

## Practical Readiness of Graduates: Phenomenology of Basic Media Mastery in 5th Semester KPI Students

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Article Info:	ABSTRACT
Accepted: 29-01-2026	<b>Background:</b> This study examines the practical readiness of fifth-semester students in the Islamic Broadcasting Communication (KPI) Study Program to master basic media skills amid increasing demands for practice-oriented media education.
Approved: 20-02-2026	<b>Objective:</b> The objective of the study is to explore how students perceive and demonstrate their readiness for media production practices.
Published: 03-03-2026	<b>Method:</b> A phenomenological approach was employed to capture the meaning of participants' lived experiences, using data triangulation through self-report surveys, video analysis of documentation and assignment products, and in-depth interviews with 16 participants.
<b>Keywords:</b> practical readiness; phenomenology; media skills; media ethics	<b>Findings and Implications:</b> The findings indicate an early-stage readiness, characterized by strong digital habits and high self-confidence, while verified production skills remain limited. Video observations reveal weaknesses in pre-production planning, visual narrative continuity, and fundamental technical aspects such as framing and audio quality. Phenomenological interviews further show that students' understanding of media ethics tends to be normative and is not yet critically reflected in production practices. The triangulated results highlight a gap between perceived readiness and observable practical competence, indicating the need for pedagogical intervention. <b>Conclusion:</b> This study concludes that strengthening pre-production instruction, implementing portfolio-based assessments with technical rubrics, and integrating reflective ethical tasks are essential to enhance the verifiability of practical competence and graduates' readiness as media practitioners.

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of the digital era has fundamentally transformed the global media landscape, affecting modes of production, distribution, and content consumption. Contemporary media practitioners are required not

only to understand communication theory, but also to master adaptive technical skills aligned with rapidly evolving digital technologies, including audiovisual production, visual storytelling, and ethical judgment in complex digital environments (Deuze, 2007). These shifts place increasing pressure on communication education institutions to produce graduates who are not merely digitally literate, but also practically competent and professionally accountable. Within this context, the concept of *digital natives* has been widely used to describe a generation that grows up immersed in digital technology and is assumed to possess an inherent affinity with digital media tools. However, frequent exposure to technology does not automatically translate into structured, reflective, and ethically grounded professional skills. One of the central challenges in communication education today lies in transforming students' everyday digital practices into verified competencies that meet professional media standards.

Recent bibliometric analyses of the “digital natives” literature confirm that despite decades of scholarly discourse, the assumption of generational digital proficiency remains empirically contested and persistently reproduced across educational research traditions (Mertala et al., 2024). In the specific domain of media and journalism education, studies on novice practitioners further demonstrate that the digital competencies required for professional media work—including technical production, mobile journalism, and audiovisual storytelling—require structured pedagogical intervention beyond informal technology engagement. These findings reinforce the imperative to examine how communication programs bridge the gap between students' digital habits and the verified competencies demanded by the industry.

Global scholarship in communication and media education consistently emphasizes the importance of practical skill mastery as a determinant of graduate readiness for media work (Bridgstock, 2009). Experiential and practice-based learning models are widely recognized as effective pedagogical approaches for developing professional competence (Biggs, 2003). In digital media contexts, research further underscores the need to integrate digital literacy, technical proficiency, and ethical awareness to ensure responsible participation in the public communication sphere. Nevertheless, previous studies also indicate a recurring pattern in which communication students exhibit high confidence in their digital abilities, while the quality of their media production often falls short of professional benchmarks. Moreover, much of the existing literature focuses on final-year students or graduates, assessing employability and readiness after the completion of formal education (Tomlinson, 2017). As a result, empirical attention to students in earlier or intermediate stages of study remains limited.

Alongside these disciplinary concerns, contemporary literature on graduate employability identifies a growing mismatch between the competencies universities develop and the expectations of 21st-century workplaces. Employers increasingly require graduates who possess not only technical knowledge, but also collaborative communication, critical thinking, digital problem-solving, and adaptive professional skills—competencies that are difficult to cultivate without deliberate, practice-oriented curricular frameworks. This convergence of practical and professional demand underscores the urgency of developing verifiable evidence of competence as an integral component of communication education.

Despite the growing body of research on graduate readiness and media competence, a significant gap persists concerning the relationship between students' digital habits and their mastery of ethical and professional media practices. Contemporary students are frequently perceived as digitally fluent, particularly in their engagement with social media platforms and accessible production technologies (Buckingham, 2019). However, it remains unclear whether such habits have evolved into systematic, reflective, and ethically informed competencies consistent with professional media standards. Preliminary findings from local studies suggest this gap is particularly salient among students of the Islamic Broadcasting Communication (KPI) Study Program. For instance, research on KPI students' use of TikTok indicates that although students actively engage with the platform, they tend to function primarily as passive consumers rather than strategic content producers who intentionally develop professional skills or media identities aligned with graduate profiles (Hasibuan et al., 2025). Similar patterns emerge in studies of journalistic interest, where theoretical exposure is not accompanied by sufficient practical development due to limited facilities, field experience, and practice-oriented learning spaces (Kahpi, 2022).

These institutional challenges are situated within a wider global context in which higher education systems across diverse national settings grapple with integrating digital transformation into academic structures that were designed for pre-digital modalities. Comparative analyses of digital literacy in higher education reveal persistent gaps between students' informal digital habits and the structured, critically reflective literacies expected of professional graduates (Farias-Gaytan et al., 2023). The Islamic communication education context in Indonesia shares these structural tensions, further compounded by the dual mandate of technical media training and the ethical-religious formation embedded in KPI program objectives.

Another underexplored dimension in existing research concerns the ethical foundations of media practice. While ethics is widely acknowledged as

a core component of responsible communication, it is often treated normatively and examined separately from practical skill development. Additionally, most studies rely on evaluative or quantitative-descriptive approaches, offering limited insight into how students subjectively experience and interpret their readiness as emerging media practitioners. The lack of phenomenological inquiry leaves a gap in understanding the lived experiences through which students construct meanings of competence, ethics, and professionalism during their formative academic stages.

Comparative evidence from journalism and communication programs in other national contexts further illuminates how the transition from digital engagement to professional competence is mediated by pedagogical design and the availability of authentic practice environments. Research on communication students' responses to practice-based learning indicates that the absence of structured technical feedback, realistic production constraints, and professional mentoring significantly limits the transformation of academic exposure into workplace-ready skills (Jordaan & Groenewald, 2021). This body of evidence suggests that the competence gaps observed in KPI students are not idiosyncratic but reflect structural challenges common to communication education in digitally transitioning contexts.

Students of the Islamic Broadcasting Communication Study Program occupy a distinctive position at the intersection of media skill acquisition, Islamic ethical values, and da'wah-oriented communication. Normatively, KPI graduates are expected to become media practitioners who combine technical competence with ethical sensitivity and social responsibility. Fifth-semester students represent a critical transitional phase, as they begin engaging with applied courses such as media law, ethics, and information and communication technology, which form the foundation of practical readiness. However, scientific studies that specifically examine middle-semester KPI students as active subjects of inquiry remain scarce. Existing research tends to focus on platform effectiveness or external constraints, rather than on students' lived experiences in developing comprehensive basic media skills.

This research presents a novelty by placing early-stage readiness as the main phenomenological object in the context of the Islamic Broadcasting Communication Study Program, a focus that is still rarely studied in the communication education literature that tends to assess graduates at the end of the study period (Bridgstock, 2009). Methodological contributions in the form of data triangulation that combine phenomenological interviews, self-report surveys, and video analysis of classroom documentation as evidence of practice offer a richer empirical approach to test whether students' digital habits transform into verified practical skills (Bennett et al., 2008). This

research also operationalizes practical readiness through four indicator clusters (pre-production, technical production, post-production, ethics), thus enabling transparent and actionable criterion-referenced assessments for curriculum development. The findings are expected to supply contextual and instructional evidence that can be immediately applied by KPI curriculum designers to strengthen practice-based learning and ethical internalization from the first semester.

This positioning is further supported by emerging scholarship on active and digitally integrated pedagogical approaches in higher education, which demonstrates that practice-oriented instructional design significantly enhances the development of professional competencies and transferable skills among students. By combining phenomenological inquiry with triangulated evidence from self-report surveys, video-based observation, and in-depth interviews, this study contributes empirically grounded and contextually situated insights that can inform curriculum reform in KPI and analogous Islamic communication programs.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to examine students' lived experiences related to practical readiness in mastering basic media skills. A phenomenological approach was selected because the research focuses on understanding how participants interpret and give meaning to their learning experiences, rather than measuring technical competence quantitatively (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This design is considered appropriate to capture the depth and context of students' experiences during practice-oriented learning activities.

This methodological orientation is consistent with recent applications of phenomenological inquiry in educational research, which have demonstrated the approach's effectiveness in capturing nuanced cross-contextual experiences and the subjective meanings participants attribute to novel learning environments (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Phenomenological design was particularly suited to the present study given the interpretive nature of the research questions, which sought to understand how KPI students give meaning to their readiness rather than to measure it in a standardized way.

The research was conducted in the Islamic Broadcasting Communication (KPI) Study Program during a six-week period of practice-based instruction embedded in the Media Law and Ethics and Information and Communication Technology courses. This setting was chosen because these courses represent an early-to-middle stage of professional skill formation,

where students begin engaging with applied media competencies and ethical considerations.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, with criteria that ensured relevance to the research focus. The sample consisted of 20 fifth-semester KPI students who (a) actively participated in a minimum of four practical sessions, (b) were willing to engage in in-depth interviews, and (c) consented to the use of video recordings and assignment products for research purposes. The number of participants was deemed sufficient to achieve phenomenological depth while enabling triangulation across multiple data sources.

Data were collected through three primary techniques as a form of methodological triangulation. First, brief self-report surveys were administered using Google Forms to capture students' initial perceptions of their practical readiness through Likert-scale items and open-ended responses. Second, video documentation of teaching activities and student practice products—such as assignment videos, posters, and simple portfolios—were analyzed using structured observation sheets. These sheets assessed basic technical indicators, including framing, audio quality, editing continuity, and ethical representation, based on established literature on experiential learning and media practice competencies (Biggs, 2003). Third, semi-structured in-depth interviews lasting 30–45 minutes were conducted to explore students' learning experiences, interpretations of practical readiness, and ethical reflections in media production. Interviews followed phenomenological interviewing principles to elicit experiential meaning without imposing predetermined theoretical constructs.

The process included data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme refinement, and thematic description. Video observation data were coded in parallel using technical indicators to allow comparison with students' self-reported claims. Survey data were analyzed descriptively to provide numerical context supporting the qualitative findings, without intent for statistical generalization.

The thematic analysis procedure followed in this study was guided by established methodological principles for rigorous qualitative data analysis, including systematic phases of familiarization, open coding, theme generation, and reflexive review (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). This framework ensured that themes were grounded in participant data rather than imposed by prior theoretical expectations, thereby strengthening the credibility and transferability of the findings across comparable communication education contexts.

To ensure trustworthiness, several strategies were applied, including data source triangulation, member checking with selected participants, audit trail documentation, and peer debriefing with academic colleagues (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Ethical considerations were addressed through written informed consent, anonymization of participant identities, and secure storage of recordings and transcripts. Permission for the use of learning materials and student products was obtained prior to analysis. Methodological limitations, such as contextual focus on a single study program and potential self-selection bias, are acknowledged and discussed to support transparent interpretation of the findings.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

Data analysis through triangulation involving self-report surveys (n = 16), video and product observations (n = 16), and phenomenological interviews with a selected subset of participants (n = 5) yielded four main themes representing the condition of practical readiness among KPI students in semester 5: (1) claims of readiness versus evidence of practice, (2) limited internalization of pre-production processes, (3) ethics framed as normative compliance, and (4) early-stage readiness as a transitional condition. These themes emerged consistently through cross-comparison of data sources.

### *Claims of Readiness Versus Evidence of Practice*

Survey data indicated that 12 of the 16 participants reported high levels of basic technical readiness, scoring between 4 and 5 on a five-point self-assessment scale. Observation of video documentation and assignment products showed that 14 participants demonstrated basic technical competencies such as stable framing, acceptable audio clarity, and basic editing continuity. However, when triangulated with interview data, only three of the five interviewed participants articulated reflective awareness of professional technical standards beyond task completion. One informant explained, "I often make videos for Instagram; the process is fast, so I think that is already enough as an editing skill" (P3). This perception aligns with previous literature cautioning against the assumption that digital familiarity automatically translates into professional media production competence (Bennett et al., 2008). The divergence between self-reported confidence and observable reflective understanding underscores the importance of product-based assessment alongside self-report measures (Bridgstock, 2009).

### *Limited Internalization of Pre-Production Processes*

Survey responses showed that 13 of the 16 participants claimed to engage in basic pre-production activities such as writing short scripts or outlining production schedules. In contrast, observational data revealed that only four assignment submissions demonstrated clear evidence of structured pre-production planning. Interview narratives clarified this discrepancy. Students commonly perceived pre-production as optional for short or simple tasks. One participant stated, “If the assignment is short, we usually record it right away; it feels more time-efficient” (P1).

### *Ethics as Normative Compliance*

In the survey, 11 of the 16 participants affirmed that they understood media ethics. Observation of student products did not identify explicit ethical violations such as direct copyright infringement. However, ethical sensitivity related to representation, contextual accuracy, and narrative framing was rarely articulated. Interview data revealed that ethical understanding was predominantly framed in normative and prohibitive terms. One informant noted, “Ethics for me means making videos that do not corner or embarrass other people” (P4). This interpretation reflects compliance-oriented ethical reasoning rather than reflective ethical judgment, consistent with prior studies emphasizing the need for deeper internalization of ethical principles in media education (Christians, 2009).

### *Early-Stage Readiness as a Transitional Condition*

The integration of survey, observation, and interview findings indicates that most participants occupy an early-stage readiness position. While students demonstrated functional competence sufficient for academic assignments, evidence of readiness for professional practice remained limited. Interviewed participants consistently expressed awareness of this transitional status. One participant reflected, “I feel ready to complete class assignments, but I am not confident yet about working in a TV station or an agency” (P5). This pattern aligns with the concept of early-stage readiness, defined as foundational functional competence that has not yet reached professional standards validated through robust portfolios and sustained practice (Tomlinson, 2017).

### *Summary of Video and Product Observations*

Observational analysis provided a concrete depiction of students’ practical performance. Framing was appropriate in six assignments, audio quality was clear in eight, editing continuity was adequate in six, and basic text

or graphic elements were present in ten submissions. Evidence of pre-production documentation such as scripts or storyboards appeared in only a small number of cases. Ethical reflection was explicitly included in written task reports by five participants. These observational findings corroborate self-report data while grounding phenomenological interpretations of students' lived learning experiences in verifiable practice evidence.

Table 1 summarizes the results of triangulation descriptively for the main indicators of practical readiness.

**Table 1.** Results of Triangulation of Practical Readiness of KPI Students (n = 16)

Key indicators	Survei / Self-report (n)	Video Observation & Product (n)	Interview: Deep reflection (n)
Technical readiness claim (score 4-5)	12	6	3
Basic technical skills as per indicators	13	9	5
Pre-production practices are clear	13	4	1
Simple portfolio availability	16	1	—
Understanding ethics (affirmative answer)	11	6	5

Source: Data Processed

These empirical results confirm the existence of a gap between perceptions and practices that are relevant to practical readiness studies in communication education. The data shows that students' digital habits contribute to self-confidence, but do not always result in production skills that meet professional practice standards. Observational evidence emphasizes the need for curricular interventions that reinforce pre-production, product-based assessment components, as well as reflective tasks that force the internalization of ethics. These findings provide an empirical basis for curriculum recommendations that will be discussed in the discussion section.

## Discussion

The main findings of this study confirm the gap between the perception of KPI students' practical readiness and the media production skills seen in practice. Triangulation data shows that students' digital habits increase confidence but do not automatically produce technical skills that meet professional standards. Video observation showed weaknesses in pre-production aspects, visual narrative continuity, and representational sensitivity, while phenomenological interviews put student awareness in a

position of *early-stage readiness* ready at the level of academic tasks but not yet at a verifiable professional level. This interpretation is in line with criticism of *the assumption of digital nativity* that equates exposure to technology with professional production competence (Bennett et al., 2008).

A broader review of the literature on 21st-century digital skills further contextualizes this finding. Studies examining the determinants of digital competence among workers and graduates consistently show that possessing digital tools or devices does not automatically translate into the complex, problem-solving, and collaborative digital skills required by professional environments (van Laar et al., 2020). The pattern observed among KPI students—where high self-assessed confidence coexists with limited reflective production competence—is therefore not an anomaly but reflects a systemic gap widely documented across educational levels and disciplinary contexts.

The reading of the findings through the lens of phenomenological theory emphasizes the subjective meaning of students' learning experiences. Phenomenology demands an understanding of how students give meaning to their media production activities and how those meanings shape practical actions in the classroom. The informant's narrative that affirms the experience of creating content for a personal platform as proof of ability shows a pragmatic meaning that is different from professional criteria. This phenomenon shows the need to bridge these subjective meanings with practice standards through learning that explicitly links students' daily experiences with the professional competencies expected by the industry.

The gap in the pre-production aspect underscores the urgency of structured, experiential teaching. *Experiential learning* theory emphasizes the importance of cycles of planning, practical action, reflection, and application to form sustainable skills. Observational evidence showing a lack of pre-production planning recommends the integration of tasks that require scripts, storyboards, and shot lists as part of the assessment. A learning framework that links small tasks to larger projects can improve the internalization of the pre-production process so that students not only react technically but also manage production projects professionally.

Recent scoping reviews of experiential learning environments in higher education lend empirical weight to these prescriptions. Research synthesizing features of experiential learning environments associated with positive learning outcomes identifies structured reflection, authentic task complexity, and iterative feedback as the most consistently effective design elements for producing transferable competencies in professional programs (Duchatelet et al., 2024). These features correspond directly to the pedagogical gaps identified in the present study, reinforcing the recommendation to restructure

KPI learning activities around scaffolded, project-based curricula that require sustained engagement with pre-production planning and professional production standards.

The ethical dimension that emerges from the data indicates an understanding of media ethics that tends to be normative and descriptive. The results of the interviews show that students tend to see ethics as compliance with basic rules such as copyright or the prohibition of vilifying people. The study of media ethics demands a deeper reflective capacity, where editorial decisions are linked to the principles of fair representation and the public interest. The cultivation of ethics as a reflective practice requires assignment design that forces students to make written editorial justifications, conduct representational impact analysis, and weigh the social implications of production choices. Learning approaches that include real ethical case studies and discussion of editorial criticism can reinforce that internalization.

This interpretation aligns with theoretical arguments for recapturing moral agency as a foundational practice in journalism and media ethics education. Rather than treating ethics as a set of external constraints or prohibitive codes, this perspective advocates cultivating practitioners who exercise active, deliberative ethical judgment grounded in awareness of the social implications of their editorial choices. Embedding structured ethical reflection into the KPI curriculum—through case analyses, editorial justification tasks, and guided discussion of representational impact—would support students in developing ethics not as a compliance checklist, but as an internalized dimension of media professionalism.

Interpretation of results also needs to be associated with *the employability* literature and graduate attributes. Previous research has emphasized that job readiness is more than just technical knowledge; portfolio, project managerial skills, and evidence of practical experience are important indicators for recruiters. The findings of this study that show the availability of simple portfolios in a small number of students indicate the opportunity of the curriculum to increase portfolio exposure as a method of assessment and a driver of readiness. The implementation of assessment rubrics that prioritize product proof, process documentation, and personal reflection will increase the validity of student readiness claims in the eyes of employers.

The role of portfolio-based assessment as both a pedagogical tool and an evidence mechanism for graduate readiness has received growing scholarly attention. Analysis of social media and digital platforms as e-portfolio environments in higher education indicates that when students are guided to curate, reflect on, and contextualize their work within structured assessment

frameworks, portfolio practices substantially strengthen self-regulated learning, metacognitive awareness, and the verifiability of competence development (Chang & Kabilan, 2024). This finding underscores the practical feasibility of integrating portfolio-based components into KPI courses without requiring costly infrastructure, provided that clear assessment rubrics and reflective prompts are embedded into the pedagogical design. Practical recommendations for the curriculum of the KPI Study Program focus on three integrated aspects: learning structure, product-based assessment, and the strengthening of reflective ethics. First, the learning structure needs to include mandatory pre-production modules that are tiered from the first semester, covering planning, production management, and team communication skills.

The form of assignment can be in the form of micro projects (2–3 weeks) that lead to verified portfolios so that students build a collection of real products over time. Second, the assessment system must adopt a comprehensive rubric that assesses production techniques, work processes (pre-production to post-production), and process documentation. Product-based assessments combined with peer review and ongoing feedback help students develop skills iteratively. Third, the internalization of ethics can be facilitated through a written assignment component that requires editorial justification, representation impact analysis, and assessed ethical reflection. The inclusion of case study discussion modules and collaboration with industry practitioners can enrich students' ethical perspectives.

Strengthening industry partnerships constitutes an additional strategic approach. Collaboration with local media, creative agencies, or alumni can facilitate short internships, project-based learning, and mentoring that concretize professional standards while providing external validation of student portfolios. The integration of authentic work practices into the curriculum aligns with recommendations to enhance graduate employability through verifiable evidence of practice. Evidence on what actually enhances graduate employability consistently highlights the added value of curricular, co-curricular, and work-integrated learning experiences over solely classroom-based instruction.

Research examining the comparative impact of these experiences on graduate outcomes finds that students who engage in structured industry collaboration, project-based internships, and authentic professional mentoring during their studies demonstrate substantially stronger employability indicators than peers relying exclusively on formal academic instruction (Jackson & education, 2021). For the KPI Study Program, this implies that systematic collaboration with local media outlets, creative agencies, and alumni networks is not merely an enhancement but a structural

necessity for producing graduates who meet contemporary professional standards. The assessment design implications of these findings are further reinforced by research on digital competence validation in higher education contexts.

Studies developing and validating instruments for measuring digital competence among educators and students demonstrate that self-reported digital proficiency frequently diverges from competence verified through portfolio evidence and performance-based rubrics, highlighting the need for standardized, criterion-referenced tools that can objectively document the quality of students' digital production work (Cabero-Almenara et al., 2020). Adapting such validated rubric frameworks to the KPI context would substantially improve the credibility of practical readiness assessments and provide educators with actionable data for curriculum improvement.

The limitations of the study require a conservative interpretation. A sample limited to a single course of study and a six-week teaching period limited the generalization of the findings. Follow-up research is recommended applying longitudinal design to test the effectiveness of proposed curriculum interventions as well as expanding the cross-institutional study population for external validity. Comparative quantitative evaluation can also add evidence regarding the impact of pre-production modules and ethical components on the quality of student products.

The conclusions of the discussion showed that the transformation of digital habits into professional skills requires systematic pedagogical interventions, standardized product-based assessments, and the internalization of ethics as a reflective practice. A KPI curriculum oriented towards pre-production reinforcement, portfolio assessment, and real-world work experience has the potential to close the gap between *early-stage readiness* and reliable professional readiness.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the practical readiness of KPI students in semester 5 is characterized as early-stage readiness: students demonstrate digital habits that enhance self-confidence, yet verified media production skills remain limited and do not fully meet professional standards. Triangulation findings reveal a consistent gap between self-report claims and observable practice evidence from videos and assignment products, while phenomenological interviews confirm learning experiences that tend toward pragmatic rather than reflective engagement. The study's main contribution lies in operationalizing early-stage readiness as a pedagogical intervention domain, supported by empirical evidence integrating claims, practices, and

student narratives as the basis for curriculum recommendations. Study limitations include a single-program sample, a six-week observation period, potential self-selection bias, and the descriptive nature of video instruments; future research should employ longitudinal designs, cross-institutional samples, and quantitative comparative measurements to validate intervention effectiveness. Three practical recommendations are proposed for the KPI Study Program: first, mandatory integration of pre-production modules from the first semester incorporating scripts, storyboards, and shot lists; second, adoption of product-based assessments combining technical rubrics, verified portfolios, and peer review; and third, strengthening ethics as reflective practice through editorial justification tasks, representation impact analysis, and ethical case study discussions—thereby closing the gap between digital habits and verifiable professional readiness.

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