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Industry Perceptions of Journalism Interns' Media Skills Preparedness in Selected Media Organisations in Nakuru City

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to explore media industry perceptions of journalism interns' skill preparedness during internship in selected media organisations in Nakuru City, identify existing skill gaps, and evaluate the role of internships in bridging those gaps. It was guided by Competency Based Theory, and employed a phenomenological design with stratified, systematic, and purposive sampling used to select a sample size of eighteen respondents from target media organisations. Data were collected via interview schedules with the study employing the use of semi-structured interview questions to allow the respondents the freedom to respond extensively, but within the limits of the objective, and were analysed thematically. Findings revealed that journalism interns possessed foundational competencies in news writing, interviewing, basic multimedia production and social media use; however, their preparedness was moderate rather than industry –ready. Significant gaps emerged in advanced multimedia production, data journalism, analytical skills and digital tool application. While interns demonstrated strong theoretical knowledge, they often struggle with practical application in real newsroom environments due to limited exposure, rapid technological changes, and insufficient industry-academia collaboration. Internships play a transformative role by enhancing practical skills, professional discipline, newsroom adaptability and ethical responsibility, though they cannot fully compensate for academic training deficiencies. The article concludes that improving journalism interns' preparedness requires enhanced practical training, regular curriculum updates aligned with industry needs, stronger industry-academia partnerships, and structured internship programmes. These findings contribute to ongoing discussions on aligning journalism education with labour market demands in Kenya.

Key words: Advanced multimedia production, data journalism, internship preparedness, journalism education, media skills gap.



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INTRODUCTION

Internships are structured short-term temporary roles that allow recent graduates to gain practical industry experience, acting as a bridge between academic learning and professional employment by allowing them to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings (NACE, 2021). However, a persistent gap remains between the competencies journalism students acquire in academia and the skills demanded by the industry (Mensing, 2010). While well-structured internships have the potential to close this gap, evidence suggests that this potential remains largely unrealised.

A consistent trend across multiple global contexts is that employers perceive significant skills deficiencies among graduates, even as academic institutions express confidence in their preparedness. Employability skills, both technical and soft, have become a global concern for graduates and employers alike (Raty et al., 2020). In Bangladesh, for instance, universities produce graduates with little regard for employer needs, resulting in a substantial corporate-academia divide (Hoque et al., 2023; Uddin, 2021a, 2021b). Pang et al. (2018) similarly argue that graduate skills must be continuously aligned with employer expectations, yet this alignment remains as an aspiration rather than a practice.

A striking contradiction emerges when comparing institutional self-perception with employer evaluation. In the United States, human resource managers report a disconnect between the skill levels students possess and those required in the workplace (Stewart, 2022). Even more telling, in Indonesia, while 96 per cent of universities believed they had produced competent graduates, only 11 per cent met employer needs—particularly in critical thinking and communication (Bain & Fraser, 2017; Sartika, 2019). This pattern holds across both developed and developing economies, suggesting a profound and persistent disconnect between academic assurance and employer assessment.

The journalism industry itself is undergoing a turbulent change, driven by technological disruption and economic uncertainty (Pavlik, 2000). Modern journalism demands not only traditional training but also continuous adaptation to new technologies and workflows (Srikan et al., 2021). Internships, situated within active media organisations, could theoretically expose graduates to these innovations before they are integrated into curricula. In East Africa, research confirms a marked

skills gap, with university staff, employers, and public servants agreeing that graduates lack general knowledge, employability skills and uncertainty management skills, though leadership and cognitive skills fare somewhat better (Guardia et al., 2021). In Kenya specifically, Ileri (2018) found that media graduates require additional training after employment to perform better competitively. Sitati et al. (2024) advocate for stronger university-industry linkages, arguing that such collaboration would benefit both parties: industry gains skilled workers, while training institutions stay current with technological and dynamic industry needs.

Despite this compelling evidence of a global and local skills gap, and despite the widely acknowledged potential of internships to serve as a bridging mechanism, there remains a conspicuous lack of empirical research examining how internships actually function in this role from the perspective of industry actors who directly supervise and evaluate interns. Little is known about media managers' specific experiences: what skills interns possess upon arrival, what gaps emerge during the internship, whether and how internships address those gaps, and what deficiencies remain upon completion. In the Kenyan context, and specifically in Nakuru City, an emerging media hub, no known study has systematically captured media managers' perspectives on journalism graduates' preparedness as revealed through internship performance. Consequently, educators and policymakers lack evidence-based guidance for structuring internships to maximise their bridging function, leaving the persistent skills gap unaddressed and graduates ill-prepared for a rapidly evolving media landscape.

It is this gap that the present study addresses. This research sought to unravel the perspectives of media managers who directly oversee and interact with journalism graduates during internships in selected media organisations in Nakuru City, Kenya. By centring on media managers as the frontline actors who supervise interns and subsequently make hiring decisions, this study captures critical insights into whether internships currently fulfil their intended bridging function, what specific skill gaps persist despite internship experience, and how internships may be redesigned to better align academic preparation with industry expectations. Nakuru City is a hub of media activity, hosting numerous media organisations that offer internships to graduates from institutions of higher learning across the country.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scope of Graduates' Skills Preparedness

Skills preparedness refers to the state of being adequately equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge, and competencies to perform tasks, adapt to changes, and meet the demands of a specific role, industry or environment. It involves proactive learning, training, and development to ensure individuals or organisations can respond to current and future challenges such as evolving job requirements, economic shifts and technological advancements (World Economic Forum, 2020). The performance of the mainstream media in Kenya is closely linked to its relationship with the level of journalism training and preparedness of graduates. It is believed that appropriate training provides journalists with the knowledge and skills to write accurate, fair, balanced, and impartial stories (Mbeke, 2010). However, this foundational study is now over a decade old, and Kenya's media landscape has since undergone significant transformation, including digital migration, converged newsrooms, the rise of social media as a primary news source, and the financial collapse of several legacy outlets.

More recent Kenyan scholarship has begun addressing these shifts. Ileri (2018), in a national survey of practising journalists conducted, found that 91 per cent of journalists acknowledged the need for further training beyond their current qualifications. While Ileri's study did not directly survey employers, his findings revealed a perception gap with reported deficiencies in digital audio editing, online content management systems, and data visualisation. Critically, however, Ileri's (2018) study differs from this study in two ways: it captured the journalist's perspective rather than the employers and it relied on self-assessment rather than observed performance during internships. This study, therefore, complements Ileri's work by shifting from self-reports to media managers' direct evaluation of interns' demonstrated skills and focusing specifically on Nakuru City, a context Ileri's national aggregation obtained. Similarly, Chemwaina (2017), in a study of convergent newsrooms in Nairobi, reported that media managers considered multimedia production and social media analytics as critical skills conspicuously absent among new hires.

Unlike Chemwaina's Nairobi-centric focus, this study examines whether these same convergence skills are expected and found lacking in Nakuru City's smaller,

resource- constrained newsrooms, where convergence may take different forms due to limited equipment and multi-tasking demands. Ngugi and Mberia (2020) observed that despite the proliferation of media training institutions in Kenya, the quality of graduates remains inconsistent, with many lacking basic news writing and intervening competencies. While Ngugi and Mberia identified the problem of inconsistency, they did not investigate the internship as a potential equalising or differentiating mechanism. This study fills this gap by examining whether structured internships can address these basic competency deficiencies in the Nakuru context. Nguyen et al. (2019) advocate for work-integrated programs such as internships to enhance skill preparedness in graduates, a recommendation that has guided urgency in the Kenyan context.

According to Succi and Canovi (2020), employers consistently report dissatisfaction with graduates' readiness for workplace demands, particularly in soft skills such as communication, problem-solving and teamwork. Their survey revealed that 60 per cent of employers in Europe found graduates inadequately prepared for collaborative environments despite strong technical expertise. Thornton and Keith (2009) found that U.S journalism interns recognised a gap between classroom and newsroom expectations, particularly regarding rapidly evolving skills. Additionally, Osepashvili (2020) observes that the digital transformation of the media landscape necessitates proficiency in multimedia journalism and digital storytelling, with employers expecting graduates to possess a deep understanding of current digital media trends and the ability to engage audiences through innovative storytelling techniques.

Jackson et al., (2021), identified a mismatch between employer evaluations and graduates' self-assessments with graduates over-estimating their leadership and problem-solving capabilities. However, a paradox emerges from the literature: while Succi and Canovi (2020) report widespread employer dissatisfaction, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2021) found that 60 per cent of interns received job offers from their internship employers. This apparent contradiction (unprepared graduates still get hired) suggests that employers may be hiring for potential rather than current readiness, or that skills gaps are tolerated in entry-level roles. This study explored whether this paradox holds in Nakuru City's media industry.

Alladine's (2022) study of Lebanese journalism students found overwhelming prioritisation of traditional skills communication (100%), accuracy (95.6%), and truth seeking (97.8%), while digital competencies such as multimedia (86.9%) and computer skills (67.3%) were rated as important but secondary. Notably, students viewed charisma (52.1%) and personality (45.6%) as relevant, suggesting an awareness of the performative dimensions of broadcast journalism. Cruza (2026) notes that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated demand for digital proficiency, exposing inadequacies in graduates' readiness for technology-driven workplaces; his study of 1500 STEM graduates found only 34 per cent confident using advanced data tools despite 89 per cent having completed relevant coursework. However, Jorre and Oliver (2018) criticised the reliance on graduates' employability rates as a measurement of preparedness, arguing that such metrics overlook under-employment and skills under-utilisation. They proposed holistic frameworks combining self-assessment and employer feedback, an approach this study adopts by centring on media managers' perspectives. The above proposition, however, does not reflect the specific state of the Nakuru City media industry job market, which is characterised by smaller newsrooms, fewer specialised roles, and resource constraints distinct from Nairobi and global contexts.

Skills and Competencies Required by the Media Industry

According to Williams (2017), media skills are the abilities and knowledge areas related to the collection, processing, packaging, and dissemination of media messages. This includes the ability to use technology and software to create and distribute media content. Potter (2016) refers to media skills as the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and create media in various forms. Spacey (2022) defines media skills as the ability to search, find, navigate, and use media content and services.

According to Poynter and Klinger (2014), creating a successful journalist is not like passing a recipe down through generations. There are no particular core skills that journalists need to be successful. It is a list that is forever changing and evolving, just like journalism itself. What was, in one era, an essential journalism skill might be utterly irrelevant in another. Similarly, Krachvuk (2011) notes that to remain competitive, every journalist should possess a certain set of skills to navigate the ever-

changing media landscape. This implies that journalism trainers and the media organisations need to equip learners and staff with relevant competencies. In the African context, Finlay et al. (2026) observed that journalism skills in sub-Saharan Africa are shaped by unique constraints, including unreliable internet connectivity, irregular electrical supply and limited access to high-end production software, necessitating adaptive competencies that prioritise resourcefulness over sophisticated tool mastery. Finlay et al.'s continental analysis, while invaluable, did not specifically examine Kenya's secondary cities. This study applies his framework to Nakuru, asking whether adaptive competencies and resourcefulness are indeed the skills media managers prioritise when resource constraints are the norm rather than the exception.

Haak et al. (2012) posit that in the current technology-driven environment of accelerated transformation, journalism has gradually shifted how it is produced, distributed, and consumed by the audience, leading to an increased demand for a dynamic set of skills and competencies. Krachvuk (2011) observes that journalism is no longer about publishing, but rather it is about communicating and engaging in dialogue with the audience. Ugangu (2013) notes that the internet has transformed how news and other media programs are sourced, gathered, and transmitted to mass audiences in Kenya, with journalists increasingly producing reports across multiple media genres and using social networks, such as blogs and social media, to engage readers. Hence, unless journalism graduates keep abreast with certain media skills, chances are that they will lag and lack essential skills (Newton et al., 2003).

Otieno and Njeru (2020) found that Kenyan community radio stations, which form a significant portion of the media landscape outside Nairobi, require journalists to possess additional skills in audience interaction management, vernacular language proficiency, and mobile-based reporting due to limited studio infrastructure. Hence, unless journalism graduates keep abreast of evolving media skills, they risk lagging behind. Otieno and Njeru's focus on community radio, a vital but often overlooked sector, provides a useful comparative lens for this study, as Nakuru City hosts both commercial and community media. However, their study did not examine whether journalism graduates arrive with these specific competencies or acquire them during internships. This study addresses this by directly

assessing skill preparedness in Nakuru's mixed media ecology.

Media organisations are adopting a multiplatform approach to production and distribution (Siapera & Veglis, 2012) with employers seeking individuals with converged skills (Flores, 2010). According to Chemwaina (2017), media convergence is an ongoing process, occurring at various intersections of media technologies, industries, content, and audiences, where media will be everywhere, and we will use all kinds of media in relation to each other. Flores (2010) argues that in the wake of converged media environments, journalists need to be multi-skilled in both the core journalistic skills of research, writing, communicating/presenting, and interviewing as well as digital media skills such as the use of editing software, blogging, graphic design, operation of websites, and mobile journalism skills.

However, as Chemwaina (2017) studies convergence in a Nairobi-centric context, the extent to which these requirements apply to Nakuru City's media industry remains unexamined. Wanyonyi and Kurgat (2021) extended this line of inquiry to western Kenya, finding that journalists in Eldoret and Kisumu relied more heavily on WhatsApp for newsgathering and distribution than their counterparts, suggesting that definitions of digital skills must be contextualised to local technological ecologies. Wanyonyi and Kurgat's study of Western Kenyan cities is the closest precedent to the present Nakuru-focused investigation. However, their research examined practising journalists, not interns, and did not assess skill preparedness during internships. This study builds directly on their call for contextualised digital skills definitions by focusing on the internship as the entry point where these skills are first tested.

According to Jenkins et al. (2017), modern media professionals require advanced digital literacy, including proficiency in data analytics, social media management, and multimedia production. They also emphasised the need for skills in artificial intelligence (AI) tools and immersive technologies to create engaging content. Similarly, Potter and McDougall (2017) argue that media literacy now extends to understanding algorithms and digital distribution platforms to optimise audience reach. Tandoc et al. (2018) note that the proliferation of misinformation and fake news has underscored the importance of ethical decision-making and critical

thinking. Journalists must verify sources rigorously and navigate biases.

Ireton & Posetti (2018) also note that in this age of digital transformation, it is a time for news media to adhere more closely to professional standards and ethics, abstain from publishing unchecked information for mere public curiosity. Similarly, Wasserman and Madrid-Morales (2021) further emphasise that ethical competencies such as accountability and transparency are vital for maintaining public trust in an era of fake news; their comparative study of 18 African countries found that Kenyan journalists rated verification skills as the most critical yet least mastered competency.

Picard (2014) highlights adaptability, noting that media practitioners must continuously upskill to respond to industry disruptions and shifting consumption patterns. Chen (2024) argue that globalisation and diverse audiences necessitate media practitioners to have cultural sensitivity, citing cultural competence as critical for media working in a transnational context, requiring awareness of linguistic nuances and socio-political dynamics. In Kenya's ethnically diverse setting, Mwangi and Otieno (2019) found that journalists covering pastoralist communities in the Rift Valley, including Nakuru's peripheries, required cultural competence to avoid reinforcing stereotypes and to navigate sensitive reporting on land, ethnicity, and resource conflicts.

A study by Akdag & Ceylan (2022) found that modern media requires creativity and trans-media storytelling skills, with professionals crafting narratives that span multiple platforms, underscoring adaptability and innovation in content creation. All the above requirements, however, may not reflect the requirements of the Nakuru city media industry job market, where resource constraints often limit access to advanced AI tools, immersive technologies, and specialised data journalism platforms. This study, therefore, intended to identify the skill requirements in the specific context of the Nakuru City media industry job market, factoring in local industry shifts.

Industry Skill Requirements Vis-à-Vis Graduates' Skill Sets

According to Newman's (2021) Reuters Institute Survey, the media industry increasingly prioritises digital and multimedia competencies, including mobile-first content, data journalism and audience analytics. The rise of

immersive technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR) and AI-driven tools in the recent past further complicates skill requirements (Finberg and Klinger, 2014). Newman's (2021) and Laws' (2020) further argue that while journalism programs may teach foundational digital skills like video editing, they often fail to integrate AI, VR, blockchain or advanced data visualisation tools that are now prevalent in modern newsrooms, thus limiting opportunities for graduates lacking proficiency in these areas. Laws (2020) notes that while these technologies are gaining traction, few graduates possess expertise in them, creating a niche demand. However, as argued earlier, these high-end technological requirements may not directly apply to Nakuru City's media houses, which typically operate with fewer resources and less specialised roles.

Muller (2014) reported that graduates often lack confidence in digital production and media law application, suggesting that skills lag behind technological advancements. While some institutions integrate digital tools in their training, Blom et al. (2012) argue that such training is inconsistent globally. Spyridou et al. (2013) also note that graduates often lack proficiency in multimedia editing tools and analytics platforms, limiting their readiness for converged newsrooms. Bell and Owen (2017) found that only 12 per cent of the graduates under study felt confident in using data tools, despite 68 per cent of newsrooms requiring them.

Similarly, Finberg and Klinger (2014) report employers' frustrations with gaps in video production and social media strategy skills. According to Moldovan (2019), this gap has been growing due to constant changes in industrial sectors resulting in a disruptive change in operating environments and workflows caused by rapid technological advancements, changes in audience behaviour, and economic pressures facing the industry. These changes modify employees' tasks, which demand new skills at all value chain stages of the industry.

Leech (2021) highlights that despite the evolution in journalism programs, a gap remains between the skills imparted in academic settings and the demands of the media industry. He highlights that graduates often lack hands-on experience with industry-standard tools, e.g., analytics software, leaving graduates under-prepared in some aspects of modern journalism. Finberg and Klinger (2014) report that only 30 per cent of United States

journalism training institutions have a formal partnership with news organisations to co-design curricula and continuously update curricula, leaving graduates underprepared for platform-centric roles. In Kenya, the situation is more pronounced. A survey by the Media Council of Kenya (2022) found that only 23 per cent of journalism training institutions had any form of industry advisory board, and only 15 per cent reviewed their curricula annually in response to industry feedback.

Spyridou et al. (2013) note that resource inequality widens skill disparities; while European training institutions often partner with tech. firms, African and Asian institutions struggle to teach basic digital tools. This global inequality is particularly relevant to Kenya, where journalism training institutions face resource constraints that may be further magnified in secondary cities like Nakuru, away from Nairobi's concentration of media infrastructure and industry partnerships. Gathara (2020) documented that Nakuru-based journalism students at one public university had access to only eight digital cameras for a cohort of 120 students, and the computer lab ran editing software that was three versions behind industry standards.

The Role of Internships in Media Skills Development

Academic institutions play a significant role in shaping students into productive graduates (Saeed et al., 2018). While the role of higher education is to prepare students with knowledge and skills to handle their prospective careers, internships contribute crucially to achieving this goal by imparting practical skills and experience to graduates to make them professionals in their respective careers (Njura & Kaberia, et al., 2020). In Kenya, the Media Council of Kenya (2021) mandates that all journalism students complete a minimum of eight weeks of industrial attachment as a condition for accreditation, recognising internships as a formal component of professional preparation. This study investigates the on-the-ground reality of this mandate in Nakuru, asking whether internships actually implement, not as mandated, deliver skill development.

According to Lauber et al. (2004), internships are unique educational programs that aim to integrate study with a planned and performance-related experience, playing a significant role in media skills development by providing hands-on experience that bridges theoretical knowledge and practical application, thus enhancing interns' competencies in real-world settings. Similarly, Isabella

(2023) notes that internships stand as the cornerstone of a comprehensive journalism education. They bridge the gap between theory and practice, providing interns with a profound understanding of the industry's inner workings. By immersing themselves in real newsrooms, interns gain insights into ethical, logistical, and creative facets of journalism that textbooks alone cannot provide.

In the Kenyan context, Kanyanjua and Kamau (2013) found that journalism internships exposed graduates to real editorial pressures, deadline management and the practical application of media law areas poorly simulated in classroom settings. Their study of 150 journalism interns in Nairobi reported that 84 per cent felt their internship experiences were more valuable for skill development than their final year of coursework. Kanyanjua and Kamau's findings are highly encouraging for the potential of internships, but their study relied entirely on intern self-reports, not employer assessments. An intern may feel more skilled without those skills being recognised or valued by the employer. This study therefore provides a crucial corrective by asking media managers, the evaluators who decide whether interns are ready for employment, and whether they observe the same skill development that interns report feeling.

Gault et al. (2000) argue that internships are pivotal in fostering both soft and hard skills. Interns engaged in substantive tasks demonstrated significant gains in job-specific competencies. However, Narayanan et al. (2010) argue that the quality of skills development depends on internship design. This caveat is critical: poorly structured internships with vague roles and inadequate mentorship may fail to deliver anticipated benefits (Taylor, 2014). Unpaid internships, prevalent in media fields (Perlin, 2012), raise further concerns about equity and exploitation, as they may exclude students without financial means and may not provide the promised skill development (Siebert & Wilson, 2013).

Knouse and Fontenot (2008) found that internships help students refine career goals and build confidence. Their study reported that 74 per cent of interns clarified their career paths post-internship, attributing this to exposure to real-world challenges. Similarly, Kanyanjua and Kamau (2013) note that internships expose students to real work, helping them gain perspective on career preferences and acquire best practices according to their specialisation. D'Abate et al. (2009) posit that self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura's social learning theory,

is strengthened through mastery of experiences and mentorship; thus, interns who receive constructive feedback exhibit higher career decision-making self-efficacy. A study by Mwikya and Mwanzia (2021) of Kenyan university journalism interns found that those placed in newsrooms with dedicated internship coordinators showed 64 per cent greater improvement in news writing skills compared to those placed without structured supervision, underscoring the role of mentorship quality.

According to the National Association of Colleges Employers (2021), internships offer professional networks that translate to job opportunities for interns, with over 60 per cent of interns receiving job offers from their internship employers. Baynit and Ngussa (2021) note that internships provide graduates with the opportunity to network with industry professionals, building connections that can lead to job offers, mentorship opportunities, and insights into industry standards and expectations. Similarly, Sitti et al. (2023) found that internships enable professional networking, which is beneficial for future job searches and career growth.

They also note that these interactions provide insights into industry trends and expectations. Silva et al. (2018) found that employers increasingly prioritise internship experience, with graduates with internships securing employment 22 per cent faster than those without. Hanusch (2017) found that 72 per cent of journalism graduates credited internships with securing their first job. A Kenyan study by Odhiambo and Achieng (2023) found that 68 per cent of journalism hires of Nation Media Group's regional bureaus had completed at least one internship, though they noted that interns from Nairobi-based universities were 3.5 times more likely to receive job offers than those from upcountry institutions, reflecting geographic inequalities in internship quality and networking opportunities. However, as noted earlier, these findings from global contexts may not fully reflect the Nakuru media industry scene, where formal internship programmes and smaller newsrooms may limit both opportunity and quality.

According to Makhadi and Diederichs (2021), work-integrated learning experiences provide a bridge between the academic present and a professional future requiring a three-way partnership between the student, the workplace organisation, and the training provider (a

tertiary institution) with each party assuming specific functions, and achieving benefits. The Media Council of Kenya (2022) has attempted to formalise this partnership through its accreditation guidelines, which require training institutions to demonstrate internship supervision capacity and industry linkages.

The Kenyan Media Landscape and the Case of Nakuru City

The Kenyan media industry comprises approximately 100 FM radio stations, 40 television stations (including free-to-air and pay TV), and several national and regional newspapers (Communication Authority of Kenya, 2023). However, the majority of these outlets are headquartered in Nairobi, creating a concentration of media infrastructure, specialised roles and internship opportunities in the capital. Secondary cities such as Nakuru, Kisumu, Eldoret and Mombasa host regional bureaus of national media houses, community radio stations, and independent online news platforms. Nakuru city, as Kenya's fourth largest urban centre and a growing economic hub, has seen an expansion of media activity, including branches of Nation Media Group, Standard Group, Royal Media Services, and numerous local FM stations. Despite this growth, no known study has systematically examined the skill preparedness of journalism interns in Nakuru's media organisation. The resource constraints, smaller newsroom sizes, and multi-tasking demands typical of regional bureaus and community media organisations may produce skill expectations distinct from those in Nairobi or global contexts.

Summary and Research Gap

The literature consistently identifies a global skills gap between journalism graduates' academic preparation and industry expectations, particularly in digital and multimedia competencies. Internships are widely recognised as a potential bridging mechanism, though their effectiveness depends on design, mentorship quality, and structural factors such as pay and role clarity. However, the overwhelming majority of existing studies have been conducted in North American, European, and Asian contexts, with limited empirical research on African journalism internships. In Kenya, while scholars have noted the need for extra training for media graduates (Ileri, 2018) and called for stronger university-industry linkages (Sitati et al., 2024), no known study has specifically examined media managers' perspectives on journalism interns' skills preparedness

during internships in secondary cities such as Nakuru. Furthermore, the literature lacks systematic documentation of what specific skills interns possess upon arrival, what gaps emerge during the internship, whether and how internships address those gaps and what deficiencies remain upon completion, all from the perspective of the industry supervisors who evaluate and ultimately hire graduates.

This study, therefore, addresses that gap by exploring media managers' perceptions of journalism interns' skill preparedness in selected media organisations in Nakuru City, identifying existing skill gaps and evaluating the role of internships in bridging those gaps.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study adopted a phenomenological research design to explore media managers' perceptions of journalism interns' skill preparedness in Nakuru city. The target population comprised 42 media managers/internship supervisors/across radio, television and print media organisations in Nakuru. Using stratified sampling, media houses were divided into 3 strata (radio, TV, print). From which nine media houses were selected through systematic sampling, four radio stations (Sauti ya Mwananchi, Egerton Radio, Radio Amani, MBCI Radio). Three TV stations (KBC TV bureau, MBCI TV, Riri TV) and two newspapers (The Standard, Nation Newspaper). From these, purposive sampling was used to select 18 participants (two per media house) who directly supervise interns.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, audio recordings and note-taking. Thematic analysis was employed on transcribed data to identify patterns and themes related to skill preparedness, competency gaps, and the role of internship. Ethical considerations included obtaining approval from the university ethics committee, NACOSTI, and relevant media house administrators. Participants were informed of voluntary participation, study purpose, and confidentiality, with identities anonymised. The researcher ensured plagiarism-free work and adherence to research integrity standards.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Scope of Media Skills Possessed by Journalism Graduates During Internship in Selected Media Organisations in Nakuru City

This section presents findings aligned with the first research objective: to assess the scope of media skills

possessed by journalism graduates during an internship in selected media organisations in Nakuru City. Respondents comprising radio, television, and print managers were asked to evaluate how well prepared journalism interns were upon first reporting for an internship, specifically focusing on technical competencies (writing, editing, multimedia production, soft skills (communication, teamwork, adaptability, professionalism) and digital skills.

The analysis revealed that industry practitioners perceive a mixed and often uneven scope of skills among journalism interns. Most respondents described interns as moderately prepared, particularly in news writing and communication. Several editors noted that interns understand a news story structure and can produce simple reports with guidance. The findings are categorised into two main themes: foundational strengths and critical deficiencies.

Common Strengths and Deficits in the Skill Set Scope

Most respondents acknowledged that interns arrive with a competent grasp of traditional journalism fundamentals. They demonstrated adequate competence in basic news writing skills, voice reporting skills, script writing, audio voicing, feature writing, research work and are willing to learn. As one newspaper editor (respondent 15) said:

Most lack practical skills but are committed to learning and the traditional core skills are usually there.

Respondent 2 (a radio supervisor) also said:

Most interns demonstrate a strong eagerness to learn while on the job.

This suggests that academic training successfully imparts core journalistic skills.

Most interns were deemed competent in basic news writing, voicing, reporting and research skills; however, limitations in practical, technical, and digital-first skills were a dominant theme. Multimedia production skills were described as basic rather than market-ready. Respondents described most interns as theoretically aware but practically inept in key journalism skills. Most supervisors reported that few interns could independently shoot and edit a professional standard video package or

produce audio reports with clean, natural sound. One TV producer (respondent 11) stated:

In shooting sequences and editing a broadcast standard on a tight deadline, most are basically green and have to learn on the job.

Another respondent (respondent 1, a radio supervisor) stated:

'The theory is okay but the application is wanting'. This gap was also highlighted by respondent 5 (a radio producer), who vividly recalled how an intern could write detailed scripts but could not grasp the confidence needed to go out and bring the story to fruition.

Regarding soft skills, respondents identified strengths in willingness to learn, respect for authority, enthusiasm and creativity, but observed that most interns failed to ask critical questions concerning assignments and also struggled to beat deadlines.

Some interns are brilliant writers but struggle with newsroom pressure and deadlines (respondent 15).

Other noted deficiencies included limited initiative in seeking stories, difficulty in receiving constructive criticism and inadequate interpersonal communication with sources and colleagues. Several respondents reported that interns struggled with collaborative workflows characteristic of converged newsrooms unlike the solitary nature of most academic assignments, professional journalism requires seamless coordination with photographers, editors, producers and social media teams. Respondent 9 stated:

Interns often work in isolation, submitting their piece without considering how it fits into the broader bulletin or digital package.

These findings align with Succi and Canovi's (2020) observation that 60 per cent of European employers found graduates inadequately prepared for collaborative environments.

Beyond technical and communication competencies, respondents identified professionalism as an area of

concern. Punctuality, appropriate dress code, respect for hierarchical decision-making and understanding of workplace politics were noted as challenges. Respondent 4 noted:

Some interns treat the newsroom like a classroom-they expect to be taught rather than to contribute.

This suggests a misalignment between academic expectations and professional expectations.

Adaptation and Evolving Trends

Interns' adaptation to professional environments depended on personal initiative, the quality of assigned supervisors and the media organisations they are interning at. Factors like proactivity, openness to criticism, and previous informal media experience (such as in blogging and institutional radios) influenced adaptation. Respondent 12 (a TV producer) stated that:

Personal initiative is key for interns to adapt and be able to fill gaps in the skills they lack.

He gave an example of an intern who had come lacking the technical skills needed in TV production but because he had initiative and willingness to learn, he was able to improve and become proficient within a period of three months.

A clear consensus emerged regarding trends in media technology and standards. According to respondent 17, a veteran print journalist, legacy media such as newspapers need to adapt to digital tools, due to a decline in newspaper consumption as the market shifts to online sources; he noted that there was a slight improvement among interns in familiarity with digital tools, but more needs to be done. The majority of respondents emphasised that adaptability largely determined internship success.

Most respondents noted that interns gradually adapt within the first few weeks. Adaptation speed between different interns was, however, influenced by mentorship quality, prior practical exposure, personal initiative and confidence level. Also, interns who actively sought feedback from their supervisors improved faster than passive ones.

Discussion

The findings presented reveal a fundamental paradox that lies at the centre of contemporary journalism education and its intersection with professional practice: on one hand, journalism interns have a wide nominal knowledge base (awareness of concepts): they are conversant with language of digital media, familiar with range of platforms and can articulate theoretical principles; on the other hand they possess a narrow range of executable skills; and they struggle to translate this awareness into practical on time production ready outputs. This paradox constitutes the central tension in industry perceptions of graduate preparedness.

This reinforces the concept of the 'application gap' where academic learning remains abstract until contextualised by real-world practice (Sewchurran & Hofmeyr, 2020). The application gap is not merely a deficiency in individual graduates but a structural feature of education systems that have not fully adapted to a converged, digitally mediated media environment. Within the classroom setting, the students learn concepts with isolation, i.e., they discuss ethics in abstract terms without the complexities of newsroom dilemmas and study multimedia production without the pressures of breaking news deadlines. The results demonstrate that this form of learning produces graduates who can define, describe and discuss but struggle to execute and deliver.

The results further suggest that curricula are reacting to technological change but may be doing so superficially, inadvertently creating graduates who are 'digitally literate but journalistically shallow'. As documented in the literature review on journalism education by Deuze & Witschge (2018), Fenton (2010), many academic programmes have responded to the digital transformation of the media industry by adding units on social media, digital tools and multimedia production, without fundamentally rethinking the structural organisation of journalism curriculum. These additions, while well-intentioned, often result in a fragmented learning experience rather than being integrated into the core of journalistic training.

This fragmented approach leads to the creation of graduates who possess surface-level familiarity with digital tools and platforms but lack the deeper journalistic competencies that differentiate a professional from an amateur. These deeper competencies include: the capacity to exercise sound ethical judgement in complex

situations; the ability to verify information and combat misinformation; and the skill to identify a story's significance and communicate it with nuance and context (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). As respondent 10 noted, the current system produces graduates who can collect information but struggle to interrogate it; this echoes concerns about the erosion of investigative and analytical capacities in an era of speed and technological determinism.

The phenomenon of digital superficiality brings about significant consequences for the journalism profession. When graduates enter the workforce with strong technical skills but underdeveloped critical professional competencies, they risk becoming content technicians rather than journalists (Deuze & Witschge, 2018). Content technicians can produce, distribute, and promote content efficiently, but lack the intellectual tools to differentiate substantive reporting from propaganda, to prioritise stories that serve the public interest and to navigate ethical complications of modern journalism. In this era characterised by rampant misinformation and declining public trust in the media, there is a need for journalists who are not only digitally skilled but also analytically stringent (Ward, 2019; Newman et al., 2023).

Addressing the application gap and digital shallowness requires a rudimentary reevaluation of teaching approaches in journalism education. Literature points to several directions. First, there is a growing consensus around the value of experiential and project-based learning that immerses students in realistic, sustained journalistic practice (Mensing, 2010). When students produce content for real audiences, operate under deadlines, and receive feedback from practising professionals, the abstraction of classroom learning is replaced by the concreteness of professional accountability. Second, there is a need for deeper industry-academia collaboration that goes beyond occasional guest lectures to encompass curriculum co-design, joint research, and sustained mentorship (Sewchurran & Hofmeyr, 2020).

The results in objective one lend empirical support to these teaching directions for journalism training institutions. Respondents emphasised that interns who had prior experience in campus media, who demonstrated initiative to pitch stories and who approached criticism with a learning orientation were far more likely to

succeed than those who merely possessed a list of technical competencies in their credentials.

Summary of Findings: Scope of Media Skills Possessed by Interns

The findings revealed that journalism interns possessed a mixed scope of skills, characterised by foundational strengths but significant practical deficiencies. Interns demonstrated a competent grasp of traditional journalism fundamentals, including basic news writing, audio voicing, interviewing, script writing, voice reporting and presenting, feature writing, research work and the willingness to learn. Their preparedness was described as moderate rather than industry-ready, while theoretical knowledge was generally strong, practical application was limited. The most critical deficiencies were observed in technical, digital and multimedia competencies, including video production, audio editing, poor analytical depth, and socio-media management for professional purposes and data journalism. While interns exhibited soft skills such as teamwork, communication, enthusiasm and willingness to learn, their ability to independently produce content across multiple platforms to a professional standard was limited. Adaptation to the professional environment played a major role in determining performance during internship and depended largely on personal initiative, quality of mentorship, and prior informal media experience.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: Based on the findings, the following conclusion were drawn:

Disconnect Between Academic Training and Industry Reality

There exists a fundamental disconnect between the skills imparted by journalism training institutions and the competencies demanded by the contemporary media industry in Nakuru city. While graduates possessed sound theoretical foundations, they lacked advanced practical competencies in applied digital, multimedia, and analytical skills required to function effectively in converged newsrooms.

This disconnect suggested that journalism curricula may not have kept pace with the rapid technological and structural transformations in the media landscape.

The Evolving Definition of Journalistic Competence

The study concluded that the definition of a competent journalist has evolved significantly. The industry no longer seeks specialists in a single medium but rather platform-agnostic storytellers who combine technical versatility with strong analytical and ethical faculties. Graduates who could not demonstrate this hybrid profile faced significant employability challenges, as the market increasingly favoured adaptable, self-sufficient, and business-aware content professionals.

Systemic Nature of the Skills Gap

The skills gap identified was not merely a deficiency in individual graduates but a systemic issue rooted in the different operational environments of academia and industry. Universities operate on multi-year curriculum cycles, while the media industry evolves in real-time with technological advancements. Without structured mechanisms for continuous feedback and collaboration between these two spheres, the gap is likely to persist and potentially widen.

Internship as a Missed Opportunity

While internships hold immense potential for professional development, this potential is currently underutilised. The internship experience is too often unstructured, inadequately mentored, and insufficient in duration. Consequently, what should be a capstone experience for refining industry-ready skills often became a remedial crash course on foundational competencies. This represented a missed opportunity for both graduates and the industry.

Overall, the study concludes that improving journalism graduates' preparedness requires curriculum reform, enhanced practical training, industry involvement and structured internship programmes.

Conclusions clearly stated or enumerated drawing from the results. It should be a summary of not more than 250 words.

Recommendations: Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made;

Recommendations for Journalism Training Institutions

Curricula must be overhauled to make digital-first, multimedia, and convergent storytelling courses

mandatory, including video/ audio production, data visualisation, and web analytics. Simulated newsrooms functioning as campus media outlets operating under real deadlines should be established to reduce interns' transition shock. Institutions must formalise industry-academia partnerships for curriculum advisory boards and equipment sharing, while investing in modern multimedia equipment aligned with industry standards.

Recommendations for Media Organisations

Structured internship programmes with clear learning objectives, trained mentors, and regular feedback sessions must be developed. Where feasible, internships should extend to at least six months to enable meaningful skill development. Standardised evaluation tools assessing technical, analytical, ethical, and professional competencies should be created and shared with training institutions to inform curriculum improvements.

Recommendations for Policy and Regulatory Bodies

National internship guidelines with standardised assessment criteria and minimum mentorship requirements should be developed. Accreditation bodies must mandate evidence of industry collaboration and modern equipment for programme approval. Government and development partners should provide targeted funding for training equipment and explore public-private partnerships for resource sharing.

Recommendations for Further Research

Priority areas include tracer studies to track long-term skill gap resolution, comparative studies across Kenyan cities, intern perspective research, action research on specific interventions (simulated newsrooms, extended internships), quantitative measurement of skill gaps, curriculum content analysis benchmarked against industry requirements, and national-level investigation of digital transformation's impact on journalism education.

Contribution of the Study

This study contributed to understanding how media organisations in Nakuru City perceive journalism interns' preparedness and highlights the need for stronger alignment between journalism education and industry demands. It provides evidence-based insights that can inform curricula reform, internship structuring, and industry-academia partnerships.

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