

Journalism Talent Gap Malaysia & Singapore



A research report commissioned by Google

Southeast Asia Research Centre for Digital Technologies and Society (SEADS)
at Monash University Malaysia



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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

1 Introduction

1.1 Context & Background

2 Methodology

2.1 Sampling

2.2 Research tools

2.3 Data gathering

2.4 Data analysis

3 Findings

3.1 Overview

3.2 Skills Gaps

3.3 Academic Offerings

3.4 Familiarity with online journalism tools

4 Conclusion: Gaps

5 Recommendations

6 Appendices

Executive Summary

The Journalism Talent Gap research project was initiated by Google News Initiative following discussion with newsroom leaders that highlighted talent gaps in the news industry in Malaysia and Singapore. These skill gaps at entry level, mid-career as well as management and leadership levels, could be hampering the performance of the industry as well as inhibiting their ability to meet the disruption caused by AI.

The research was tasked with:

- Understanding specific skill needs required in the newsroom
- Identify existing journalism programs by institutions and online offerings.
- Analyse and assess familiarity with online journalism tools including Google products like Pinpoint, NotebookLM and tools outside of Google’s offering
- Identify specific gaps between programs and what news leaders are seeking.
- Offer actionable recommendations to address identified gaps

Following interviews with academic program leaders, newsroom leaders and journalists, the research reaffirms the anecdotal evidence of a significant talent gap at the entry level, mid-career as well as management and leadership levels of the media industry.

Newsroom leaders note a decline in fundamental skills (such as writing and storytelling, news gathering), a mismatch between academic preparation and industry demands and challenges related to attitude, work-life balance, and compensation.

Among senior editors, there is a weak grasp of AI, compounded by underinvestment in leadership development, stunting the AI transformation.

The gap is driven by curriculum inertia at academic institutions, in tandem with declining revenue and resources at media companies, reducing in-house training and transformation.

The report recommends:

Malaysia	Singapore
Fund the formal development and role out a Journalism Skills Framework .	Fund several training options: • Practitioner-in-Residence • Contextualised Leadership Training Fund • Internal Coaching and Mentorship
Encourage the media industry and universities to position journalism as a top entry-level vocation .	Implement AI Integration and Ethical Governance • AI Policy Dissemination and Audit Fund • Targeted AI Grants for Small Media Fund
In collaboration with industry bodies and newsrooms, fund a common internship management platform , as well as a cadet journalism program.	Support Alternative Revenue Models and Independent Media Growth
Partner with executive education programs to provide mid-career skills development and senior management leadership coaching.	

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Introduction

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Introduction

1.1 Context & Background

According to Google, recent conversations with senior leaders of news organizations in Malaysia and Singapore revealed significant talent-related challenges:



Lack of qualified entry-level journalists

Newsrooms report a shortage of high-quality journalism graduates for entry-level positions.



High cost of internal training

Organizations find training their existing teams to be prohibitively expensive.



Upskilling needs of experienced journalists

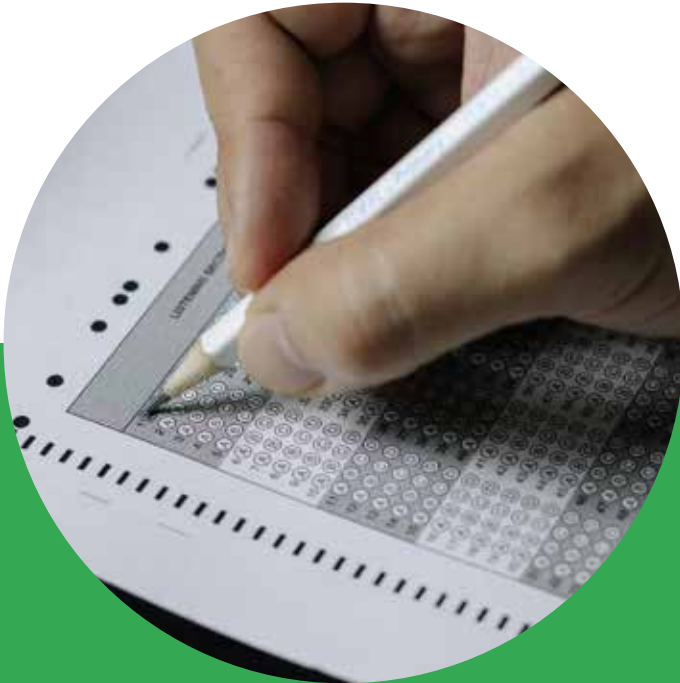
A substantial portion of newsroom employees, particularly those in their 40s and 50s, require upskilling to adapt to modern journalism practices and tools.

1.1 Context & Background

In order to address these challenges, Google funded a research project with the following research objectives:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 Understand Specific Skill Needs | Conduct in-depth interviews with journalism educators and news organization leaders to understand the precise skill requirements across the funnel: fresh journalism graduates, mid-level journalists and experienced journalists. |
| 2 Assess Current Academic Offerings | Identify and analyze existing programs offered by journalism institutions and other online offerings. |
| 3 Analyse & assess familiarity with online journalism tools | Including Google products like Pinpoint, NotebookLM, but also tools outside of Google's offering. |
| 4 Identify Gaps | Identify specific gaps between available programs and what news leaders are seeking. |
| 5 Propose recommendations | Offer actionable recommendations to address identified gaps. |





Methodology

The research involved interviews with three separate cohorts:

- academic program heads,
- newsroom leaders
- journalists

In examining the data we focused on 4 career stages:

- Undergraduates
- Recent graduates, entry level journalists
- Mid-career journalists, those with at least 3 years of experience
- Newsroom leaders and managers

2.1 Sampling

All participants were purposely sampled, drawing on the networks of the research team.



Academic Program Heads

Malaysia	8
Singapore	2

TOTAL: 10



Newsroom Leaders

Singapore	5
East Malaysia	2
Peninsular Malaysia	14
Malay-Language Media	4
Chinese Language media	6
Tamil Language media	2

TOTAL: 21



Journalists

Quantitative Responses	72
Qualitative Responses	22
Malaysia	22

TOTAL: 22

2.2 Research Tools

The research team generated the following tools to facilitate sampling and data gathering:

2 Excel Spreadsheets



listing the names and contact details of newsroom leaders and academics to approach for interview, and where researchers could update the status of their approach/ interview and posts links to the transcripts

List of Questions



A list of questions to guide semi-structured interviews with the participants in academic and newsroom leader cohorts

Skills Framework

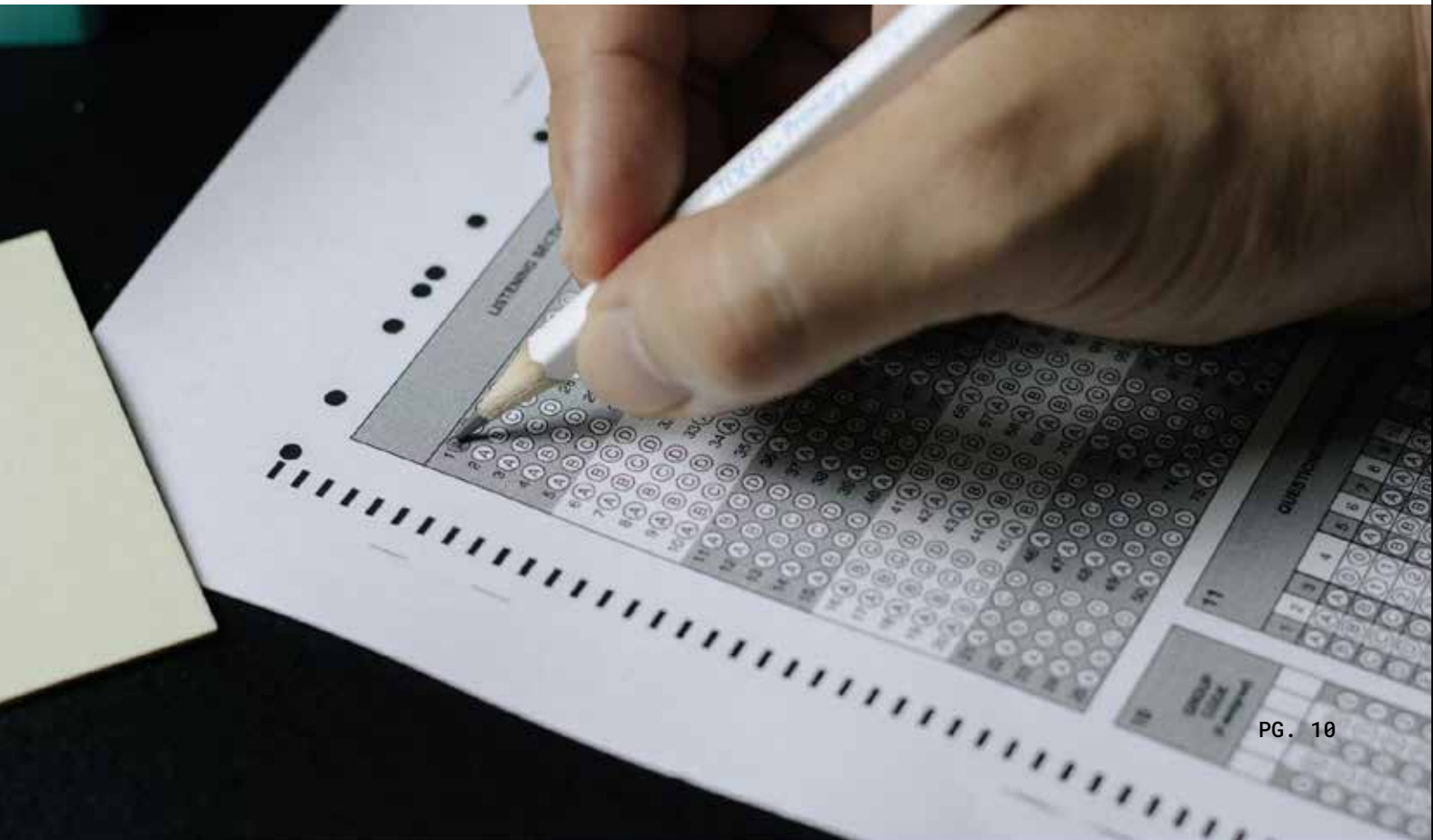


A skills framework tailored for each cohort for gathering quantitative data related to skills gaps

AI-Powered Chatbot



An AI-powered chatbot, rolled out on WhatsApp to journalists



2.3 Data gathering

 Academic Program Heads	 Newsroom Leaders	 Journalists
Qualitative data: 45 minute semi-structured interviews over Zoom Quantitative data: Participants assigned numerical values to a skills framework to indicate relevance and capacity of graduates and newsroom journalists respectively		Third-party developer, Awatar Solutions, designed and deployed a conversational chatbot on WhatsApp
Focus on: - Media industry links - Student numbers - Graduate tracking - Marketing of journalism programs	Focus on: Skills needs across three career stages: - Recent graduates, entry level journalists - Mid-career journalists, those with at least 3 years of experience - Newsroom leaders and managers	Focus on: - Contextual experiences that extended beyond the parameters of the survey instrument - Challenges, rewards, and motivations underpinning their professional practice

2.4 Data analysis

Quantitative transcripts:

Analysed using Notebook LM and Claude , to identify and rank skills gaps (relevance minus competency) across the different career stages.

Qualitative transcripts:

Preliminary analysis undertaken in Notebook LM
Secondary data analysis was undertaken by interviewers, who cross checked the AI summaries for veracity/ validity.
Additionally, the research team undertook manual triangulation of the data to arrive at findings that are affirmed by all three cohorts

3.0

Findings



3.0

Findings

3.1 Overview

The research affirms the anecdotal evidence/ hypothesis:



Lack of qualified entry-level journalists

- Industry struggling to find and retain high-quality graduates.
- Decline in fundamental skills
- A mismatch between academic preparation and industry demands
- Challenges related to curiosity, critical thinking, initiative and drive among graduates



High cost of internal training

- Cost of internal training prohibitively high, due to labour shortages (newsrooms are often understaffed), financial pressures, time constraints and lack of qualified trainers.



Upskilling needs of experienced journalists

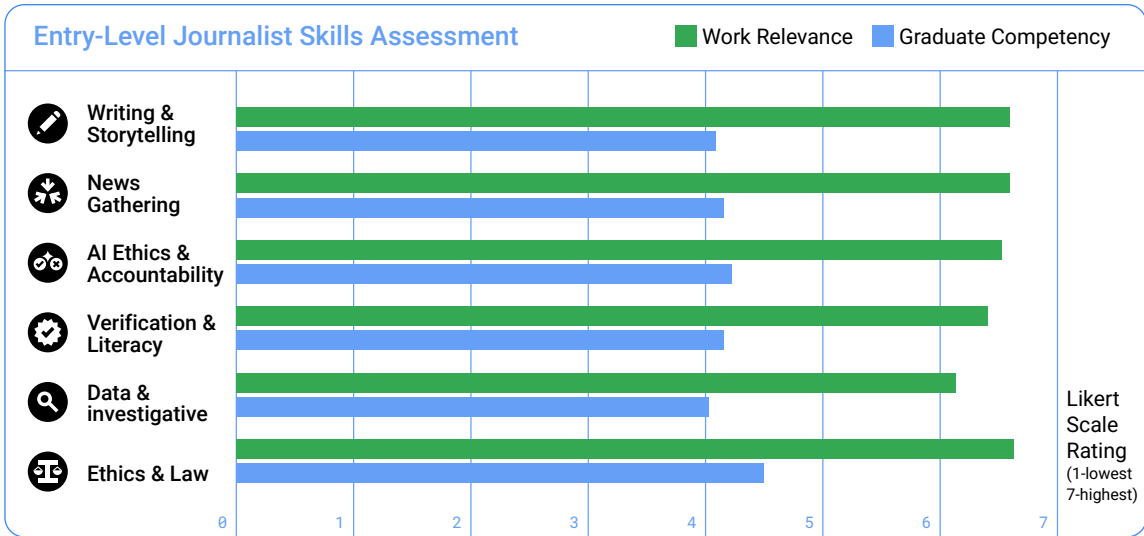
- Especially in digital and visual storytelling, AI tools and literacy (especially ethical usage), and leadership development.
- Lack of succession planning affects the experience of mid-career journalists.

3.2 Skills Gaps

Newsroom leaders see skills gaps in Writing and Storytelling, AI Ethics and Accountability, News Gathering, and Verification and Literacy

The most pressing skills gaps among entry-level journalists relate directly to core journalistic skills, such as understanding of data collection, awareness of ethical and legal issues. New hires struggle to:

- Write clean leads, conduct basic interviews
- Understand news values
- Recognise misinformation



Entry level journalists lack curiosity, persistence and ability to “go to ground” to get a story

Newsroom leaders express grave concerns about a decline in foundational journalistic qualities, such as passion, curiosity and critical thinking. There is a lack of initiative towards news gathering among new recruits, including over-reliance on press conferences, press statements and social media posts. They also lack basic understanding of how a newsroom works, the drive to dig deeper, ask clarifying questions, and connect the dots to provide context.

“There’s a lot of live coverage of events online, so statements are available on social media, and then some of the newer reporters ...seem less motivated to go to the ground to cover the event, you know?... All the older reporters will almost always will be on the ground. But the newer reporters are less persistent.”

“Curiosity, and ... drive...I think that’s something that’s hard to find these days.”

“Gen Z reporters tend to file stories quickly, often relying on AI to process press releases, then publish online first. Gen X journalists, by contrast, usually research more deeply before writing and fact-check more thoroughly.”

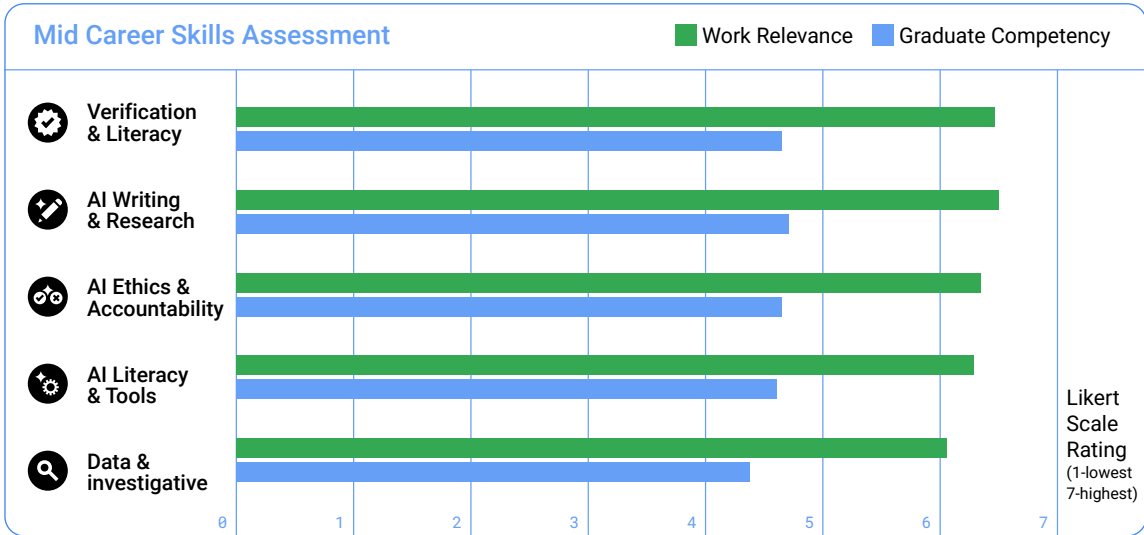


Mid career journalists require urgent upskilling in AI competency - including Tools, Ethics and Accountability

The most pressing skills gaps among mid-level journalists relate directly to Artificial Intelligence. Qualitative data affirms the need for upskilling AI competencies at mid-career level, with journalists citing their felt need and enthusiasm for developing AI competencies.

“I feel like I lack knowledge in the more modern form of journalism. ... If I am able to create AI videos based on my news articles, I can reach out to more audience as I realise lately not many people read anymore.”

“We journalists need to upskill ourselves. AI should not be our enemy but a friend. We can speed up processes to maximise productivity. It is important for us to learn content creating tools such as Canva and CapCut.”



There is a trend of mid-career journalists leaving the industry, leading to loss of talent and structural weaknesses

Interviews with both journalists and newsroom leaders point to a trend of mid-career journalists leaving the industry, driven by factors such as unfulfilled professional aspirations, lack of succession planning, the relentless and often unrewarding lifestyle, and the allure of better-compensated and more stable careers outside of journalism.

This trend not only leads to a loss of valuable talent but also creates structural weaknesses within newsrooms.

“The hierarchy is limited and if senior staff stay for decades, younger staff see no room for advancement. So they leave for other jobs.”

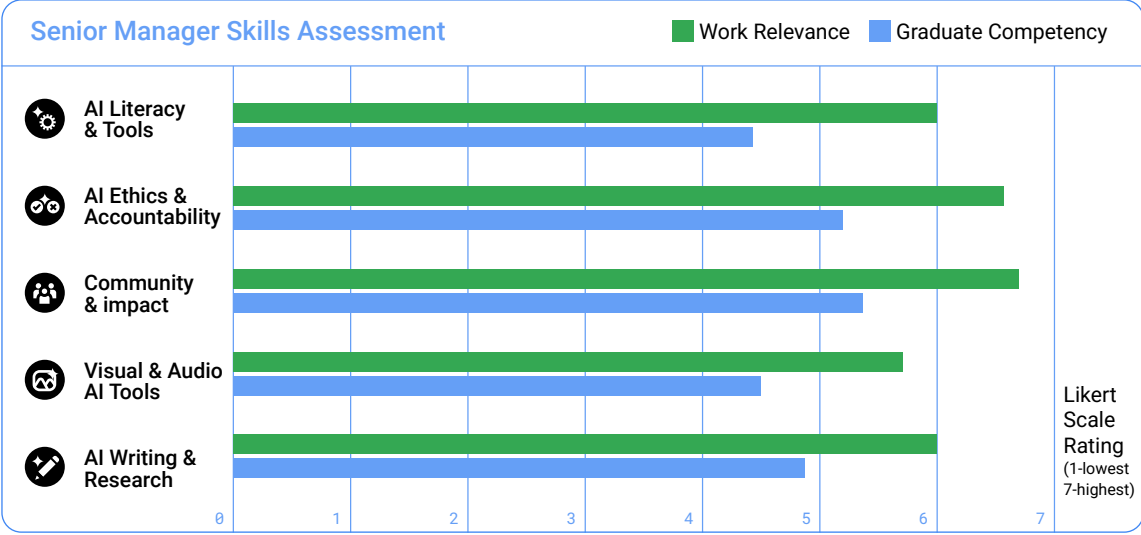
“I feel burnt out and mentally exhausted.... My fitness tracker keeps telling me I’m overexerting myself, but there is not much I can do about it.”

“I don’t think attrition is that big of an issue in and of itself, because when you lose one person, you can always hire another person. The problem is, you don’t build up your experienced correspondents and editors. You have a strong leadership, but this middle portion is always churning. So that is the issue. And then you have problems raising new leaders, raising new subject matter experts and stuff.”



Newsroom leaders lack understanding of AI, affecting their capacity to drive strategy

The top-ranked skills gaps among senior editors/managers lie in AI-related skills. Journalists at this career stage lack familiarity with AI-related tools, which affects their capacity to develop policy around AI, as reflected in the gap around AI Ethics and Accountability.



Newsroom leaders lack the skills required for management roles

The data also shows that journalists at this career stage are sorely unprepared for management roles, having generally received little training to develop skills required for managing large teams and for strategic planning.

“Main editors [are there] because they’re the best journalists in the room. But they are not suitable as leaders. Or, they were not given training as leaders.”

“Every newsroom, and possibly even the non-newsroom places I’ve been, the idea of leadership training does not seem to exist. There are courses for leadership. But they’re always run by external providers. But when it comes to actual experience [of the news industry], they don’t have a lot of it. They come from a corporate background.”

3.3 Academic Offerings

Students’ appetite for working in the news industry is shrinking.

Universities are increasingly developing programs that enable students to attain skills they need to enter a variety of possible media industry professions, including marketing, PR and advertising. The numbers of students who are absorbed into the news industry upon graduation are small.

“Out of the 100% of the students who enrolled in the whole [mass communication] degree, about 15-20% are inclined towards journalism.”

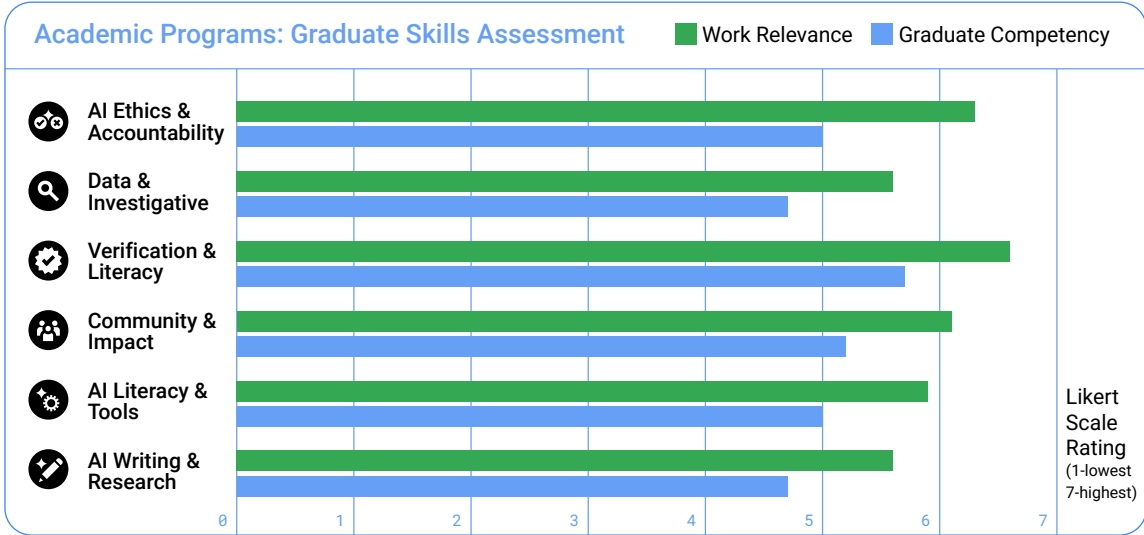
“We get about 12 students per intake [to our Bachelor of Arts in Journalism in Chinese Media]. So it rounds up to be about 30 students, or even less in a year.”

“Q: Roughly every year for internship, how many percent [of students in your Bachelor in Journalism degree] actually end up in news organizations?
A: Very low, very low... sometimes in one semester, I’ll have at least one or two going. In some semesters, I have none.”



Academic programs do not reflect industry demands.

Academic program heads perceive the most pressing upskilling needs for graduates lie in AI Competencies, Data and Investigative skills, and Verification and Literacy.



University and industry linkages are weak and largely performatory

Universities lack institutionalised processes for ensuring programs engage news corporations in a feedback loop to ensure industry relevance.

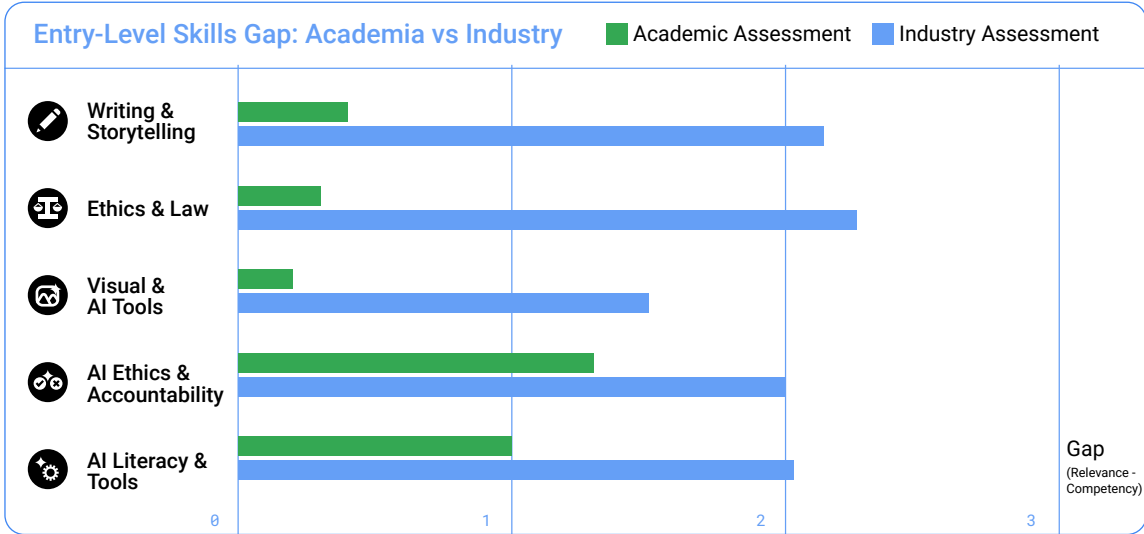
- There is an over-reliance on industry feedback that filters back through internship programs, and five-year course reviews for accreditation, as examples of industry engagement.
- Program heads were unable to provide detail about how insights into the evolving challenges and requirements of newsroom work revealed by internship programs are systematically fed back into processes of program review and revision on a year to year basis.
- A number of programs included ex-news industry professionals among their teaching staff, but they were not systematically engaged to leverage their industry links to ensure program alignment with changing industry needs.
- Program heads do not have detailed knowledge of graduate tracking. Similarly, program heads lacked detailed knowledge/ input into how the degrees they oversee were being marketed by their university.

“Q: How does the university track the journalism students, especially their employment, and whether they are in the industry or not?

A: As far as we know, all of them are employed, but whether they remain in the journalism field 6 months and beyond after their graduation, that is unknown currently. That is not something that we are tracking at the moment.”

Significant disconnect between academic self-assessment and industry reality on skills gap

There is significant mismatch between academic self-assessment of available programs and what newsroom leaders are seeking. Academia rates graduate competencies higher than industry across nearly all skills. The competency gap is the critical finding — it reveals a significant disconnect between academic self-assessment and industry reality, particularly for core journalism skills.



Misalignments			
Visual and AI Tools	Ethics and Law	AI Literacy & Tools, AI Ethics and Accountability	Writing & Storytelling
- Academics believe graduates are prepared - Industry experience major deficiency	- Academics: feel prepared - Industry: major deficiency	Both acknowledge need for development but industry perceives much larger skills gap	- Academics: confident - Industry: significant concern

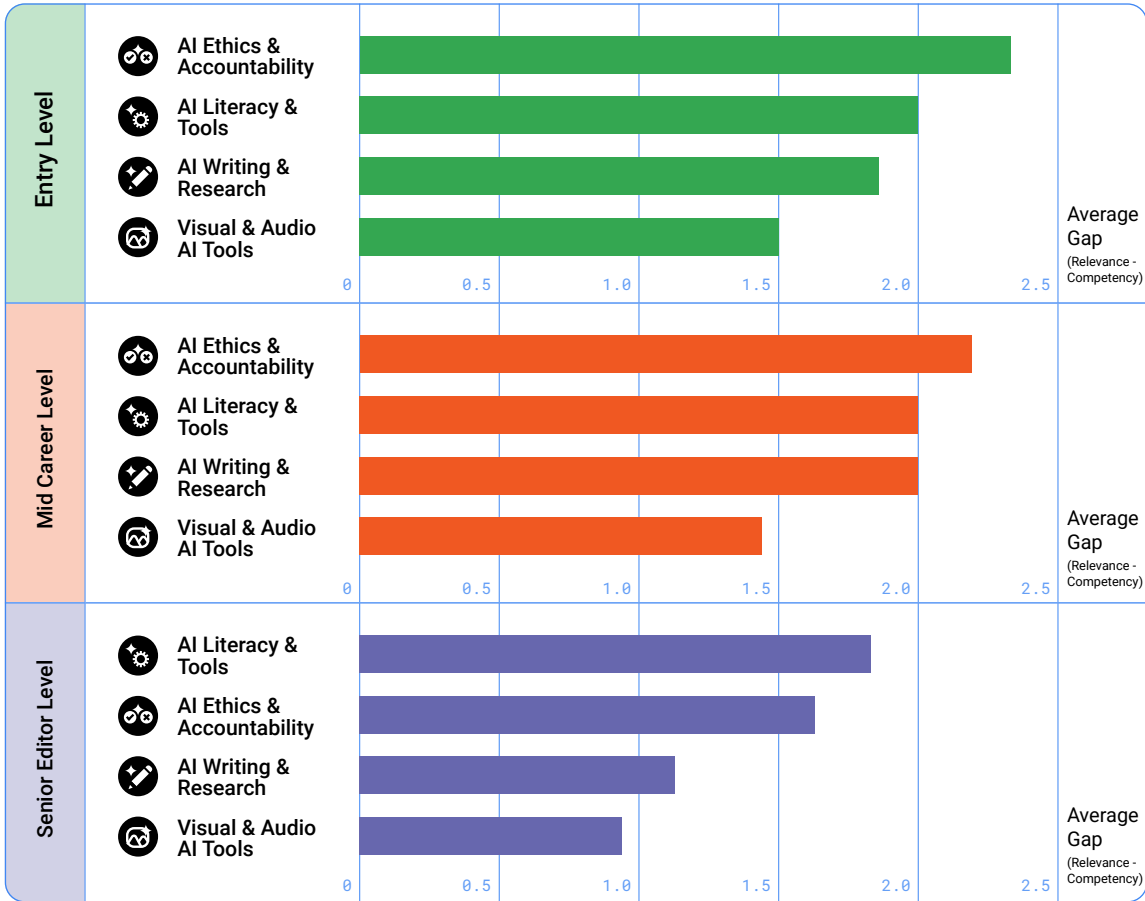
3.3 Familiarity with online journalism tools

Newsroom leaders and managers lack proficiency in AI Tools, and entry level and mid-career journalists lack understanding of ethical use of AI

AI Literacy and Tools is the top gap driver for both Senior Managers and Leaders/Strategists, indicating a systemic inability at the highest levels to evaluate, procure, and train staff on the fundamental tools necessary for productivity.

AI Ethics and Accountability presents the most critical gap for Entry-Level and Mid-Level journalists, reflecting that the core workforce lacks the competency to apply ethical decisions and check for hallucinations.

Visual & Audio AI Tools consistently ranks last in terms of the average gap, although it still presents large deficits in specific newsrooms, particularly concerning strategic investment in deep-fake or avatar technology.





Conclusion: Gaps

4.0 Conclusion: Gaps

The findings revealed technical gaps and cultural/ institutional gaps across the three career stages. It confirms that these gaps are hindering the progress of the media industry, especially given growing consumption of content from non-newsrooms, declining revenues and the need for responsible use of AI as part of industry transformation.

Technical gaps were revealed in the quantitative data interviewees assigned to the skills framework, in which key functions of each skills category varied according to career stage.

Cultural/ institutional gaps emerged from the analysis of the interview data.

This differentiation is vital, for interventions to address technical skills gaps can only be effective if they recognise the role cultural and institutional gaps play in hampering the acquisition of key competencies at each stage across the funnel.

With this in mind, our recommendations not only posit training programs to upskill journalists at each career stage, but also deeper reforms that can help to address some of the fundamental challenges facing the news industry today.

	Technical Gaps (Relevance-Competency)	Cultural/ Institutional Gaps
Academic Programs	• Data/investigative skills • Writing and Storytelling • Ethics and Law • AI-related competencies	• Low appetite for career in news industry • Disconnect between academic offerings and industry reality.
Entry Level	• Verification and Literacy • Data and Investigative • Ethics and Law • News Gathering • Writing and Storytelling	• Lack of curiosity • Lack of critical thinking • Lack of initiative and drive
Mid Career	• AI Literacy and Tools • AI Writing and Research • AI Writing and Research • Visual and AI Tools	• Exodus of mid-career journalists from the industry
Senior/ Management	• AI Literacy and Tools • AI Ethics and Accountability • Community and Impact • AI Writing and research	• Lack of management skills needed to implement succession planning • Lack of familiarity with AI needed to develop policy

5.0



Recommendations

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Recommendations

5.1 Recommendations for Malaysia

Formalise an industry recognised Journalism Skills Framework

Fund the formal development and role out a Journalism Skills Framework, that is recognised by the media industry and training regulators such as the HRDF and MQA. Having a framework in place will allow education and training organisations to clearly understand the needs of the industry and develop specific programs.

Market Journalism as an early career option

The media industry and universities could position journalism, not as a life choice, but as an excellent entry-level vocation. An early career in journalism will help develop soft skills as well as gain broad knowledge and develop key contacts and networks.

Improve the current undergraduate internship component

In collaboration with industry bodies, a common internship application and management platform can be developed. Improve the funnel to media companies, while introducing standard courses that address skills gaps.



Fund a 6-month cadet journalism program, in partnership with newsrooms

Similar to a housemanship in medicine or chambering in law, a cadetship for journalists in newsrooms will help build a solid foundation for a more sustainable career in the field.

Partner with executive education programs to provide a mid-career skills development and senior management leadership coaching

Using the skills framework as a reference, fund skills courses focused on AI and transformation to be delivered by experienced local training partners. Also fund a subsidised coaching program for newsroom leaders, focused on newsroom strategy and transformation.



5.2 **Recommendations for Singapore**

Fund several training options

Practitioner-in-Residence or Fellowship Program for media practitioners to teach the “craft” of journalism at universities, addressing the lack of real-world experience among faculty.

Contextualised Leadership Training on culture shaping, change management, and innovation in the news environment.

Support Internal Coaching and Mentorship Infrastructure by scaling proven internal development models with staff “tuition centres” with internal senior editors to provide targeted basic training and remedial coaching.

Implement AI Integration & Ethical Governance

Fund cross-organisational policy training focused on AI ethics and compliance. Focus on demonstrating how AI can produce binary or conflicting answers and how to verify AI output.

Fund small independent media outlets that focus on long form content, to build an AI application for its editorial style guide. Directly translates into efficiency gains and reduces pressure to hire more staff.

Support Alternative Revenue Models and Independent Media Growth

Independent outlets operate on constrained resources and rely heavily on alternative monetisation strategies, presenting a unique funding opportunity distinct from the established market leaders. Funding experts or resources to improve subscription conversion metrics and audience engagement strategies tailored for independent, long-form journalism would ensure the long-term viability of the outlet.

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Appendices

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Appendices

6.0 Appendices

Appendices may be accessed by scanning the following QR Code.



Acknowledgements

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