

AI in Journalism Education: Curriculum Development and Implementation of Journalism in BRICS Universities

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Abstract

This study employs content analysis and semi-structured in-depth interviews to examine how journalism education across BRICS countries has responded to the rise of AI and adjusted its core paradigms. In this study, BRICS refers to the expanded BRICS grouping, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. It combines latent Dirichlet allocation topic modeling of university journalism curricula with 15 interviews of China-based journalism educators. We selected 10 representative BRICS universities with journalism and communication programs as samples, after which we compiled training frameworks, syllabi, and teaching documents for all their AI-related courses, and used the LDA model to extract core topics and to conduct manual qualitative content analysis across five dimensions: course localization, technical tools, skill guidance, teaching content, and values. The interview results provided valuable supplementary insights.

Keywords

AI; AI curriculum construction; curriculum construction; journalism education; BRICS universities

1. Introduction

As defined by de-Lima-Santos and Ceron (2022), AI refers to a systematic, step-by-step approach to problem-solving. Over recent years, the integration of AI into journalism education and professional practice has been extensively explored in Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) countries. Yet scholarly engagement with AI's impact remains limited in non-WEIRD contexts, especially across

developing nations and emerging markets. Journalism scholars have long disproportionately centered Western countries, neglecting other world regions—most notably Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia (Hanitzsch et al., 2012; Mesquita & de-Lima-Santos, 2021; Soto-Sanfiel et al., 2022). Indeed, research produced from non-WEIRD and Global South contexts can help challenge Western-centric assumptions and foster a more inclusive understanding of journalism theory (Mutsvairo et al., 2021). Against this backdrop, this article addresses this existing gap by examining how AI is reshaping journalism education and curricular practice in the Global South.

This study focuses on three core issues in non-WEIRD nations: the evolving perceptions of AI among students, educators, and industry representatives; the current status of AI-related courses in regional journalism schools; and key barriers to course implementation, such as limited infrastructure, access to advanced technologies, and resistance to change (Ncube et al., 2025). We seek to clarify both AI's potential to expand access to journalistic practice and education, and the obstacles that must be addressed to achieve effective integration. Ultimately, this article aims to propose a systematic, forward-looking framework for embedding AI into journalism education in non-WEIRD countries, supporting these nations to better respond to the ongoing digital transformation of media ecosystems.

2. Literature Review

As AI becomes increasingly embedded in global social and economic systems, its role in national development strategies has drawn growing scholarly and policy attention worldwide. For journalism education, AI adoption shapes the professional competencies of future journalists and drives broader transformations across media systems, reshaping journalistic practice, communication processes, and media innovation. Against this global trend of AI integration into journalism, it is particularly critical to examine how these technologies are incorporated into journalism education in non-WEIRD contexts.

2.1. AI in Journalistic Practices Across the Global South

AI is exerting growing influence on journalistic practices across the Global South. AI tools have been deployed to support newsgathering, automate parts of the reporting process, optimize content distribution, and facilitate audience engagement, allowing newsroom teams to complete data-intensive tasks more efficiently. In sub-Saharan Africa, generative AI tools such as ChatGPT are increasingly being explored to support journalistic work and reporting practices; however, concerns remain regarding misinformation, biased stereotypes, and the limited representativeness of African data sources, which may reduce the effectiveness of these tools in local news contexts (Gondwe, 2023). In China, qualitative interview research suggests that AI integration has improved production efficiency and altered news production workflows across both state-affiliated and commercial media organizations. At the same time, interviewees raised concerns regarding ethical risks, content credibility, and the shifting relationship between technology and journalistic practice, indicating that AI adoption continues to be shaped by local institutional conditions, media regulations, and professional norms (Li, 2025). In India, existing literature on AI adoption in news media documents gradual changes across television, print, and digital platforms. Indian media organizations have increasingly experimented with AI-driven tools for automated content production and related news practices, although empirical evidence regarding their broader impacts remains limited (Afsar, 2025).

Beyond institutional adoption, scholarly attention has also turned to journalists' perceptions of AI in Global South contexts. While acknowledging potential opportunities, this research also highlights concerns about AI's effects on journalistic autonomy and creative practice (Sarısakaloğlu, 2025). Studies suggest that journalists express uncertainty regarding AI's impact on professional roles, editorial judgment, and established journalistic values. Additional concerns relate to data privacy, algorithmic bias, and AI's broader implications for media representation and journalistic practice.

2.2. Growing Demand for AI Integration in Global South Journalism Education

As AI technologies reshape journalistic practices across the Global South, universities face growing pressure to expand AI-related components in journalism curricula. This shift reflects both students' proactive adoption of AI tools and labor-market demands that "pull" academic programs toward AI-oriented training. On the one hand, journalism students have shown increasing interest in learning how AI can support professional practice. Existing research suggests that students are already using AI tools in academic and journalism-related activities and express interest in receiving more structured training to acquire AI-related knowledge and practical skills (Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés, 2026). On the other hand, media industry stakeholders are raising new expectations regarding AI literacy among journalists. In Latin America, for example, studies of local news organizations suggest that the adoption of AI is changing newsroom practices and raising concerns about professional skills, ethics (García de Torres et al., 2025), and the future role of journalists. Consequently, journalism education faces a growing imperative to equip students with the understanding and practical ability to apply AI, enabling them to navigate technological disruptions and evolving employment structures.

In response to these pressures, universities across the Global South have started revising their curricula and integrating AI-related topics into journalism education. These initiatives aim to better prepare students for evolving media landscapes and technological demands, while also addressing persistent disparities in digital resources and educational opportunities between the Global North and South.

2.3. Challenges in Integrating AI Into Journalism Education in the Global South

While AI holds the potential to influence journalism education through automation and new forms of content production, educational systems operating under resource constraints continue to face substantial implementation challenges. In Southern African journalism schools, limited technological resources, shortages of faculty with AI-related expertise, and broader infrastructural constraints have been identified as significant barriers to integrating AI into journalism curricula (Ncube et al., 2025). Similarly, research from Bangladesh suggests that journalism educators continue to face challenges related to limited resources, rigid curricula, and differing levels of readiness for AI integration (Asadi & Sultana, 2025).

Beyond structural and resource constraints, educators have also expressed concerns regarding curriculum adaptation, ethical issues, and the implications of AI for teaching and learning practices (Wenger et al., 2024). Educational institutions face further challenges in integrating emerging technologies into existing curricular structures and pedagogical approaches. In parts of Asia, for instance, research suggests that journalism schools are adapting curricula in response to AI-related changes while addressing shifting technological conditions and evolving industry expectations (Jiang & Rafeeq, 2026). These challenges indicate that

integrating AI into journalism education involves not only technical and infrastructural issues but also broader questions concerning curriculum design and the future of journalism training.

Studies indicate that AI is being used to support newsroom work, data-driven reporting, and content production—yet challenges such as algorithmic bias, resource limitations, shortages of faculty expertise and infrastructure, and ethical concerns continue to affect its implementation in educational settings. Although existing research offers useful insights into AI in journalism education, the literature remains fragmented. Comparative evidence across specific national contexts is limited, and few studies examine the perspectives of educators, students, and industry actors simultaneously. From a non-WEIRD perspective, there has also been limited attention to how AI competencies, journalistic values, and local media contexts can be integrated into systematic curriculum and teaching approaches.

Given the inherent diversity and heterogeneity of the Global South, this study focuses on the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) countries instead of treating the Global South as a homogeneous concept. Previous research has emphasized that the Global South should not be understood as a fixed geographical entity but as a diverse and uneven set of social, political, and economic contexts across regions such as Latin America, Asia, and Africa (Dados & Connell, 2012). Existing studies have discussed BRICS as an important interregional grouping within the Global South that brings together countries from different regional contexts, including Latin America, Asia, and Africa (Naik, 2021). More recent discussions suggest that the expansion of BRICS reflects broader developments in South–South cooperation and reinforces its role as a platform for cooperation among emerging and developing countries (Wang & Long, 2024). Although BRICS countries have notable differences in political systems, media environments, and educational practices, they share some common issues relevant to this study. These include ongoing digital transformation, growing attention and application of AI technology, and uneven distribution of technological and educational resources. Therefore, examining the development of journalism education in BRICS countries helps explore the development paths of AI curriculum reform in the Global South and identify the common challenges in these contexts.

3. Research Questions

This study focuses on journalism education within higher education, examining how journalism programs in BRICS countries are responding to AI-driven technological changes. Specifically, the article addresses the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What is the current status of AI-related courses offered in journalism programs across BRICS countries?

RQ2: What challenges have been encountered in the implementation of these courses?

RQ3: How do educators, students, and AI industry representatives perceive and evaluate the integration of AI into journalism education?

RQ4: Based on practical experiences and observed tensions, how can a systematic, non-WEIRD, and future-oriented “AI + journalism” curriculum and pedagogical model be developed to address the

competency demands and training objectives of journalism education in the Global South amid technological transformation?

4. Research Design and Methods

4.1. Sample Selection

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining objective public data and subjective experiential narratives to examine how journalism education in the Global South responds to and is reshaped by AI development. We selected 10 universities from BRICS member countries as research cases. Variations across these countries in media systems, higher education development, technical capacity, and regulatory environments enable us to gain a comprehensive understanding of the broader landscape of AI integration in journalism education across the Global South.

This study uses purposive sampling—one university with a journalism or communication major was selected from each BRICS member country based on three criteria: (a) strong performance in internationally recognized university rankings; (b) a mature journalism and communication program; (c) high academic influence and social reputation. As higher education systems differ considerably across BRICS countries, few institutions meet all three criteria. Universities were therefore included if they satisfied at least one of these conditions, and institutions meeting multiple criteria were prioritized.

It is worth noting that the inclusion of Russia requires brief clarification, as its position within the Global South remains subject to debate. In recent years, however, Russia has increasingly been discussed in scholarship on the Global South and South–South cooperation, particularly in studies of BRICS and world-systems analysis, where it is often categorized as a semi-periphery (Morales Ruvalcaba, 2013) or a non-Western emerging power. As Duggan et al. (2022) observe, BRICS, with Russia as one of its members, acts as an integrator of the developing world and serves as an important driver of South–South cooperation. At the same time, Russia has sought to align itself more closely with the Global South through BRICS engagement, diplomatic positioning, and anti-colonial political rhetoric (Vuksanović, 2025). For this reason, Russia is included here as part of the BRICS framework, rather than being treated as an unproblematic Global South case.

The final sample included Communication University of China (China), Lomonosov Moscow State University (Russia), University of Delhi (India), University of São Paulo (Brazil), University of Cape Town (South Africa), Cairo University (Egypt), Addis Ababa University (Ethiopia), Allameh Tabataba'i University (Iran), King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (Saudi Arabia), and University of Wollongong Dubai (United Arab Emirates).

4.2. Data Sources

This study draws on two main types of data sources: (a) public course documents related to AI in journalism and communication education; (b) semi-structured online interviews with relevant stakeholders involved in course teaching, learning, curriculum integration, and industry-university collaboration. Drawing on these two data types, the study combines the perspectives of “official curriculum narratives” (reflected in training plans and syllabi) and “lived curriculum experiences” (described by interviewees).

First, this study collected AI course-related documents from the 10 sample universities via online searches of university official websites and other public materials, including training programs, course syllabi, and teaching manuals. We then screened these documents to verify their relevance to journalism and communication education and AI-related content. After removing irrelevant materials and duplicate records, the remaining texts were organized into a curriculum text corpus for subsequent analysis.

Second, we interviewed 15 participants from China, covering four stakeholder groups: program directors for journalism and communication, teachers teaching AI-related courses, students who have taken relevant courses, and AI industry or platform technical staff who collaborate with universities. This design aligns with our research approach of using China as an entry point to explore the broader dynamics of journalism education curriculum reform across BRICS member countries. The interviews primarily focused on three common themes: course format, implementation mechanisms, and stakeholder perceptions, with differentiated questions tailored to the specific roles of each interviewee group.

For teachers, the interviews explore their understanding of AI integration into journalism education, including AI's role in talent cultivation, news production workflows, ethical considerations, and research practices. The discussions also focus on how AI content is embedded in the curriculum system, commonly used teaching tools and classroom activities, as well as challenges encountered in instruction. For program directors, the interviews primarily examine institutional strategies for AI-driven teaching transformation, how AI competencies are incorporated into program design, curriculum development processes, faculty support systems, and quality assurance mechanisms. For students, the questions mainly cover their experiences with using AI, perceptions of AI-related courses, and future career expectations. For AI platform representatives, the interviews focus on university-industry collaboration models, the media industry's talent competency needs, their evaluation of learning outcomes, and specific approaches to sustaining long-term partnerships.

4.3. Data Analysis

4.3.1. Content Analysis of Objective Public Curriculum Documents

We first conducted automated content analysis on the corpus of publicly available AI-related curricular documents from journalism and communication programs at the 10 sampled universities. Latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) topic modeling reduces reliance on subjective judgment when processing large-scale textual data. As an unsupervised machine learning technique, LDA estimates latent topics within a corpus and represents each topic as a probability distribution over co-occurring terms.

LDA was employed because the purpose of this analysis was to identify recurring thematic patterns across curriculum documents rather than generate open-ended semantic interpretations. Given the comparative analysis of official curriculum materials across BRICS institutions, LDA also provides a relatively transparent analytical process, allowing model performance to be assessed through indicators such as coherence and perplexity scores. Therefore, LDA was used as a first-stage mapping tool for identifying recurring curricular themes.

Specifically, we used JGibbLDA to clean valid texts and perform tokenization and segmentation, converting the raw corpus into keyword sequences for model input. We then conducted topic modeling and iteratively tuned model parameters to identify an optimal solution. Across multiple rounds of experimentation, we found that when the number of topics (K) was between 3 and 10, the models exhibited low perplexity and generated topic clusters with stronger internal coherence and interpretability. After evaluating models with topic numbers ranging from 2 to 11, we selected $K = 7$ by jointly considering statistical fit and semantic interpretability, as illustrated in Figure 1. The identified themes were subsequently interpreted through close reading and triangulated with interview data collected from Chinese stakeholders, including educators, students, program directors, and industry representatives.

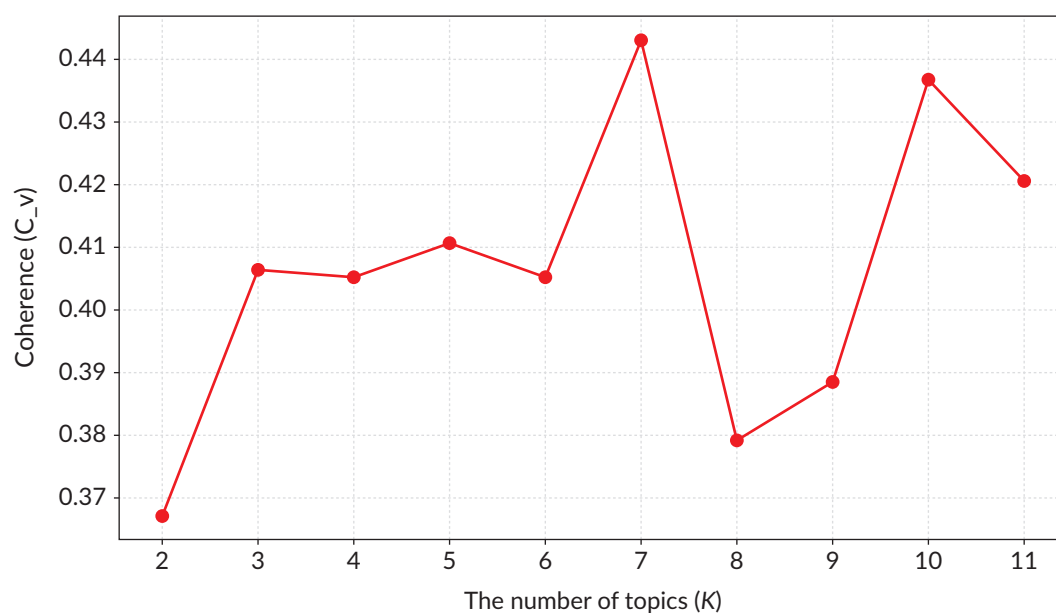


Figure 1. Topic coherence of LDA models.

The perplexity results show a steady decrease in $\log_perplexity$ (from -5.90 to -6.24), as illustrated in Figure 2, alongside an increase in $standard_perplexity$ (from 59.92 to 75.51) as K increases. However, the curve does not show a clear elbow, suggesting that perplexity alone is insufficient for determining the optimal number of topics. We therefore relied on topic coherence as the primary criterion. Topic coherence captures the semantic consistency of high-frequency words within each topic, with higher scores indicating more coherent topic structures. The model achieves its highest coherence score (0.443036) at $K = 7$. When K increases to 8, the score declines, and although minor fluctuations are observed at higher values (e.g., $K = 10$), none exceed the peak at $K = 7$. We further conducted manual inspection of the top 20 keywords for each model ($K = 2-11$). Results suggest that $K = 7$ provides the most balanced topic structure, with clearer within-topic cohesion and limited overlap between topics. Based on coherence performance and model parsimony, $K = 7$ was selected as the final model for subsequent analysis.

Based on the seven sets of topic keywords, we labeled each of the seven topics. As several topics contained conceptually similar or complementary content, we further explored potential linkages between them. Through iterative discussion and revision, we consolidated the seven topics into five broader dimensional categories based on substantive similarity and conceptual relatedness.

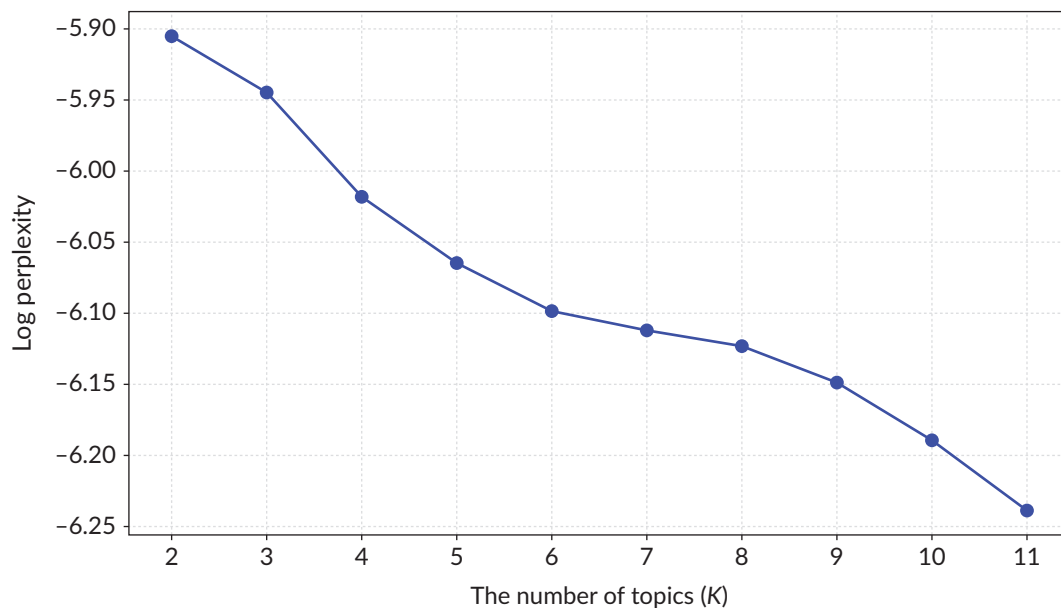


Figure 2. Log perplexity of LDA topic models.

4.3.2. Data Analysis of Subjective Interview Materials

Prior to the interviews, participants were informed of the study purpose, the intended use of interview materials, potential risks, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Informed consent was obtained voluntarily. To protect participants' privacy and confidentiality, all interview materials were anonymized during data preparation and analysis. Information that could identify individuals or institutions (e.g., names, contact details, precise job titles, and identifiable events) was removed or replaced. Participants were assigned anonymous identifiers according to role and sequence: teachers (T1–T5), program directors (P1–P3), students (S1–S4), and corporate representatives (C1–C3). Only these identifiers are used in quotations and reporting.

Data analysis followed constructivist grounded theory, guided by the cyclical processes of open, axial, and selective coding (Duan & He, 2026). During open coding, we conducted close, line-by-line readings of all transcripts and generated initial codes using conceptual labels that remained close to participants' language. We sought to minimize a priori theoretical imposition while identifying actions, experiences, and meaning-making processes related to "integrating AI into journalism education," including modes of curricular embedding, teaching activities, learning objectives, ethical governance, resource constraints, and risk perceptions. This stage yielded an initial set of concepts. We then moved to axial coding, in which we aggregated, compared, and reorganized the initial concepts to develop categories and specify their properties and dimensions. Particular attention was paid to similarities and differences across the four stakeholder groups (teachers, program directors, students, and corporate representatives) regarding course implementation mechanisms, institutional and resource constraints, ethical and governance tensions, competency demands, and career expectations, resulting in a set of second-order codes.

Finally, in selective coding and guided by the RQs, we identified core propositions that integrated the major categories and consolidated them into four overarching themes: (a) the current landscape of course provision, (b) key challenges, (c) stakeholder attitudes and perceptions, and (d) pathways for improvement.

5. Findings

5.1. Current Status of AI-Related Courses in Leading Journalism Schools of BRICS Member Countries

According to the results of the LDA topic model, the development status of AI-related journalism courses in BRICS member countries is as follows.

5.1.1. Overall Landscape: Explicit Courses and Embedded Approaches

In the sampled journalism schools, AI education primarily manifests in two modes: explicit specialized courses and embedded provision.

The first mode, explicit specialized courses, integrates AI into the broader talent cultivation system through dedicated training tracks or standalone courses. For instance, Communication University of China has established the Intelligent and Computational Communication track, with courses covering skill-based training in areas such as Python programming, natural language processing, web crawling, and data analysis. Similarly, Lomonosov Moscow State University offers the course AI and Big Data in Media Communication, which encompasses topics including machine learning, media data analysis, data visualization, and ethical considerations.

The more prevalent embedded provision integrates AI content into existing courses such as data journalism and digital journalism. The University of Delhi incorporates AI applications, technology-assisted fact-checking, algorithms, and ethics into its Data Journalism course; the University of São Paulo adds an AI module covering fact-checking, automation, chatbots, and practical training. Other sample universities, including Cairo University and Addis Ababa University, also introduce AI topics via existing curricula and digital media training platforms.

These modes show that journalism schools are no longer stuck in the discussion of “whether AI should be taught,” but have begun to further explore the question of “how to integrate AI into the existing curriculum system.” However, there are still significant differences in the visibility and implementation depth of AI curricula among different universities, which reflects the differences in resource conditions, organizational support, and reform priorities of various institutions.

5.1.2. LDA Topic Analysis: Curricular Design and Value Orientations of AI-Related Courses

The LDA topic model analysis finds that training programs and course content of the sampled universities are mainly clustered into seven topics (Table 1). Further analysis shows these topics can be consistently grouped into five analytical dimensions: curriculum positioning, technical tools, skill training, teaching content, and value orientation (Table 2).

Table 1. Themes in samples.

Number	Theme	Proportion of Corpus (%)	Keywords
1	Digital literacy	42 (13%)	Learning, social interaction, teaching, platform, network, digital
2	Automation ethics	77 (23.8%)	Information, system, ethics, platform, automation, algorithm
3	Computational communication	37 (11.4%)	Discipline, media, computation, skills, communication, knowledge
4	Talent development and AI practice	35 (10.8%)	Training, work, competence, intelligence, practice, algorithm
5	Digital research methods	51 (15.7%)	Digital, society, visualization, automation, research, methods
6	Self-directed learning and tool use	40 (12.3%)	Self-directed, tools, projects, digital, classroom, discussion
7	International journalism innovation	41 (12.6%)	Ethics, Africa, journalism, innovation, practice, environment

Table 2. Mapping of topics to analytical dimensions.

Dimensional Categories	Corresponding Topic Number	Contained Topics
Course positioning	1, 3, 4	Digital literacy; computational communication; talent development and AI practice
Technical tools	2, 5, 6	Automation ethics; digital research methods; self-directed learning and tool use
Skills guidance	1, 4, 5, 6	Digital literacy; talent development and AI practice; digital research methods; self-directed learning and tool use
Teaching content	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7	Digital literacy; automation ethics; computational communication; talent development and AI practice; digital research methods; international journalism innovation
Values	1, 2, 7	Digital literacy; automation ethics; international journalism innovation

First, course positioning. “Digital literacy,” “computational communication,” and “talent development and AI practice” jointly constitute the core positioning of AI-related journalism curricula. AI courses are no longer seen as a marginal supplement to traditional journalism education. Instead, through a layered structure of basic skill building, professional skill improvement, and practical ability development, they have gradually been integrated into the core system of journalism talent training. In other words, AI is not only reshaping curriculum content, but also changing the underlying logic of journalism education. Building on this foundation, universities have further embedded AI capabilities into talent development frameworks through specialized tracks and program design. For example, the Communication University of China incorporates Python programming, natural language processing, and data collection and processing techniques into its

curriculum, while strengthening training through courses such as fact-checking, data journalism, and AI-enabled storytelling.

Second, technical tools. Technical teaching has gradually shifted from pure software skill training to a systematic curriculum centered on data processing, machine-assisted automation, and AI-supported collaboration. Technical training has changed from cultivating isolated operational skills to training in which data and algorithm work are integrated throughout the complete workflow of data collection, processing, analysis, and presentation. Technical teaching increasingly shows the characteristics of automation and intelligence. For example, Lomonosov Moscow State University has included machine learning, media data analysis, and data visualization in its core curriculum, allowing students to complete the whole process from multi-source data collection to analysis and presentation. Overall, technical education is gradually moving away from a purely operational orientation and toward a comprehensive cultivation of technical understanding, work collaboration, and independent learning abilities. Students are expected not only to learn how to use tools, but also to understand how they operate, how algorithms shape content production, and what ethical considerations should be addressed when using AI in journalism practice.

Third, skills guidance. The core focus of AI-related journalism courses has shifted from isolated professional skill training to comprehensive capability development for the intelligent media environment, with greater emphasis on students' problem-solving and continuous learning abilities in complex professional scenarios. Courses now also prioritize practical and professional capabilities more than before: By aligning learning objectives with real professional contexts, students' professional adaptability is improved. Some universities have set up journalism labs, interdisciplinary workshops, and industry-university cooperation projects, allowing students to practice the full workflow—spanning data collection, algorithm analysis, news production, and content presentation—in an environment close to real media work. This arrangement helps students combine technical knowledge with professional practice to better meet future career demands. Meanwhile, competency goals have increasingly expanded beyond occupational skills toward the cultivation of critical judgment in intelligent social environments. For example, the EthicsLab at the University of Cape Town, in collaboration with the African Observatory on Responsible AI, has developed courses that move beyond technical operations and encourage students to critically engage with broader social and ethical dimensions of AI. This shows journalism education is shifting from a tool-capability-centered training model to a comprehensive model that integrates both professional practice capabilities and social governance capabilities.

Fourth, teaching content. AI-related journalism courses cover diverse topics, including ethical reflection, algorithmic content production, digital research skills and methods, and global news innovation practice. The curriculum no longer focuses on isolated technical skills, but builds a more systematic knowledge framework for the intelligent media environment, linking technology, industry, platforms, and the broader social context. For example, the University of Delhi's data journalism course explicitly incorporates AI, technology-assisted fact-checking, algorithms, and ethical issues—while reinforcing these concepts through project-based data-driven journalism practices. Similarly, the University of São Paulo's Digital Journalism Projects course introduces broader theoretical perspectives, including platform capitalism, data colonialism, surveillance capitalism, and future developments in digital journalism. These changes show that journalism education is increasingly transforming to adapt to the platform-based environment. Universities guide students to understand how digital technology reshapes the logic of news organizations, platform relations,

and communication structures. The goal is no longer merely helping students master specific tools or technologies, but cultivating their holistic understanding of the intelligent media ecosystem.

Fifth, values. The value orientation of AI-related courses has gone beyond the scope of traditional journalism ethics discussion and gradually formed a broader framework centered on AI's social consequences, platform power, and public responsibility. Course objectives no longer only focus on technical efficiency and professional skills, but increasingly emphasize social responsibility and value judgment in the use of technology. AI ethics has become a key part of the curriculum, and topics such as data security, privacy protection, algorithmic bias, and information authenticity are systematically included in course design. For example, the University of Delhi's data journalism course includes a module on ethical concerns, while the University of Cape Town's course, AI, Ethics and Policy in Africa, situates AI governance within the broader context of long-standing inequalities. The course addresses issues including bias and discrimination, privacy protection, social justice, and inclusive development. Against the background of the Global South, these courses particularly highlight inequality and inclusiveness in technological development, and try to prevent journalism education from being dominated only by the logic of technical efficiency. This also reveals an important trend: In the context of the Global South, the value and governance dimensions are no longer just accessory parts of technology-oriented courses, but can become the core of organizing AI education, embedding reflections on broader issues such as power structure, historical conditions, and social justice into technical training from the very beginning.

5.2. Challenges in Curriculum Implementation

Based on semi-structured interviews with Chinese teachers, departmental administrators, students, and platform representatives, this study uses China as an entry point to explore broader curriculum reform processes in journalism education across BRICS contexts. The findings suggest that challenges in integrating AI into journalism education extend beyond technical limitations alone. Across the interview data, respondents repeatedly described difficulties related to institutional arrangements, faculty capacity, resource allocation, evaluation practices, and students' use of AI tools. Five recurring themes emerged and are discussed below.

5.2.1. Institutional and Governance Lag

During the interviews, respondents repeatedly noted an obvious mismatch between the speed of institutional decision-making and the rapid development of AI technology. A teacher said, "Curricular reform must pass through multi-level approval processes—such as teaching committees and degree committees—so the cycle is long" (T1), which objectively pushes departments toward embedded modules rather than system-wide curricular redesign. Several respondents pointed out that weak reform momentum stems not from a lack of ideas, but from organizational processes and performance evaluation systems. The current institutional framework is more accommodating of fragmentary embedding, but struggles to support systematic upgrades. This implies that "without coordinated workload recognition, performance incentives, and funding support, teachers' motivation for sustained investment will be difficult to maintain" (P1).

5.2.2. Insufficient Faculty Capacity and Transformation Pressure

Problems facing teachers are mainly reflected in two aspects. One concerns uneven familiarity with AI tools—"not knowing how to use AI" (T5)—which results in situations where "we wanted to launch new AI practice-oriented courses, but we couldn't keep up because of staffing limitations, and in the end, it always fizzles out" (P1). Second, and more critically, some faculty "can use AI but cannot teach it or assess it" (P2). Limited technical proficiency can generate teaching anxiety, with instructors worrying that they may "face students' professional questioning in class" (T1). Beyond technical familiarity, several respondents pointed to difficulties in translating AI technologies into teaching practice. A department head stressed that the urgency of faculty training has surpassed that of student training: "Without targeted AI training for instructors, mid-career and senior faculty will struggle to support the substantive implementation of curricular reform" (P3). It can be seen that the current difficulty does not mainly lie in introducing AI tools themselves, but in how to transform these tools into teachable, assessable professional practice.

5.2.3. Foundational Resource Constraints: Accounts, Computing, and Equipment

Resource constraints were identified as a key barrier by both faculty and students. Inequalities in access to "paid accounts, computing support, and hardware" (T1) directly translate into learning inequalities among students. Although some departments attempt to mitigate these tensions through open-source tools and shared computer labs (P2, C1, T5), such measures objectively limit the diversity of adoptable tools and the types of practice-based projects that can be assigned. Unequal access to resources affects not only learning experiences but also the scope of curriculum implementation.

5.2.4. The Absence of AI-Use Rules and Operational Guidelines

Many respondents noted that institutions still lack clear policies governing AI use, particularly regarding operational guidelines and arbitration mechanisms. Most institutions lack clear principles for AI use. Minimum disclosure standards, lists of permitted and prohibited scenarios, and data-compliance procedures remain undefined, leaving instructors to "decide on their own" (T1, T4, P1, P2). Several instructors also raised concerns about AI-generated images, particularly in sensitive topics such as poverty, violence, or marginalized communities. In such cases, AI-generated content may reproduce stereotypical or harmful representations, yet institutions continue to rely largely on general academic integrity policies rather than more specific guidance for AI-generated visual content. Moreover, the absence of evidentiary tools and standards further weakens enforceability. As one instructor explained:

If a student appeals after being suspected of using AI, there are no unified rules regarding evidence or how such cases should be handled. Even if I suspect AI use, it is difficult to reduce grades because no department-recognized tool currently exists to detect AI use and serve as evidence. (T2)

Such gray zones in grading and appeals procedures impede the deeper integration of AI education into student development.

5.2.5. Unclear Assessment Systems and Quality Assurance

With AI-generated content becoming increasingly widespread, interviewees widely framed “process evidence” as the core proof of learning outcomes. Both industry representatives (C1, C3) and faculty (T4) emphasized that the most persuasive basis for assessment is a combination of “process documentation plus final products.” Process documentation should record when and how AI was used, what problems were encountered, and how they were resolved, helping instructors understand how students approached tasks and used AI during the learning process. Student feedback, however, suggests that teaching often “encourages use but lacks guidance” (S2) or suffers from “opaque standards” (S1), resulting in fragmented learning experiences and diminished perceptions of assessment fairness. Interview data suggest that individual course design alone is insufficient and that departments may need clearer assessment frameworks and shared standards.

Overall, the challenges can be summarized into five aspects: institutional governance, teacher capability, resource equity, operational norms, and the evaluation system. These problems rarely exist in isolation. Lagging institutional operation often further promotes fragmented curriculum arrangements, which in turn may aggravate the imbalance in teaching practice and the gap between students’ learning experiences. At the same time, the lack of clear operational rules and evaluation standards also leads to uncertainty in classroom application and evaluation practice, as well as unequal access to resources, which continues to limit practical learning opportunities. The interview results further show that implementing AI-related journalism courses not only means introducing new technologies into the classroom; it also requires universities to rethink how to organize professional norms, teaching practices, and responsibility mechanisms in the AI-assisted education environment.

5.3. Attitudes and Perceptions of Various Subjects toward “AI + Journalism” Education

5.3.1. Faculty and Administrators: From Tool Use to Broader Understandings of Workflows, Methods, and Ethics

Faculty and departmental administrators generally viewed AI as more than a technical tool and discussed it as part of broader changes in journalism education and practice. Respondents argued that AI is reshaping journalistic work, influencing reporting, writing, editing, distribution, and post-publication review. They also noted changes in research methods and stressed that ethical concerns should be addressed alongside practical training rather than treated separately after technical instruction. One faculty member (T1) explained that AI integration involves “workflow reconstruction, methodological updating, and ethics and governance,” describing AI as a “critical competence” because “without it, efficiency cannot keep up; without verification, risks increase.”

From the administrative perspective, respondents described efforts to incorporate AI-related competencies into program objectives and graduation requirements. They also discussed attempts to reduce fragmentation across courses and address situations in which instructors “assume someone else has covered it” (P1) by clarifying learning objectives across different stages of the curriculum. At the same time, they emphasized that AI-related teaching should include requirements for verification, transparency, and ethical responsibility, so that students learn not only how to use AI tools, but also to understand their limitations and potential risks.

Interviews also revealed differences in approaches to AI teaching. Faculty involved in writing instruction and media ethics tended to emphasize responsibility and boundaries, expressing concern that students might rely on AI uncritically. By contrast, faculty in data journalism and computational communication focused more on workflows, tools, and assessment, suggesting a shift from basic literacy toward methodological and practical training.

5.3.2. Students: Support for AI Learning and Concerns About Teaching and Assessment

Interview data show that students frequently use AI in their studies and internships while also expressing concerns about reliability and institutional guidance. Students reported using AI for tasks such as search and retrieval, transcription, multi-version copywriting, editing, and subtitling (S2, S3, S4). At the same time, many raised concerns about hallucinations, fabricated citations, incorrect dates, and misleading synthetic imagery, stressing that “facts, quotations, and data must be verified by oneself” (S4). Several students also felt that AI use should be documented during the learning process.

A recurring concern in the interviews was not the absence of AI-related teaching, but the lack of systematic instruction. One student (S1) described many classroom references as merely “mentioned in passing” rather than taught in a structured manner and argued that project-based courses and workshops were more effective because they allowed students to “deliver outputs and learn verification and disclosure through debriefing.” By contrast, when instructors encouraged AI use without clearly explaining grading criteria, students reported concerns about fairness and lower motivation among harder-working students. Rather than opposing rules, students repeatedly expressed a desire for clearer standards and more transparent assessment practices.

5.3.3. Platform Firms: From Tool Use to Workflow-Based Learning Models

Platform representatives tended to discuss AI education from the perspective of industry needs and workplace practices. Across interviews, they highlighted “prompt engineering, fact-checking, and the design of human–AI collaboration workflows” (C1, C2) as important competencies for future journalists and argued that current teaching often remains at the level of “tool demonstrations” (C1) that are “disconnected from real newsroom environments” (C1, C3).

They believe that learning outcomes should include process documentation, showing at which stage AI was used, how it was used, what difficulties emerged, and how they were addressed. Such records help instructors understand how students completed tasks and used AI. This view echoed concerns raised by faculty and administrators regarding transparency and verification. Platform representatives did not argue that journalism students should be trained simply as AI operators; instead, they stressed that judgment, verification, and ethical boundaries remain essential.

Overall, the three stakeholder groups converge on a clear consensus: AI must be part of journalism education and must consider the tension between technological rationality and humanistic values. However, differences primarily emerged in approaches to implementation. Faculty and administrators focused more on transparency and accountability in AI-supported learning, students emphasized opportunities for practice and fair assessment, and platform representatives highlighted workplace competencies and learning processes. Taken together, these views suggest the need to move beyond teaching isolated tools toward clearer processes for using and evaluating AI in journalism education.

5.4. Building Systematic, Non-WEIRD, and Future-Oriented AI Journalism Curricula and Pedagogical Models

To build a systematic, non-WEIRD, and future-oriented “AI + journalism” curriculum and pedagogy, the challenge extends beyond introducing AI tools into existing courses. Instead, it requires connecting the competencies demanded by changing media environments with public values, inclusion, and social justice, while embedding these into curriculum design, classroom activities, assessment, and institutional policies. Findings from this study point to two related questions. First, how can journalism education develop competencies required in rapidly changing media environments? Second, how can Global South institutions translate commitments to public values and equity into teaching practices? While the following discussions should not be interpreted as universally applicable across all BRICS or Global South contexts, curricular evidence from the ten sampled universities and qualitative insights from Chinese stakeholders may provide useful reference points for AI-related curriculum reform in journalism education across non-WEIRD contexts. Four directions for curriculum and pedagogical development are discussed below.

5.4.1. Organizing the Journalism Curriculum Cluster Through a Tiered Competency Framework

Both interview results and existing studies show that AI-related capability requirements have gradually gone beyond the scope of traditional news reporting and writing skills, and expanded to include problem definition, evidence verification, editorial judgment, and human–AI collaborative workflow design. AI-related teaching may need to break through the limitations of prompt writing and tool operation training, and instead organize learning processes around different stages of news production. Interview findings also support more differentiated forms of training: “Lower years should focus on basic AI understanding and ethical awareness; middle years should integrate AI tools and workflows into professional courses; upper years should strengthen human–AI collaboration through project-based learning and industry practice” (T4).

Therefore, journalism course clusters can be designed around three capability areas: basic capabilities of AI and media/information literacy, capabilities of data processing, algorithm programming and evidence verification, and project-based professional practice capabilities. These capability areas are not used to prescribe a fixed curriculum structure, but rather serve as a universal framework to maintain stable learning objectives amid continuous technological changes. Schools can cultivate students’ basic understanding of AI’s operating mechanisms and limitations through general education, integrate AI-related methods and workflows into professional courses, and deliver higher-level learning opportunities through workshops, labs, and project activities combined with industry practice. Meanwhile, evaluation methods can also break through the traditional exam model and expand to diverse forms such as portfolios, project-based work, and cross-platform narratives.

5.4.2. Front-Loading Ethics Education to Secure Value Goals in the Global South

Against the non-WEIRD background, integrating AI into journalism education usually takes place in an environment with existing problems including digital inequality, uneven language resources, and relatively weak governance systems. Therefore, the challenge for journalism education is not only to teach students how to use AI tools, but also to build a learning environment that emphasizes human subjectivity, transparency, privacy protection, and fairness. Just as UNESCO’s global guidance document on generative

AI in education and research stresses, we should protect human subjectivity and pay more attention to data privacy, transparency, and accountability mechanisms when applying AI. Similar issues also appear in broader discussions on AI governance and media norms. Comparative research on AI guidelines in global media suggests that, despite differences across countries, transparency, disclosure, fairness, privacy, and human oversight have emerged as recurring principles, while unequal technological development and power asymmetries may create additional challenges for Global South contexts (de-Lima-Santos et al., 2025).

In this context, AI-integrated journalism education in the Global South may benefit from treating ethics and governance as elements embedded throughout curriculum design and teaching activities rather than isolated topics. For example, course requirements may include disclosure of AI use, verification procedures, privacy reviews, and additional ethical assessment for work involving vulnerable groups or conflict-related topics. Such arrangements may help connect broader values such as publicness, inclusion, and social justice with everyday teaching practices.

5.4.3. Supporting Sustainable Curriculum Development in Low-Resource Contexts

Both existing research and interview results show that challenges for curriculum reform are usually closely tied to teacher development, resource access, and mechanisms for updating teaching content—problems that are particularly prominent in the Global South. If AI courses rely excessively on high-cost subscriptions, single-language environments, or closed platforms, resource gaps will cause unequal learning opportunities and limit curriculum sustainability.

Therefore, universities should prioritize affordable tools and data resources, including open-source alternatives, shared computing power, and institutional subscription mechanisms. Second, continuous teacher capability building is essential. This includes providing support for AI teaching methods, evaluation mechanisms, and teaching material development; strengthening cooperation between universities, industry, and research institutions; and accelerating the creation of localized case banks and workflow models.

At the same time, incorporating local issues, language environments, and platform ecologies into teaching materials serves to connect local contexts with broader international discussions. Given AI's growing importance in journalism, these arrangements enable journalism education in the Global South to respond more effectively to changing professional needs and educational goals.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

This study examines the current state and implementation of AI-related courses across leading journalism schools in BRICS countries and reveals several common patterns in current curricular development. AI-related journalism curricula generally take two forms: dedicated specialized programs and embedded modular approaches. While some institutions have established AI-oriented tracks, a more common approach integrates AI-related content into existing journalism courses while retaining traditional disciplinary structures. The curricular materials also show recurring attention to competency development, AI-assisted tools, practical skills training, broader media transformations, and ethical issues. Interview data from Chinese stakeholders further point to several challenges in implementation, including institutional constraints, shortages of faculty expertise, limited resources, and uncertainty regarding governance and assessment practices.

The findings suggest that AI-related curricular design has implications beyond classroom learning and may directly influence graduates' preparedness for increasingly AI-integrated newsroom environments. As newsroom work becomes increasingly organized around human-AI collaboration, questions of graduate readiness extend beyond technical skills and involve broader forms of professional judgment and adaptation.

From the current offering of AI-related courses, we can see that students are increasingly exposed to capability training related to data processing, AI-assisted content production, fact-checking, and ethical judgment. This training helps graduates adapt to journalism tasks that increasingly rely on content automation, audience analysis, data interpretation, and human-AI collaboration. This kind of curriculum design does not only focus on a single technical skill, but helps students develop broader professional adaptability in the changing journalism environment. Meanwhile, interview results from Chinese stakeholders show that current curriculum arrangements may not fully help students cope with the actual complexity of AI-powered newsrooms. In some teaching practices, AI is still embedded in curricula in the form of independent modules or tool teaching, rather than running through the complete journalism workflow. Therefore, students may gradually get familiar with how to use AI tools, but still lack sufficient preparation in editorial judgment, fact-checking, and critical supervision of AI-generated content.

This indicates that journalism education may need to move beyond teaching AI as a standalone subject and instead teach how AI can be integrated directly into the journalism workflow, combining technical capabilities with journalistic values and professional decision-making. This teaching model not only helps graduates use AI tools effectively, but also helps them apply AI in a more critical and responsible way in the future newsroom environment.

This study has several limitations. First, the sample focuses on nationally representative journalism schools and does not cover a broader range of institution types and tiers, including vocational institutions and professional training programs; consequently, the study cannot provide a comprehensive picture of how AI-related curricula are developing across different educational settings. Second, due to time and connection constraints, the interviewees were limited to Chinese educators, students, and enterprise representatives. This inevitably restricts the range of perspectives represented in the study and limits the broader applicability of the findings across different contexts. Third, the analysis relies primarily on publicly available curriculum documents and interview-based accounts of experiences and perceptions, without longitudinal observation of graduates' competency development and professional outcomes. Consequently, a gap may remain between intended curriculum objectives and actual educational practices. Fourth, although LDA topic modeling effectively identifies thematic patterns, it has more limited capacity to explain deeper structural factors—such as national institutional settings, media ecosystems, and technical infrastructures—which may shape differences in curricular development across contexts. Future research could combine comparative case studies with longitudinal observation of graduates' professional trajectories in order to examine how AI-related training translates into newsroom practices across different contexts.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

All data generated or analysed during this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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