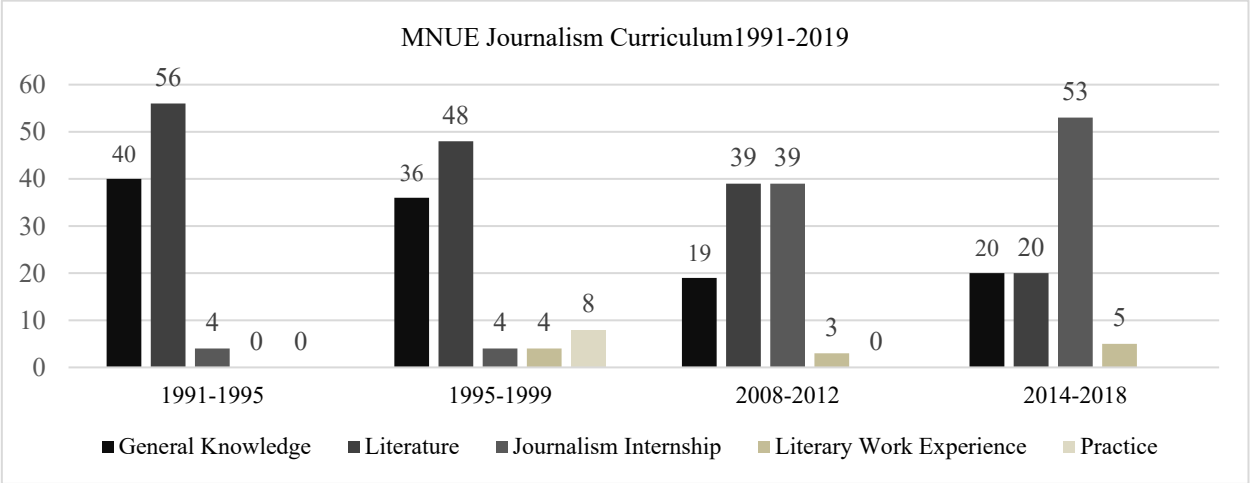


Figure 9. Comparison of MNUE Journalism Curriculum

The reform of the MNUE curriculum has created a program similar to those from the Western educational system due to the emphasis on practice-based learning or practical courses.

Subsequently, in their curriculum updates of 2021, NUM and MNUE compared the programs of similar foreign

universities and evaluated the development status of their programs, and concluded that their programs are in line with international trends.

Thus the curriculum of both NUM and MNUE are currently developing towards programs dominated by practical education, focused on professional subjects, both in terms of content and concepts (see Figure 10).

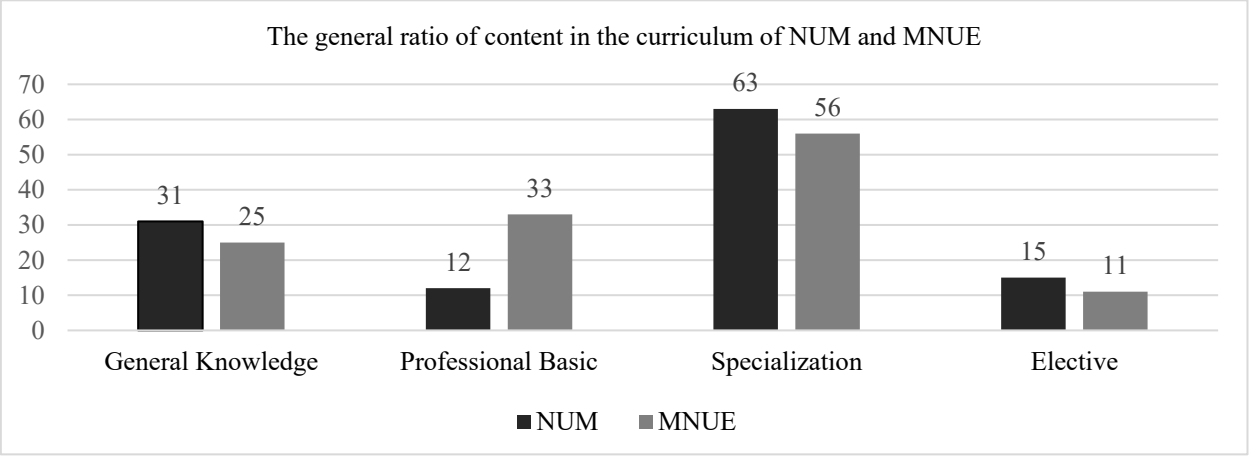


Figure 10. The general ratio of content in the curriculum of NUM and MNUE

Thus the curriculum of both NUM and MNUE are currently developing towards programs dominated by practical education, focused on professional subjects, both in terms of content and concepts.

However, the results of these reformed curricula cannot be directly evaluated at this time, as results of new styles of training are slow to emerge and national institutional reform is a long-term process. In 2023, both universities have again made improvements to their curricula based on the concept of libertarian journalism.

In addition to studying all the subjects taught in higher education institutions, the program and its curriculum were revised to adapt the journalism course to meet Western standards. An important principle of curriculum development in Mongolia was creative reflection of the curricula of foreign countries emphasizing the values of the free press.

4. Discussion

The democratic transition of Mongolia in 1990 brought profound changes not merely to the country's political system but also to the structure and orientation of journalism education. Universities were required to reconsider the content and objectives of their journalism programs to align them with the principles of a free and independent press. During this period, considerable efforts were made to introduce the values of libertarian media theory and integrate them into academic training. The Press Institute, which emerged from the "Free Press" project, played an important role in this process. As a result, short-term training courses for retraining journalists were conducted in stages, and a training program based on the theory and methodology of Western libertarian journalism began to be implemented.

The National University of Mongolia's curriculum reform was determined by educational programs from American universities, whereas the reform at the Mongolian State University of Education drew inspiration from British curricula. Despite being influenced by the educational traditions of two distinct nations, the programs successfully laid the foundations for accountable and professional journalism.

In terms of the extent of curriculum changes, the program of the National University of Mongolia was renewed by 69%, while that of the Mongolian State University of Education was renewed by 75%.

More than 70% of journalism programs in African countries follow the principles and methodologies of the free press. At the same time, there has been a 25% increase in course content that reflects local social and cultural settings (Mazonde, 2001). The transition to global journalism standards in national curricula often poses the difficulty of balancing local socio-political histories with universal professional norms. Universal media freedom, independence, and pluralism principles—frequently rooted in Western, libertarian ideals- must be applied to the unique socio-political and economic contexts of local environments. (Moyo, 2020).

This demonstrates that curriculum reform was carried out with distinctive characteristics and differences among regions. For example, in Eastern European countries, this transition occurred unevenly and gradually over a long period. Ziani et al. (2018) examined the curriculum of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and found that journalism education in the GCC reflects the development trends of the region. In the case of East Germany, however, the program that had trained communist journalists was immediately closed, and West German standards were directly introduced.

In Mongolia, the journalism curriculum underwent a major shift, with professional courses increasing sharply to 60–70 percent, showing a departure from the socialist-era structure dominated by social and political theory, literature, and ideological subjects. This change is indicated by its responsiveness to labor market demand. Newsrooms began requiring graduates trained under the old curriculum to undergo retraining, and many eventually took positions as press officers in the public relations departments of government institutions.

American journalism programs in the 1970s and 1980s took the same approach. In other words, in the early 1990s, “the approach was topical, e.g., the theory and reality of press freedom or responsibility and ethics in journalism” (La Brie, 1981) in Mongolia.

To summarize, ongoing innovations in curriculum design, international collaboration, and research development reflect a dynamic shift in Vietnam’s journalism and communication education landscape (Triệu, 2025). Our research results showed that this process is similar in Mongolia.

However, the transition of journalism education to the theory and concepts of the free press required considerable time, and the main difficulty was that instructors with entrenched old mindsets were largely reluctant to accept these changes.

The transformation of journalism education in post-communist countries is not simply a matter of changing curricula; it occurs amid a conflict of values between the established 'authoritarian culture' of older educators and the 'libertarian freedom' embraced by the new generation. This internal tension between professional roles and deeply rooted cultural habits frequently complicates the practical implementation of democratic journalism standards (Lauk, 2009).

New challenges and trends are also influencing curriculum reform. In particular, the ongoing digital transformation is creating entirely new trends in journalism. This development requires dedicated and in-depth research.

Our study is limited in scope, examining the radical reform of Mongolia’s journalism curriculum mainly through the program changes implemented at the two major universities, with a focus on the significant ideological change from the communist paradigm to the libertarian concept of journalism.

5. Conclusions

The following conclusions have made after studying the state of journalism education in Mongolia through the development of curricula.

From 1960 to 1990, during the socialist period, journalism curricula focused on the training of party ideologues, with Marxist theory occupying most of the curriculum. To this end, when training journalists in the Party Institute, the Soviet communist journalism curriculum was directly copied. Through that program, the first Mongolian journalists were steeped in the history and ideology of the Soviet and Communist parties and ended up as ideologues and agitators of the Party press.

Over the course of these 30 years, the curriculum at NUM maintained the principle of focusing on social studies based on Party history and ideology.

After the victory of the Democratic Revolution in 1990, the free press began to develop in Mongolia, but at first there were no significant changes in the curricula for training professional journalists. Schools implemented an "intermediate program" based on the study of literature, and focused on history and social studies. This transitional program did not break away from the tradition of Soviet-style journalism training, which trained party agitators of the past, nor did itbreak away from the teaching methodology of Communist press theory and practice.

However, since 2000, the reform of the program with the concept of democratic libertarian journalism was carried out, based on the principles of the free press. NUM introduced a new curriculum based on mass communication studies, while MNUE adopted a curriculum dominated by libertarian journalism practices.

In 2010, 2014, and 2019, when the two universities executed four program reforms, they introduced Western-style journalism curricula which are now being implemented as suitable curricula for training free press specialists in a democratic country.

However, the results of these reformed curricula cannot be directly evaluated at this time, as results of new styles of training are slow to emerge and national institutional reform is a long-term process. In 2023, both universities have again made improvements to their curricula based on the concept of libertarian journalism. This curriculum will be in place over the next five years. In this way, the two universities have reformed their curriculums 4 times in the last 23 years, aiming to offer programs that are in line with global standards.

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Author contributions

Prof. Batbaatar Jamyansuren and Prof. Amartuvshin Sukhee were responsible for study design and revising. Prof. Odmandakh Myagmarsuren and Ph.D. Enkhbat Chuluunbaatar was responsible for ensuring an accurate data collection and interpretation. Amartuvshin Sukhee drafted the manuscript and Odmandakh Myagmarsuren. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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