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Research Article

EFFECTIVE COACHING PRACTICES IN SCHOOL JOURNALISM: AN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Marah Shahani V. Montes¹, Grace G. Tizon¹, Rochelan Lumasag¹, Elsa B. Buenavidez², Cynthia S. Superable²

^{1*}Misamis University, Oroquieta City Philippines

²Misamis University, Ozamis City Philippines

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*Corresponding Author:

marahshahani@deped.gov.ph

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ABSTRACT

Journalism in schools plays a vital role in nurturing students' critical thinking, ethical awareness, and communication skills while fostering informed and responsible citizenship. This study explored the sustaining and evolving coaching practices of school journalism advisers. Using a qualitative approach, the research examined how integrating digital and multimedia journalism skills, along with continuous reflection, feedback, and professional development, supports students' technical competence, adaptability, creativity, and ethical awareness. Findings revealed that advisers emphasized hands-on digital content creation, multimedia storytelling, social media engagement, and iterative feedback as essential strategies for maintaining relevance amid rapidly changing journalism standards. The study highlighted that iterative cycles of experience, reflection, and application enabled student journalists to develop professional readiness and lifelong learning dispositions. The study concludes that adaptive, reflective, and technology-integrated coaching practices are vital for cultivating competent, resilient, and ethically grounded student journalists who can thrive in modern newsroom contexts. School journalism advisers are encouraged to adopt experiential, collaborative, technology-rich, and well-structured coaching practices with sustained mentorship and continuous digital integration to enhance student journalists' competence, creativity, ethical professionalism, accountability, and long-term adaptability in evolving media environments.

Keywords: *collaborative learning, digital journalism, experiential coaching, mentorship, student journalists*

Introduction

Bullying School journalism holds significant value for learners' holistic development, serving as a powerful platform for cultivating their communication, research, and ethical decision-making skills (Islam & Ishaq, 2024). Through involvement in school publications and press conferences, students are provided with avenues to articulate their ideas, conduct responsible reporting, and promote a sense of social responsibility. This not only improves their performance in school but also prepares them to be active citizens in a democratic state. Hence, the success of school journalism depends largely on the advice and mentorship offered by committed coaches and advisers (Auten, 2023; Barbare, 2023). These teachers have a critical role in developing students' journalistic skills and monitoring the quality and integrity of their work (Uktamova, 2024).

Despite its significance, the impact of school journalism is undermined by the challenges faced by coaches who conduct these activities (Paguirigan & Paguirigan, 2023). These teachers and advisers are often tasked with coaching students with minimal training and resources, undermining the learning process and the quality of the student products. The effectiveness of school journalism activities depends primarily on the skills and motivation levels of these coaches, making their professional development highly important (Sokolović et al., 2023). In addition, support from institutions such as official training programs is variable and sometimes inadequate to meet coaches' needs (Bekidusa, 2024; Fahmy & Abdulmajeed Attia, 2024; Mthombeni et al., 2024). It is critical to improve school journalism and enhance students' learning by understanding the experiences and challenges these teachers face.

Research on school journalism programs has predominantly focused on organizational and structural issues, with little attention to the personal experiences of elementary school press coaches. Most existing studies concentrate on outcomes, policy, or organizational concerns, overlooking the individual and affective dimensions of coaching. There is a significant empirical gap in understanding the personal lives, emotional challenges, and coping strategies of these coaches. This gap is crucial because coaches' personal experiences directly influence how they mentor student journalists, which, in turn, shapes students' development as journalists. Investigating these first-hand experiences will provide valuable insights into the support mechanisms needed to help coaches manage their emotional challenges and become more effective mentors. Addressing this empirical gap will deepen understanding of the real-world complexities faced by school journalism advisers and inform more effective support strategies.

Paguirigan & Paguirigan (2023) analyzed these organizational issues, noting challenges such as the lack of formal training and resource limitations faced by school journalism coaches. Their research underscored the fact that most coaches do their work with inadequate preparation, which causes them stress and reduces their effectiveness. They also noted the need for ongoing professional development to enhance coaching practice and student achievement. However, their work focused mainly on systemic issues, leaving a knowledge gap in understanding the personal and emotional aspects of coaching, which remain largely unexplored.

Drawing on Paguirigan & Paguirigan (2023), this study examined the personal accounts of elementary school journalism coaches to reveal their reasons for pursuing coaching and the strategies that have made them successful in their careers. The study's findings can guide targeted training initiatives and organizational policies to enhance coaches' support in their roles. In the long run, this research aims to help professionalize school journalism coaching, enabling educators and students to benefit from a more organized and nurturing environment.

This study is significant because it provides a deeper understanding of the personal experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of elementary school journalism coaches, whose mentorship is critical to developing students' communication, research, and ethical decision-making skills. By focusing on the emotional, professional, and practical dimensions of coaching, the research addresses an important gap in existing literature, which has largely concentrated on organizational and systemic aspects of school journalism. The findings of this study can inform targeted professional development programs, institutional support mechanisms, and policy initiatives to enhance coaches' effectiveness, motivation, and well-being. Ultimately, the study contributes to the professionalization of school journalism coaching, fostering a more supportive and structured environment that benefits both educators and student journalists and strengthens the holistic

development of learners as responsible and competent members of society.

Methods

This study employed an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) research design, guided by Cooperrider and Whitney (2005), to explore effective coaching practices used by school journalism advisers in elementary schools within the Aloran District of Misamis Occidental, Philippines. By focusing on strengths rather than problems, the study aimed to uncover successful strategies that promoted student growth and achievement in campus journalism activities, using the 4D cycle of Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny. Ten purposively selected advisers with at least one year of coaching experience and involvement in journalism competitions provided rich, experience-based insights. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews guided by AI principles that explored advisers' effective strategies, aspirations for an ideal coaching environment, plans for system improvements, and approaches to sustaining successful practices. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, were strictly observed throughout the research process.

The data analysis followed the 4D Appreciative Inquiry framework, enabling the study to capture advisers' lived experiences, innovative strategies, and visions for school journalism programs. In the Discovery phase, advisers shared their current successes and effective coaching practices; in the Dream phase, they envisioned ideal conditions for nurturing student creativity and journalistic excellence. The Design phase focused on actionable strategies, structures, and resources needed to enhance coaching practices, while the Destiny phase examined how advisers planned to sustain and refine these practices over time. Data were thematically analyzed using insights from Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Constructivist Learning Theory, highlighting the interplay between coaching practices and the learning environment. Findings were shared with participants and stakeholders for validation and are intended to inform policy, professional development, and institutional support to strengthen school journalism programs and empower both advisers and student journalists.

Results and Discussions

This study is composed of four themes, namely: experiential and collaborative coaching practices foster competence, confidence, and ethical professionalism in student journalists; a technology-rich, collaborative, and flexible newsroom that nurtures creativity, experimentation, and holistic student growth, structured systems and supportive mentorship to optimize student journalists' growth, and sustaining and evolving coaching practices for contemporary journalism.

Experiential and Collaborative Coaching Practices Foster Competence, Confidence, and Ethical Professionalism in Student Journalists

Experiential and collaborative coaching practices significantly contribute to student journalists' development by combining hands-on learning, real-world tasks, and guided peer interaction to build technical competence, confidence, and ethical professionalism. Participants highlighted that practical assignments, mock editorial boards, coverage of school events, and constructive feedback allowed students to refine writing, reporting, and analytical skills while internalizing professional standards (Coach 1, 2, 5, 10). Collaborative activities and peer engagement further strengthened teamwork, problem-solving, and professional confidence (Coach 3, 7, 8). Reflective practices, ethical deliberation, and accountability in authentic reporting tasks fostered critical thinking and moral judgment (Coach 4, 6, 9). These findings are supported by experiential learning theory, which emphasizes learning through active engagement, reflection, and iterative practice (Kolb, 1984; Chavez et al., 2024; Castillo & Velasco, 2025), as well as research on practice-based and collaborative journalism education (Evans, 2016; University of Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication, 2025; AUT experiential learning case, 2025; Wang, Liu, & Yen, 2022). Collectively, such coaching approaches prepare student journalists to navigate complex media environments with competence, creativity, and ethical awareness.

A Technology-Rich, Collaborative, and Flexible Newsroom that Nurtures Creativity, Experimentation, and Holistic Student Growth

A technology-rich and flexible newsroom fosters student journalists' creativity, technical skills, and holistic growth by integrating digital tools, multimedia resources, and collaborative workspaces that mirror professional media environments. Participants emphasized that well-equipped media rooms, flexible desks, editing software, and collaborative zones supported experimentation, innovation, and reflective learning (Coach 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10). Access to technology-enabled learning spaces encouraged technical proficiency in multimedia reporting and editing while promoting problem-solving, adaptive thinking, and teamwork (Aitamurto, Barnidge, & Aitamurto, 2025; Ramos & Suizo, 2024; Wang, Liu, & Yen, 2022). Guided by Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984), participants' experiences illustrated how iterative cycles of hands-on practice, reflection, and collaboration fostered innovation, professional confidence, and the creative agency necessary for authentic newsroom practice, thereby supporting both academic and professional development in student journalists.

Structured Systems and Supportive Mentorship to Optimize Student Journalists' Growth:

Structured editorial systems and supportive mentorship were critical for optimizing student journalists' growth by providing organized frameworks, clear timelines, and personalized guidance that enhanced technical skills, professional habits, and accountability. Participants emphasized that editorial schedules, project timelines, peer reviews, and formal mentorship created stable, disciplined learning environments while supporting innovation and skill development (Coach 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10). Consistent mentorship and professional support further enabled students to internalize journalistic standards, gain confidence, and navigate challenges in both academic and real-world settings (Coach 2, 7). These findings align with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), which emphasizes learning through scaffolding and guided social interaction, and are supported by research highlighting the importance of structured feedback, mentorship, and systematic learning in journalism education (Sabio & Gumanoy, 2025; Rincon Flores et al., 2024). Together, structured systems and mentorship cultivate competent, confident, and ethically grounded student journalists.

Sustaining and Evolving Coaching Practices for Contemporary Journalism

Sustaining and evolving coaching practices ensure that student journalists remain adaptable, competent, and professionally prepared in a rapidly changing media landscape. Participants highlighted the integration of digital and multimedia journalism skills, including social media literacy, podcasting, video reporting, and cross-disciplinary projects, as essential for technical proficiency, creative problem-solving, and professional readiness (Coach 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10). Continuous reflection, structured feedback, and engagement with professional development opportunities supported iterative improvement, ethical decision-making, and adaptability (Coach 2, 9). These practices reflect Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984), emphasizing the cycle of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation, and are supported by research on multimedia journalism education and reflective professional learning (Sabio & Gumanoy, 2025; Rincon Flores et al., 2024). Altogether, adaptive coaching fosters lifelong learning, ethical judgment, and resilience, preparing student journalists to thrive in contemporary, technology-driven media environments.

Conclusions

Experiential and collaborative coaching, when combined with technology-rich, flexible learning environments, structured systems, and personalized mentorship, is essential for developing competent, confident, and ethically grounded student journalists. Such approaches foster practical skills, professional judgment, innovation, reflective practice, and adaptability, enabling students to navigate both academic and real-world media contexts. By sustaining and evolving coaching practices that integrate hands-on experiences, collaborative projects, technological tools, organized frameworks, and continuous feedback, educators cultivate journalists who are not only technically proficient but also creative, ethical, and agile in responding to the dynamic, technology-driven demands of contemporary journalism.

Recommendations

School journalism advisers can enhance student journalists' competence, creativity, and professional

readiness by implementing structured, experiential, and collaborative coaching strategies, maintaining technology-rich, flexible newsroom environments, and providing clear editorial workflows, combined with mentorship and iterative feedback. By assigning practical newsroom tasks, facilitating peer collaboration, integrating digital media training and multimedia projects, and continuously updating practices to align with emerging industry standards, advisers foster students' confidence, ethical professionalism, and adaptability in dynamic media contexts. Future research may examine the long-term effects of sustained digital and multimedia coaching on students' career trajectories and ability to navigate evolving media industries.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares that they have no conflicts of interest

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