

Concretising Legislative Journalism: Journalism Students' Reporting Self-Efficacy and Professional Socialisation Following an Experiential Senate Tour in Kenya

Authors

Mercy Munene ⁽¹⁾; Philip Keitany ⁽²⁾; John Maingi ⁽³⁾

Main author's email: mercynesh9@gmail.com

(1.2.3) Kabarak University, Kenya.

Cite this article in APA

Munene, M., Keitany, P., & Maingi, J. (2026). Concretising legislative journalism: Journalism students' reporting self-efficacy and professional socialisation following an experiential Senate tour in Kenya. *Journal of media and communication*, 5(1), 109–120. <https://doi.org/10.51317/jmc.v5i1.1181>



A publication of Editon Consortium Publishing (online)

Article history

Received: 2026-07-20

Accepted: 2026-08-18

Published: 2026-09-05

Scan this QR to read the paper online



Copyright: ©2026 by the author(s).

This article is an Open Access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).



Abstract

This study evaluates a short-term experiential intervention, a formal academic tour of the Kenyan Senate undertaken by journalism students in July 2026 to address the problem that legislative reporting is frequently taught as abstract theory, leaving undergraduates with only second-hand knowledge of state institutions. Utilising a convergent mixed-methods design within a single-case study framework, this research assessed the tour's pedagogical impact. Although the Parliamentary Service Commission officially cleared 60 students, a census of the 28 students who ultimately attended was completed, and they completed a post-visit survey comprising Likert items and open-ended reflections, which were analysed using descriptive statistics and reflexive thematic analysis. Contrary to conventional assumptions about anxiety reduction, most students did not find the Senate intimidating beforehand ($M = 2.86$ on a 5-point scale). Instead, the intervention's pedagogical value lay in converting abstract procedure into concrete understanding and raising reporting self-efficacy. Students reported gaining practical insights unavailable in lectures, a better understanding of debate structures, and increased confidence in pitching and writing a parliamentary story. Furthermore, navigating mandatory security protocols and gallery decorum socialised students into the access barriers and professional conduct expected of political reporters, a finding corroborated by qualitative reflections on institutional protocol and parliamentary privilege. While acknowledging that these findings capture immediate, self-reported perceptions rather than longitudinal assessments of competence, ultimately, experiential visits function as vital mechanisms of concretisation and professional socialisation rather than mere anxiety relief. These findings underscore the importance of integrating immersive field visits into specialised journalism curricula to bridge the gap between theoretical instruction and the profession's practical demands.

Key terms: Experiential learning, institutional gatekeeping, journalism education, parliamentary reporting, self-efficacy.

INTRODUCTION

Journalism education has long grappled with the dichotomy between theoretical classroom instruction and the practical demands of a rapidly evolving media industry. The tension is not new, but it has intensified as newsrooms have become faster, more converged, and more tightly bound to the institutions they cover, widening the distance between what a lecture can convey and what a working reporter must do. In response, pedagogical frameworks have increasingly shifted towards experiential learning models that emphasise acquiring professional competence through active, real-world engagement rather than passive memorisation (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). This shift is especially consequential in specialised journalistic fields, where abstract concepts often fail to translate into tangible reporting skills without direct exposure. Experiential learning theory holds that durable learning proceeds through a cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation; immersive interventions supply the concrete experience and reflection that lecture-based instruction cannot (Foo & Foo, 2022; Nonkula, 2025). Where such interventions succeed, they do more than motivate: they can raise learners' self-efficacy their belief in their capacity to execute the tasks a profession demands which is itself a strong predictor of subsequent effort, persistence, and performance (Bandura, 1997; Usher et al., 2023).

Parliamentary reporting stands out as one of the most intellectually demanding and highly regulated beats within journalism, requiring a nuanced grasp of legislative procedure, legal terminology, and institutional protocol. For students, legislative bodies such as the Senate can appear as exclusive domains governed by rigid standing orders and intricate procedural rules that are difficult to conceptualise in a lecture hall. The physical environment of a parliament is, moreover, intrinsically tied to institutional gatekeeping: public and media access is mediated by security clearances, dress codes, and strict rules of gallery decorum (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). The academic tour examined here explicitly required adherence to security protocols and a formal dress code for entry to the galleries. Such regulated environments compel aspiring journalists to navigate the very access barriers they will later face in the field,

and experiencing this gatekeeping first-hand is a recognised component of professional socialisation into the political beat (Binderkrantz et al., 2020; Gondwe et al., 2023).

These considerations acquire particular weight in the Kenyan context. Kenya operates a bicameral parliament in which the Senate performs a distinctive role in representing county interests and safeguarding devolution; thus, accurate legislative reporting is directly implicated in citizens' capacity to hold devolved governments to account. However, journalism educators in Kenya and the broader East African region frequently face resource constraints that make it difficult to guarantee sustained, semester-long newsroom attachments for every undergraduate (Adjin-Tettey, 2024; Gondwe & Awami, 2025). As a result, pedagogical approaches can sometimes default to broader theoretical frameworks that lack localised institutional nuances. In this context, a brief, whole-cohort visit to the national legislature represents a scalable, logistically feasible experiential mechanism for exposing students to the state institutions they will be expected to cover.

Despite the broad acceptance of experiential learning, a distinct pedagogical problem persists: educators lack empirical evidence on how brief, structured immersions into restricted state institutions actually impact student competencies. While much of the Global South literature on journalism education concentrates on long-term internships or campus-media attachments (Makhadi & Diederichs, 2021; Muringa & Adjin-Tettey, 2025), short, single-institution field visits remain comparatively under-evaluated (Hill et al., 2025). This lack of evaluation leaves a critical knowledge gap regarding whether these short-term visits genuinely develop procedural understanding and reporting self-efficacy, or if they merely serve as motivational excursions. This study addresses this explicit problem by empirically evaluating a Senate tour undertaken by a cohort of journalism students at a university in Kenya.

Rather than assuming that the intervention worked by reducing pre-existing anxiety, the study interrogates what the data actually show about how physical exposure altered students' procedural understanding, reporting self-efficacy, and socialisation into

institutional gatekeeping. The following research questions guide the analysis:

- RQ1. To what extent did an experiential Senate tour change students' understanding of legislative processes and their self-efficacy for parliamentary reporting?
- RQ2. How did navigating the Senate's institutional gatekeeping security protocols and rules of decorum shape students' professional socialisation into the political beat?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Experiential Learning and Reporting Self-Efficacy

Experiential learning theory provides the pedagogical foundation for industry immersion. Kolb and Kolb (2017) argue that learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience; classroom instruction supplies abstract conceptualisation, but without concrete experience and structured reflection, the learning cycle remains incomplete. Purposefully designed field trips can move students towards higher-order thinking and connect theory to practice, provided that pre-visit and post-visit activities frame the experience (Foo & Foo, 2022). In a South African higher-education study closely comparable to the present one, Nonkula (2025) used an immediate post-trip open-ended questionnaire and thematic analysis, working explicitly within the Dewey–Kolb tradition, and found that well-structured field trips deepened conceptual understanding and fostered professional development.

While Nonkula's (2025) research differed by focusing on geography students rather than journalism undergraduates, it serves as a highly appropriate methodological precedent due to its analogous context, intervention, and analytical approach: it evaluated a brief, targeted field trip designed to bridge theory and practice in an African university setting, and it captured student learning outcomes using an immediate post-visit survey evaluated through thematic analysis. Such work establishes both a rationale and a methodological precedent for treating a single, well-bounded visit as a legitimate site of experiential learning.

The mechanism by which immersion produces confidence is best explained by self-efficacy theory. Bandura (1997) proposed that efficacy beliefs are built from four principal sources: enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences (observing credible models), verbal persuasion, and physiological or affective states. A field visit to a working legislature engages at least the first two directly: students observe professional actors performing complex procedural roles (vicarious experience) and rehearse a reporter's situated judgements on the scene (an approximation of mastery). Usher et al. (2023) synthesise how educators can deliberately structure tasks to activate these sources across the span from schooling to the professions, emphasising that efficacy information is not absorbed automatically but is filtered through learners' interpretation of the experience, which is precisely why structured reflection matters.

Empirically, experiential interventions have been shown to raise student self-efficacy across diverse professional fields; in tourism education, for instance, the intensity of experiential learning significantly enhanced final-year students' self-efficacy, with the effect mediated by their perception that skills would transfer to practice (Abdelghani & Ahmed, 2025). This literature motivates treating reporting self-efficacy rather than anxiety reduction alone as the central outcome of interest, and it cautions that the same visit may yield different efficacy gains for different students depending on their prior confidence, a prediction the present data allow us to examine directly.

Political Journalism as a Specialised, High-Stakes Beat

Political and legislative reporting is widely regarded as a demanding specialisation that student journalists find difficult to master from theory alone. Studies of political journalism training report that both students and early-career reporters express uneven confidence in core competencies, and recommend closer collaboration between universities and newsrooms to provide the experiential opportunities that build competence (Calfano et al., 2022). Work-integrated projects that place students in live political environments, such as the large-scale UniPollWatch project, in which around a thousand students covered an Australian federal election, demonstrate that the

skills specific to political reporting improve markedly when students learn by observing and doing in the midst of a real contest (Dodd et al., 2021). Immersive engagements with legislative settings themselves, including parliamentary simulations conducted in actual legislative chambers, have similarly been shown to deepen participants' appreciation of the procedural balancing acts that political actors must perform (Cameron et al., 2023). Together, this body of work frames legislative journalism as a beat whose tacit, procedural knowledge is acquired most effectively through situated experience.

Institutional Gatekeeping and Professional Socialisation

Gatekeeping theory conceptualises news as the product of selection processes shaped by forces operating at individual, routine, organisational, and institutional levels (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). For the political reporter, one of the most tangible of these forces is physical and procedural access to state institutions. Empirical studies show that elite and institutional actors enjoy privileged access to the news, that governmental sources can hoard information and thereby constrain reporting, and that the terms of access materially shape what can be covered (Bakata et al., 2023; Binderkrantz et al., 2020).

In sub-Saharan Africa specifically, community journalists must continually negotiate the boundary between what powerful institutions permit and what their audiences need to know (Gondwe et al., 2023)—encountering these constraints in situpassing through security, observing gallery decorum, learning what may and may not be said on the record is therefore not a peripheral inconvenience of a field visit but a substantive lesson in how gatekeeping operates and how a reporter must position themselves within it. Learning to move within state-regulated spaces while fulfilling the watchdog role is a core element of the political reporter's professional socialisation.

Journalism Education and the Practice Gap in the Global South

The impetus for experiential intervention is sharpened by a well-documented gap between what journalism curricula deliver and what the profession requires. Across the Global South, and in Africa in particular, scholars find that programmes remain weighted

towards theory and struggle to equip graduates with the practical competencies that newsrooms expect (Adjin-Tettey, 2024). Systematic review evidence from South Africa reports persistent shortfalls in multimedia and applied skills and, tellingly for the present study, only limited emphasis on work-integrated learning across the sector's curricula (Muringa & Adjin-Tettey, 2025). Interview and curriculum evidence from East and Southern Africa similarly shows that educators and practitioners agree on the existence of the gap and desire closer alignment, but are constrained by limited industry collaboration and scarce resources (Gondwe & Awami, 2025).

Within this landscape, work-integrated learning has been identified as the most effective bridge to workplace readiness. Yet, its fullest forms semester-long internships and newsroom attachments are resource-intensive and cannot always be provided to every student (Makhadi & Diederichs, 2021). The short institutional field visit occupies an important niche in this ecology: it is a lighter, scalable form of experiential learning that an entire cohort can undertake at once. Establishing what such visits achieve is therefore central to any realistic strategy for narrowing the practice gap in resource-constrained programmes.

The Empirical Gap in Short-Term Institutional Immersions

A critical synthesis of the contemporary literature reveals a methodological and contextual divide in the evaluation of experiential journalism education in the Global South. Contemporary scholarship overwhelmingly converges on the value of prolonged industry exposure, frequently employing qualitative interviews or longitudinal surveys to evaluate long-term experiential models such as semester-long internships (Makhadi & Diederichs, 2021). Conversely, another prominent strand of research relies on macro-level curriculum audits and systematic reviews to diagnose curricular gaps at the programme level (Adjin-Tettey, 2024; Gondwe & Awami, 2025; Muringa & Adjin-Tettey, 2025).

While these studies collectively agree that a theory-practice gap exists and that industry immersion is the optimal solution, their methodological divergence leaves a distinct, unresolved blind spot: the pedagogical mechanics of short-term, highly

structured interventions. Because the literature bifurcates between months-long attachment evaluations and broad programmatic critiques, the immediate cognitive and affective impact of short institutional immersions is comparatively neglected. Consequently, what remains fundamentally unresolved in the literature is whether these brief, logistically feasible interventions function merely as superficial motivational excursions or generate tangible, measurable gains in procedural understanding and professional socialisation. This study addresses that gap by empirically evaluating a localised experiential intervention at the Kenyan Senate, providing evidence on whether and how brief institutional visits should be integrated into specialised journalism curricula.

Theoretical Framework

A triple lens guides the study. Experiential learning theory (Kolb & Kolb, 2017) provides a framework for conceptualising why the visit should generate learning, by supplying the concrete experience and reflection a lecture omits. Self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997; Usher et al., 2023) informs the analysis of the mechanism and the outcome, providing a conceptual basis for examining whether observing skilled professionals and rehearsing the reporter's situated judgement relates to students' confidence to perform the beat. Gatekeeping theory (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009) helps illuminate what students encounter at the institutional threshold and why it matters, framing security and decorum as lived lessons in the structural conditions of political reporting.

Crucially, these three perspectives collectively model the pedagogical pathway of the intervention: experiential learning provides the physical immersion, which in turn supplies the vicarious and enactive mastery experiences necessary to build reporting self-efficacy. This heightened confidence is then practically contextualised as students navigate the physical and procedural barriers of institutional gatekeeping, ultimately resulting in their professional socialisation.

METHODOLOGY

To effectively capture both quantitative self-assessments and qualitative reflections, the study employed a convergent mixed-methods design. This standard design is well-suited for educational

interventions because it allows for the simultaneous collection of closed-ended survey ratings and open-ended observations, enabling the researcher to triangulate statistical trends with narrative insights. The design is descriptive and exploratory: it characterises the immediate responses of a bounded cohort to a specific intervention. It does not employ a control group or a true pre-test. As set out in the limitations, causal and inferential claims are therefore avoided, and the retrospective "before the visit" item is treated as a perception measure rather than as a genuine baseline.

The intervention was a formal academic tour of the Kenyan Senate in Nairobi, organised for journalism students enrolled in a specialised Parliamentary Reporting unit at Kenyan University. The tour exposed students to the Senate chamber, the public and press galleries, and the institution's security and access procedures during a live sitting. Administrative permission for the academic visit was formally granted by the Office of the Clerk of the Senate under reference number PSC/SEN/SAA/CPE/7 (635). Informed consent was obtained from all participants; anonymity was assured; and students were explicitly told that their responses would not affect their academic grades.

The target population comprised the students authorised by the Parliamentary Service Commission to undertake the tour. Although 60 students were cleared, 28 ultimately attended the physical visit. Because the entire population of attendees was surveyed, the study used total population (census) sampling rather than drawing a sample: the data collection instrument was distributed to all 28 attendees, yielding 28 valid responses and a 100 per cent response rate of the attending cohort. This census design eliminates sampling error for the attendee population. However, it does not extend to the 32 cleared students who did not attend, whose absence is a form of self-selection discussed under limitations. Because the 28 constitute the whole population rather than a sample, the standard deviations reported below are population statistics.

Primary data were collected using a structured post-visit questionnaire administered immediately after the tour, while students were still in the vicinity of the

parliament buildings, to minimise recall decay and capture immediate reactions. The questionnaire items were developed through an iterative review process based on the unit's learning outcomes and relevant literature in journalism education, then pilot-tested with a small group of teaching assistants and non-participating peers to refine clarity and eliminate ambiguity. While the use of single-item measures for complex constructs such as reporting self-efficacy and gatekeeping awareness is acknowledged as a limitation that limits internal consistency testing, these items were selected to ensure a concise field instrument that could be completed immediately post-tour without excessive student fatigue.

The questionnaire comprised background items (year of study; prior physical visits to the Senate or National Assembly), five statements rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), a closed recommendation item, and open-ended prompts inviting students to record the most surprising or clarifying thing they had learned. The five Likert statements operationalise the three theoretical constructs: procedural understanding (two items), reporting self-efficacy (one item), gatekeeping awareness (one item), and a retrospective perception of prior intimidation (one item).

Quantitative responses were coded numerically, with the five ordered Likert categories mapped to integer values from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), and summarised with descriptive statistics: frequencies, percentages, means, medians, and population standard deviations. For interpretive clarity, an "agreement" figure combining the "agree" and "strongly agree" categories is reported alongside each mean. Given the census design and small population, no inferential tests were conducted, and the modest subgroup comparisons reported below, for example, between students who did and did not report prior intimidation are treated strictly as descriptive patterns rather than as tests of statistical difference.

The open-ended responses were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and

Clarke's (2022) six-phase procedure: the researcher first familiarised themselves with the full set of responses through repeated reading, generated initial codes across the dataset, collated codes into candidate themes, reviewed those themes against the extracts and the dataset as a whole, and then defined and named the final themes. Themes were understood as actively constructed patterns of shared meaning rather than as categories passively emerging from the data, and each is illustrated with verbatim extracts so that readers may judge the fit between interpretation and evidence. Finally, the quantitative and qualitative strands were integrated to examine points of convergence and tension, most notably around the question of prior intimidation, where the numbers and the narratives together produced the study's central reframing.

Credibility was supported by grounding each qualitative theme in participants' own words and by actively reporting disconfirming cases, including the single student who did not endorse making the tour mandatory and the respondent who disagreed that the visit provided practical insights. The lead researcher is a member of the teaching faculty who organised the tour; this insider position enriched interpretation but created a risk of socially desirable responses, mitigated by anonymisation and by framing prompts around observation rather than evaluation of the trip. The persistence of critical and neutral responses in the data suggests that candour was not wholly suppressed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

All 28 attendees completed the survey. The cohort was highly homogeneous in academic progression: 27 respondents (96.4%) were in their fourth year of study, and 1 (3.6%) was in their third year. Baseline exposure to legislative environments was low: 22 respondents (78.6%) had never physically visited the Kenyan Senate or National Assembly before the tour, underscoring that, for most, this was a first encounter with the institution. Table 1 summarises the sample profile.

Table 1. Sample Profile and Headline Recommendation (N = 28)

Characteristic	n	%
Year of study — Year 4	27	96.4
Year of study — Year 3	1	3.6
Prior physical visit to Senate/Assembly — No	22	78.6
Prior physical visit — Yes	6	21.4
Would recommend the tour be made mandatory — Yes	27	96.4
Would recommend be made mandatory — No	1	3.6

Quantitative Findings

Table 2 reports the five Likert items. Three patterns stand out. First, students strongly endorsed the intervention's cognitive and practical value: the items on gaining practical insights ($M = 4.14$), understanding how debates are structured through the physical layout ($M = 4.25$), and understanding journalists' access barriers ($M = 4.11$) all attracted high agreement; the last was endorsed by 89.3 per cent of respondents.

Second, reporting self-efficacy rose: three-quarters of students (75.0%; $M = 4.00$) agreed that they now felt more confident about pitching and writing an accurate parliamentary news story. Third, and contrary to the intuitive framing of the intervention, the item on prior intimidation attracted the lowest agreement of all ($M = 2.86$), below the neutral mid-point.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for the Five Likert Items (N = 28; 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)

Survey item (1 = strongly disagree ... 5 = strongly agree) M SD Mdn % agree n	M DOCX	SD DOCX	Mdn DOCX	% agree DOCX	n DOCX
Before the visit, I found the Senate's rules and procedures abstract and intimidating	2.86	0.99	3	25.0	28
The tour gave practical insights into legislative processes unavailable in a lecture	4.14	0.95	4	78.6	28
Seeing the chambers and galleries helped me understand how debates are structured	4.25	0.78	4	78.6	28
I now feel more confident to pitch and write an accurate parliamentary news story	4.00	0.71	4	75.0	28
Navigating security protocols helped me understand journalists' access barriers	4.11	0.67	4	89.3	28

"% agree" combines "agree" and "strongly agree". SDs are population statistics.

The Intimidation Nuance

Because the "demystifying" rationale for such tours assumes that students find legislatures intimidating, the distribution of the prior-intimidation item warrants scrutiny. Only 7 respondents (25.0%) agreed or strongly agreed that they had found the Senate's rules and procedures abstract and intimidating before the visit; 9 (32.1%) were neutral, and 12 (42.9%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. In other words, a plurality arrived without the anxiety the intervention is often assumed to dispel. Critically, the reported gains did not depend on prior intimidation. Among the 21 students who had not felt intimidated, agreement remained high for

practical insights ($M = 4.05$) and reporting confidence ($M = 3.90$); the 7 who had felt intimidated reported marginally higher gains ($M = 4.43$ and $M = 4.29$ respectively), consistent with their having had more room to grow. The intervention thus added value across the cohort, not merely among an anxious minority—a pattern that reframes what the tour actually accomplished.

Qualitative Findings: Concretising Procedure and Practice

The open-ended reflections clarified the nature of the learning. To construct these themes systematically,

initial codes derived from recurring student expressions were clustered into candidate categories focusing on procedural mechanics, after which iterative comparisons against the dataset defined the final thematic structures. Students repeatedly described the visit as making concrete what had previously been abstract, and several drew an explicit contrast with classroom instruction. One wrote simply that “there’s more to learn physically there than in class” (R23). At the same time, another observed that a Senate sitting “is like a normal debate but of a higher calibre and more professional and involves political leaders” (R5). For several students, the concreteness translated directly into journalistic technique. One articulated a specific reporting practice learned by observation:

“I finally understood why it’s important for journalists to do their own personal notes while in the chambers” (R10).

Others recorded newly grasped procedural facts that bear directly on accurate reporting: that senators “talk only when asked to” (R25), that “the Speaker has full control of the Senate” (R15), and, in the most legally precise reflection, that “one cannot discuss a member of the Senate’s conduct unless a substantive motion has been moved” (R24). While these qualitative entries illustrate how students articulated immediate cognitive shifts, the data capture perceived self-assessments and immediate impressions rather than verified, longitudinal changes in long-term reporting competence. That a student internalised the rule governing parliamentary privilege simply by watching it enforced illustrates the experiential mechanism at work: procedure that is easily forgotten as textbook abstraction became memorable as observed practice.

The breadth of these procedural takeaways is notable in itself. Across the 28 reflections, students independently surfaced a wide range of specific rules and conventions: the conditions under which a member’s conduct may be discussed, the sequence and manner of debate, the Speaker’s procedural authority, and the norms governing when and how members may speak without being prompted towards any particular rule. Several framed the value of the encounter in explicitly professional terms, one recording that the visit impressed on them “the

importance of knowing the Senate proceedings” (R8) and another that it clarified “the rules that a journalist should follow” (R7). One respondent captured the affective dimension of this professional realisation directly, writing that “the order maintained is very professional and it played a critical role for my journalistic journey” (R11). Taken together, these reflections indicate that the concretising effect of the visit was not confined to a single memorable fact but extended throughout the institution’s procedural architecture, which is exactly the kind of tacit, hard-to-lecture knowledge that specialised beat reporting demands.

Qualitative Findings: Gatekeeping and Decorum as Socialisation

The most consistent qualitative theme concerned institutional gatekeeping and the chamber’s culture. Rather than treating the Senate’s rules as mere administrative hurdles, students processed them as lessons in professional conduct. The phrase that recurred most often was a terse recognition of non-negotiable protocol: “protocols are protocols, no exception” (R3; echoed by R6). Students attended closely to the decorum of the chamber, noting the customs that govern behaviour in the galleries:

“That clapping was not allowed. Points were supported by stomping their feet” (R18).

Similar observations that members “have to bow as a sign of respect” (R22) and that proceedings ran with strict punctuality, the staff being “super strict on time and very punctual” (R14), show students reading the institution’s culture, not merely its legislative output. This awareness extended explicitly to the access conditions of their future work: 89.3 per cent agreed that navigating mandatory security protocols had helped them understand the physical barriers journalists face when covering state institutions, the strongest quantitative endorsement in the study, and one that aligns the students’ experience with the gatekeeping literature on privileged and mediated access to political institutions (Bakata et al., 2023; Binderkrantz et al., 2020). Encountering the threshold first-hand socialised students into the reality that political reporting is conducted within, and constrained by, state-regulated space.

Attitudinal Engagement and the Democratic Function

Beyond procedure and access, a further theme concerned students' affective and civic engagement with the institution. Several reflections recorded a shift in how students understood the Senate's purpose, not merely its rules. One described the chamber as "a safe space to air out grievances" (R4), reframing the legislature from an abstraction into a working forum for representation; another was struck by "how much it has to influence and implement laws" (R17). Students also registered the human texture of political life, with one noting, with evident surprise, that "despite the differences in their views, they are friends" (R27). This observation runs counter to a common student assumption that partisan opposition implies personal hostility, and it mirrors findings from parliamentary-simulation research in which participants come to appreciate the balancing acts politicians perform (Cameron et al., 2023).

For at least one respondent, the experience was frankly motivating, prompting the reflection that proceedings were "interesting and thought-provoking" in a way that "makes one want to be there and share their point of view" (R21). While these responses are not, in themselves, evidence of reporting competence, they matter pedagogically: political journalists cover institutions more accurately and less cynically when they understand their deliberative function from the inside, and this attitudinal engagement is among the forms of tacit learning that classroom instruction most struggles to convey.

Curriculum Recommendation and Dissent

The perceived value of the intervention was reflected in an almost unanimous recommendation: 27 of 28 respondents (96.4%) advocated making experiential tours to parliament mandatory for the Parliamentary Reporting unit. Consistent with the study's commitment to reporting disconfirming cases, one respondent (3.6%) did not, and one student disagreed that the visit had provided practical insights beyond the classroom. These minority positions are modest but genuine, and they temper any claim of universal benefit.

Discussion

Concretising Practice and Reframing Field Visit Outcomes

The headline contribution of this study is to correct an intuitive but empirically unsupported account of why institutional field visits work. The organising assumption behind "demystifying" a legislature is that students find it intimidating and that exposure dispels that fear. The data do not sustain this: with a mean of 2.86 and only a quarter of students agreeing they had been intimidated, the cohort largely arrived unafraid. Yet the intervention still produced substantial gains in procedural understanding and reporting confidence across the cohort. Rather than functioning primarily as an anxiety-reduction mechanism, the visit operated through cognitive concretisation: transforming abstract procedural knowledge into observed, situated understanding as conceptualised in experiential learning theory (Kolb & Kolb, 2017).

Self-Efficacy as the Operative Outcome

Reframing the outcome in terms of self-efficacy clarifies the quantitative patterns. Three-quarters of students reported increased confidence in pitching and writing a parliamentary story, which was supported by Bandura's sources, such as vicarious experience and approximations of enactive mastery observed during the tour (Bandura, 1997; Usher et al., 2023). That the minority reporting initial intimidation gained the highest confidence increments aligns with self-efficacy theory, wherein learners with lower baseline efficacy benefit most from mastery-relevant tasks. These findings reinforce broader educational research indicating that experiential intensity enhances perceived professional competence when linked to practical application (Abdelghani & Ahmed, 2025; Calfano et al., 2022).

Gatekeeping Encountered at the Threshold

The findings extend pedagogical theory regarding the structural conditions of political reporting. Students processed security protocols and chamber decorum not as nuisances, but as vital lessons in institutional gatekeeping (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Experiencing mediated access first-hand makes abstract access barriers tangible, reflecting the real-world constraints imposed by institutional actors (Bakata et al., 2023; Binderkrantz et al., 2020). By internalising these rules encapsulated in the student sentiment that "protocols

are protocols, no exception", students underwent anticipatory professional socialisation, equipping them to navigate regulated state environments without compromising their watchdog responsibilities.

Curriculum Implications and Design

The high endorsement for mandatory integration (96.4%) supports embedding structured institutional visits into specialised journalism curricula, provided they are methodically designed. Rather than treating field visits as isolated motivational events, educators should anchor them within a complete learning cycle: pre-visit briefings on standing orders, guided observational tasks during the visit, and immediate post-visit writing exercises (such as news pitches) to consolidate enactive mastery (Foo & Foo, 2022).

Constraints and Limitations of Mandatory Integration

While pedagogical benefits are evident, responsible curriculum design must account for logistical realities. Legislative access depends heavily on official parliamentary clearance, scheduling constraints, and resource limitations. Furthermore, because data rely on immediate post-visit self-reports, institutions must be cautious about overstating long-term behavioural changes from a single afternoon excursion. Where feasible, integrating institutional visits as credit-bearing, assessed components helps protect them from administrative marginalisation while preserving necessary institutional flexibility.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations bound these findings. These methodological constraints directly shape how the study's conclusions must be interpreted across the board: rather than indicating definitive longitudinal skill acquisition, the reported gains reflect immediate, self-reported perceptions of competence. The study uses a single-case, cross-sectional design with a small population ($N = 28$) from a single cohort at a single university, which limits generalisability. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalised beyond this specific cohort, and the positive outcomes must be interpreted with the understanding that the 32 cleared students who did not attend may reflect self-selection, meaning attendees may differ systematically from non-attendees. Furthermore, the design lacks a true pre-test and a control group: the "before the visit" item is a retrospective perception collected after the

tour and is vulnerable to hindsight bias, so it cannot establish change over time. This retrospective approach underscores that claims of conceptual transformation must be treated as perceived shifts rather than as baseline-measured cognitive improvements.

All outcomes are self-reported perceptions of competence rather than assessments of actual journalistic output, and the single-item measures, while adequate for a brief field instrument, are not validated psychometric scales; a multi-item self-efficacy scale would permit estimates of internal consistency that single items cannot provide. Because single items were used to measure complex constructs such as self-efficacy and gatekeeping awareness, the quantitative metrics should be interpreted as exploratory indicators rather than exhaustive psychological measures.

The open-ended responses, though rich in range, were mostly brief, which limits the depth of the thematic analysis compared with interview-based qualitative work. Similarly, the potential for social-desirability and demand effects remains a critical interpretive caveat: given that the instrument was administered by the organising instructor immediately after an evidently well-received event, anonymisation and observation-focused prompts mitigate, but cannot eliminate, these effects. This immediate post-visit timing likely amplifies positive affect and enthusiasm, meaning the high agreement scores should be read as immediate experiential reactions rather than permanent professional dispositions.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: This study concludes that short-term, structured experiential field visits to state institutions function as highly effective pedagogical mechanisms for concretising abstract journalism theory into practical understanding. Contrary to common assumptions that legislative institutions are inherently intimidating to undergraduates, the data demonstrated that the primary value of the Kenyan Senate tour was not anxiety reduction, but rather cognitive concretisation and professional socialisation. The intervention significantly enhanced students' self-efficacy, specifically their reported confidence in pitching and writing accurate parliamentary news

stories. Furthermore, firsthand navigation of strict security protocols and gallery decorum served as vital, anticipatory socialisation into the realities of institutional gatekeeping. These findings suggest that experiential immersions should not be treated as mere motivational excursions, but as critical components of specialised journalism curricula. By deliberately integrating pre-visit briefings and post-visit reflective assessments, journalism educators can effectively bridge the persistent gap between classroom instruction and the practical demands of the profession.

Recommendations: This study contributes a more precise framework for evaluating brief institutional immersions. By shifting the explanatory mechanism

from vague anxiety reduction to cognitive concretisation, self-efficacy building, and in-situ gatekeeping socialisation, the study offers a robust, testable model for specialised journalism education. Thus, future research should employ genuine pre-post designs with validated self-efficacy instruments, incorporate control or comparison cohorts, extend across multiple East African universities, combine the survey with follow-up interviews to deepen the qualitative account, and most valuably assess whether measured self-efficacy gains translate into demonstrable reporting competence and, ultimately, into graduates' professional outcomes.

REFERENCES

- Abdelghani, A. A. A., & Ahmed, H. A. M. (2025). Applied internships in Egyptian tourism education: Measuring experiential learning's impact on student self-efficacy and perceived effectiveness of academic materials. *Journal of Social and Scientific Education*, 2(3), 284–304. <https://doi.org/10.58230/josse.v2i3.417>
- Adjin-Tettey, T. D. (2024). From the classroom to the African newsroom: How journalism education can bridge the gap between the classroom and the shrinking newsroom. *African Journalism Studies*, 45(3), 178–195. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2024.2321133>
- Bakata, N. B., Ngange, K. L., Assala, L.-C. B., & Ndod, S. N. (2023). Governmental information hoarding and its effects on journalism practice. *Corporate Law and Governance Review*, 5(1), 129–150. <https://doi.org/10.22495/clgrv5i1p12>
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W. H. Freeman.
- Binderkrantz, A. S., Christiansen, P. M., & Pedersen, H. H. (2020). Mapping interest group access to politics: A presentation of the INTERARENA research project. *Interest Groups & Advocacy*, 9(3), 290–301. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41309-020-00095-9>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE Publications.
- Calfano, B., Maulden, C., & Hughes, S. (2022). Coverage competence via collaboration: Overcoming political journalism challenges in local television. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 77(2), 190–204. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10776958211047430>
- Cameron, M. A., Ribeiro, A., Baier, G., McKay, S., Monnerat, R. A., & Cameron, C. A. (2023). Partisanship and political learning: Lessons from training politicians. *Journal of Political Science Education*, 19(1), 154–173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15512169.2022.2130070>
- Dodd, A., English, P., Lidberg, J., & Newlands, M. (2021). Training political reporters during a federal election: The UniPollWatch student journalism project. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 18(4), Article 6. <https://open-publishing.org/journals/index.php/jutlp/article/view/473>
- Foo, S. C., & Foo, K. K. (2022). Purposeful field trip: Impact on experiential learning opportunities and critical thinking skills. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 30(1), 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.30.1.01>
- Gondwe, G., & Awami, S. (2025). Bridging the knowledge divide: Journalism education and industry needs in East and Southern Africa. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 80(2), 135–155. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10776958241296500>

- Gondwe, G., Ferrucci, P., & Tandoc, E. C., Jr. (2023). Community gatekeeping: Understanding information dissemination by journalists in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Journalism Practice*, 17(9), 1902–1918. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2021.2022991>
- Hill, M., Hendricks, M. A., Cavanah, S. B., & Bobkowski, P. S. (2025). High school journalism field trips: Post-pandemic barriers and opportunities. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 80(1), 82–96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10776958241296507>
- Kolb, A. Y., & Kolb, D. A. (2017). Experiential learning theory as a guide for experiential educators in higher education. *Experiential Learning & Teaching in Higher Education*, 1(1), 7–44. <https://doi.org/10.46787/elthe.v1i1.3362>
- Makhadi, T., & Diederichs, P. (2021). The role of work-integrated learning in preparing journalism students for the workplace. *Communitas*, 26, 167–178. <https://doi.org/10.18820/24150525/comm.v26.10>
- Malling, M. (2023). Reconstructing the informal and invisible: Interactions between journalists and political sources in two countries. *Journalism Practice*, 17(4), 683–703. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2021.1930571>
- Muringa, T., & Adjin-Tettey, T. D. (2025). Assessing the responsiveness of journalism curricula to the labor market needs in South Africa: A systematic review. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 80(4), 331–354. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10776958251356372>
- Nonkula, Z. (2025). Bridging classroom and real-world learning: The impact of field trips on geography students' engagement and critical thinking in South Africa. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Sociality Studies*, 5(2), Article a04. <https://doi.org/10.38140/ijss-2025.vol5.2.04>
- Shoemaker, P. J., & Vos, T. P. (2009). *Gatekeeping theory*. Routledge.
- Usher, E. L., Butz, A. R., Chen, X.-Y., Ford, C. J., Han, J., Mamaril, N. A., Morris, D. B., Peura, P., & Piercey, R. R. (2023). Supporting self-efficacy development from primary school to the professions: A guide for educators. *Theory Into Practice*, 62(3), 266–278. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2023.2226559>