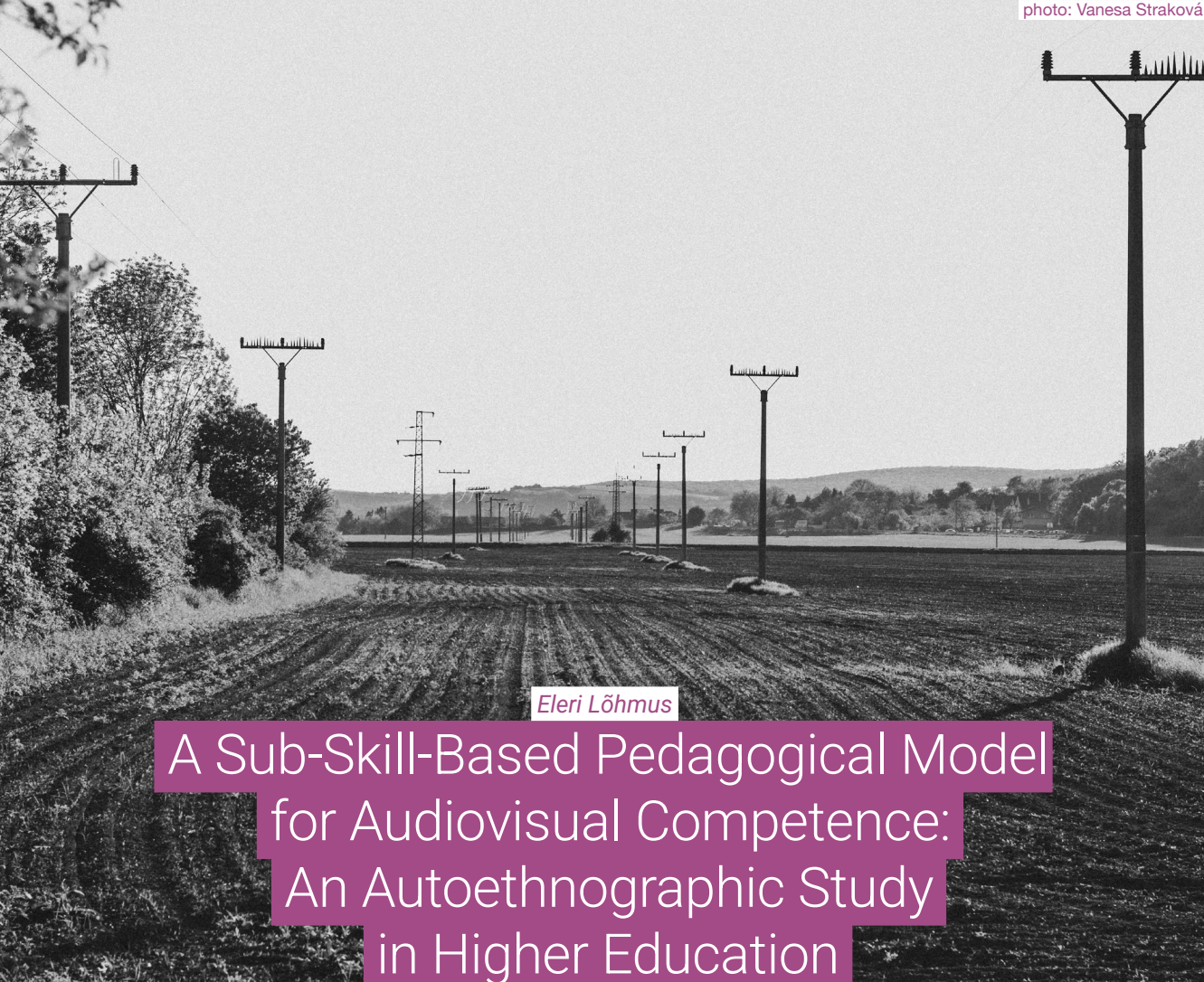




Eleri Lõhmus

A Sub-Skill-Based Pedagogical Model for Audiovisual Competence: An Autoethnographic Study in Higher Education

ABSTRACT

The ability to produce audiovisual texts for professional communication is increasingly significant in various fields. While modern technology simplifies video production, effective audiovisual communication requires more than just pressing a button. This article introduces a sub-skill-based approach to teaching audiovisual competence, where non-professional video makers develop individual skills step by step to gain better control over their production process. This structure allows non-professional video makers to prioritize and refine the skills that matter to them at a given moment in their projects. The study is based on five years of autoethnographic research conducted at the University of Tartu, analyzing fieldnotes and student feedback. The findings indicate that a sub-skill-based approach enhances flexibility in teaching audiovisual production without compromising quality, making it an effective method for higher education settings. By structuring audiovisual learning in this way, the approach also supports the development of media literacy and critical engagement with digital content.

KEY WORDS

Audiovisual Competence. Autoethnography. Higher Education. Media Education. Media Literacy. Proximal Zone of Development. Sub-Skills. Teaching Video Production.

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1 Introduction

Professionals in various fields are increasingly expected to produce non-fictional audiovisual content, including video reports, instructional materials, CV videos, and promotional content. This applies to educators, librarians, human resource managers, community leaders, and communication specialists (Kozak, 1997; Anderson, 2007; Buckingham, 2009a; Broth et al., 2014; Wall, 2017). Audiovisual (AV) competence is now recognized as a key general and transferable skill (Kozak, 1997; Kress, 2003; Eshet-Alkalai, 2004; Jamieson, 2007; Felten, 2008; Wall, 2017).

Traditional approaches to audiovisual training often emphasize professional standards that may not meet the specific needs of non-professional video makers. These learners typically aim to produce videos using readily available equipment, with minimal costs and within limited time frames. While they are often motivated to create high-quality content, they may lack the time or resources to engage in training at the depth or intensity expected in professional contexts. Therefore, a pedagogical approach that acknowledges learners' prior experiences and supports the incremental development of relevant skills and knowledge is essential.

The central aim of this study is to develop and present a sub-skill-based didactical model for teaching audiovisual competence to non-professional video makers in higher education. The model addresses the need for a more inclusive, adaptable, and experience-based pedagogical approach.

The study is guided by the following research question: How can audiovisual production skills be taught in a way that supports non-professional learners with diverse backgrounds while acknowledging their prior experiences?

This question is explored through the design, application, and reflection of a didactical model that emphasizes progressive skill development, contextual relevance, and learner autonomy.

This article introduces a sub-skill-based didactical model for teaching audiovisual competence to non-professional video makers, enabling them to progressively strengthen their individual skills and apply them to real-life communicative and professional contexts.

The model is grounded in various aspects of visual and audiovisual competence and draws upon production handbooks (Millerson, 2001; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Lunch & Lunch, 2006; Griffin, 2008; Thompson & Bowen, 2009a; Thompson & Bowen, 2009b; Musburger, 2010; Cappello, 2017; Müller, 2008). Its development and implementation are based on five years of autoethnographic research, conducted while teaching a basic audiovisual production course at the University of Tartu (2015 – 2020).

Developing specific AV production skills enables non-professionals to balance technical quality with communicative intent. However, students in higher education come from diverse backgrounds and may already possess varying levels of audiovisual experience (Fernback, 2014). The first pedagogical challenge is designing a learning process that allows students to be self-directed and adaptable.

While non-fictional audiovisual texts intended for limited use do not need to adhere to cinematographic or broadcast standards, publicly or semi-publicly shared audiovisual content must effectively serve its communicative purpose – whether to inform, express emotions, persuade, or foster social connections. This requires an understanding of audiovisual functions and the sub-skills needed for different formats, which students develop through self-reflection and iterative skill-building.

This study explores how a sub-skill-based approach to audiovisual education can enhance both the learning experience and self-efficacy of non-professional video makers in higher education.

2 Theoretical Background

Audiovisual competence is a broad skill set that encompasses both the critical analysis of audiovisual texts and the ability to produce non-fictional audiovisual content for self-expression, communication, and participation (Kozak, 1997; Kress, 2003; Eshet-Alkalai, 2004; Jamieson, 2007; Felten, 2008; Wall, 2017).

From a digital literacy perspective (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004), audiovisual competence involves the ability to work with various digital tools and platforms, including editing software and publishing environments. From a media literacy standpoint, audiovisual competence enhances critical analysis, self-expression, and participation (Buckingham, 2009b). This article focuses on teaching audiovisual competence to individuals who do not aim to become professional video makers but require these skills in their respective fields, such as education, communication, and culture. In the context of video production, they can be referred to as non-professionals.

The widespread availability of mobile technology has significantly impacted audiovisual content creation (Arnedillo Sánchez & Tangney, 2006; Burum & Quinn, 2016; Perreault & Stanfield, 2019). While high-end production equipment remains costly and requires specialized training, modern smartphones offer sufficient technical quality for most non-professional applications. Although automatic settings are commonly used for video recording, many smartphones still allow manual adjustments, providing greater control over the final image. Exposure management is a key example: while auto exposure is generally sufficient for most frames, users can still define which part of the frame should be optimally exposed, especially when lighting conditions or movement change. In such cases, maintaining a balanced light distribution between the background and the main subject is essential. In this context, the relevant audiovisual competence sub-skill is the ability to analyze both the shooting environment and the recorded frame in terms of lighting and make necessary adjustments accordingly.

Traditional audiovisual training primarily focuses on mastering entire production workflows. Various video production handbooks emphasize the importance of technical execution in audiovisual production (Millerson, 2001; Lunch & Lunch, 2006; Thompson & Bowen, 2009a; Thompson & Bowen, 2009b; Musburger, 2010). They highlight key aspects such as framing, exposure, focus, and stability, all of which contribute to clearly conveying the author's intent. These handbooks provide detailed guidance on professional production equipment and offer a comprehensive overview of the production process, from the initial idea to the final audiovisual piece. However, they do not support learners in assessing their current skill levels or setting personalized learning goals. Similarly, communicative aspects and practical needs are often overlooked, as traditional training prioritizes technical execution over audience engagement and message clarity. For non-professional video makers, the communicative purpose of their audiovisual content is shaped by their professional needs, which may include informing, educating, engaging, influencing, or advocating for a cause (Ekström, 2000; Gregg, 2015).

Author	Content criteria	Technical details
O'Kane (2017)	rule breaking opportunities	right settings, clean lens, slow motion, steadiness
Sullivan (2018)	framing, composition, light, point of view	correct exposure, focus, steadiness and audio
Tillman (2019)	framing	landscape video, zoom, flash, backlighting, time lapse, GIFs, effects, accessories and editing
Cersosimo (2020)	content	phone accessories, filming basics (light, zoom, audio), editing, uploading
Harrel (n.d.)	preparations, proximity to the object	lighting, steadiness, audio, vertical video syndrome, apps

Table 1: Overview of selected online video-making guidelines

Source: own processing (2025)

There are numerous contemporary guides on creating high-quality videos using smartphones (O’Kane, 2017; Sullivan, 2018; Tillman, 2019; Cersosimo, 2020; Harrell, n.d.). Additionally, several YouTube channels – such as Surfaced Studio, Filmmaker IQ, The Film Look, StudioBinder, and Justin Brown - Primal Video – provide insights into the technical aspects of video production (Table 1). These resources, while highly practical and widely used by learners, represent non-academic perspectives that are not subject to peer review or scholarly validation. Their popularity stems from accessibility and a focus on actionable advice, but they should be critically evaluated within an educational context. For instance, content from these sources often reflects individual workflows or platform-specific constraints, which may not generalize well to all learners or learning outcomes. Educators must therefore act as mediators, helping students distinguish between useful techniques and potentially misleading generalizations. When combined, these guides and handbooks serve as valuable resources for addressing technical aspects of video production.

However, as shown in Table 1, certain topics – such as lighting – can be considered both content-related and technical. As Benoît (2016) points out, many industry specialists discuss similar concepts but use different terminology, which can create confusion. The diverse range of topics and vocabulary may be overwhelming for non-professional video makers, making it difficult for them to navigate and apply the information effectively.

Given these challenges, a structured and adaptive learning process is crucial for non-professional video makers. Therefore, non-professional creators benefit more from a modular learning process, where individual skills, such as framing, lighting, and editing are developed separately before being integrated. This approach aligns with Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), allowing learners to progress from basic to advanced competencies at their own pace (Vygotsky, 1978). Since non-professional video makers often lack access to professional equipment and training, their primary focus is on delivering a clear message rather than achieving high production standards. Effective teaching should therefore emphasize self-assessment, which can be facilitated through structured reflection exercises, peer reviews, and iterative feedback sessions, allowing learners to identify and address skill gaps progressively.

Much of the existing literature and instructional material in audiovisual production presumes that the learner aspires to become a professional content creator, and thus prioritizes comprehensive technical mastery and full-scale production workflows. In contrast, the learners targeted by the didactical model proposed in this article seek to develop only those audiovisual skills that are relevant to their specific professional or communicative needs. While they may aim to produce high-quality content, their goal is not professionalization but functional competence.

As such, this model addresses a gap in the literature by offering a learner-centered, modular, and flexible approach that emphasizes contextual relevance, gradual skill acquisition, and autonomy – elements often missing in traditional, professionally-oriented training frameworks.

3 Concept of Learning and Training

Given the complexity of audiovisual texts, it is essential to break the production process into smaller steps, as the “make your own video” approach is often too overwhelming for effective learning (Felten, 2008; Griffin, 2008; Capello, 2017). Audiovisual production and perception are cognitively demanding processes, where multiple modalities deliver information simultaneously, leading to rapid interpretation and decision-making (Snelson, 2015). Due to the multimodal nature of audiovisual perception, learners must develop an understanding of how different sensory inputs interact. This highlights the importance of step-by-step training, ensuring that each component – such as visual composition, audio synchronization, and narrative flow – is learned progressively rather than all at once.

Senge's et al. (2000) "ladder of inferences" describes how the rapid interpretation of visual information influences beliefs and actions, making it particularly relevant in audiovisual storytelling. This cognitive process unfolds within split seconds after viewing a still image – significantly faster than when processing verbal information. In video production, multiple essential elements contribute to meaning-making, including time, editing style and pace, screen graphics, titles, various forms of sound, and, in some cases, interactive components. Given the speed of perception, non-professional learners often struggle to comprehend and integrate all these aspects while constructing their narratives. Furthermore, video production is a complex process that requires simultaneous attention to multiple elements, including:

- Lighting: Proper exposure, color balance, and differentiation between natural and artificial light.
- Composition: Framing, camera angles, and subject placement within the frame.
- Audio: Clarity of dialogue, background noise reduction, and incorporation of sound effects.
- Distance and Movement: Camera positioning, stability, and tracking shots to maintain fluidity.
- Editing and Post-Production: Sequencing of scenes, smooth transitions, and overall visual consistency.
- Technical Aspects: Equipment settings, resolution choices, and appropriate file formats.

Dividing audiovisual competence into smaller sub-skills and structuring them according to the needs of non-professional learners helps prevent cognitive overload and maintain learning motivation.

Vygotsky (1978) proposed that the most effective learning occurs within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). According to this theory, acquiring new skills builds upon those ones that the learner can already perform independently. The teacher's or peers' role is to provide guidance, challenges, and support for tasks that are just beyond the learner's current ability, ensuring they remain engaged and motivated while avoiding frustration from tasks that are too difficult or too easy. Despite its potential, ZPD is not widely implemented in higher education, where learning is often structured around standardized curricula rather than adaptive skill progression (Wass & Golding, 2014).

Vygotsky's concept aligns with Csíkszentmihályi's (1990) theory of flow in learning and creative processes. Flow describes a state of deep engagement, which occurs when learners experience an optimal balance between mastered skills and new challenges. If a task is too simple, boredom can hinder learning, while tasks that are too difficult may cause anxiety, both of which can disrupt progress.

In the context of audiovisual competence, this means structuring exercises so that learners progressively develop their skills – starting with fundamental techniques such as lighting and framing before advancing to more complex tasks like editing and sound design. The principles of ZPD and flow are also consistent with experiential learning models, including Kolb's (1976, 1984) learning cycle, where action, reflection, and feedback are repeated in a continuous learning loop, and Dewey's (1986) concept of learning by doing. While these theories are not new, they remain highly relevant for teaching the fundamentals of audiovisual production.

4 Developing Didactical Model through Autoethnographic Research

To develop a didactical model for audiovisual competence, analytic autoethnography served as a methodological framework for linking the theoretical foundations of audiovisual production and learning theories with the practical implementation of a basic audiovisual production course. For data collection, I combined several methods. To reflect on my work as a teacher, I kept

personal notes and participated in a co-vision group organized by the University of Tartu for educators interested in developing their teaching practices. To understand students' progress throughout the courses, I conducted pre- and post-course surveys and also gathered feedback during and after each course.

Since giving feedback on student work is essential in practical audiovisual production courses, I also analyzed the feedback process itself – specifically, what was required in the task instructions, what I considered the purpose of the task, and how students' outputs aligned with my expectations. Participation in the co-vision group helped me shift my focus from my own expectations to a deeper understanding of what students truly need to learn in terms of audiovisual production.

Analytic autoethnography consists of five key features: membership in the research phenomenon, analytic reflexivity, researcher visibility in the narrative, dialogue with informants, and commitment to theoretical analysis (Anderson, 2006). This approach allowed me to systematically analyze my progress as a teacher and identify which instructional strategies led to the best student outcomes. Given the complexity of teaching audiovisual production, an approach that combines personal reflection with systematic analysis is essential. Autoethnography enables such an approach by allowing the educator to critically examine their pedagogical methods while continuously refining instructional strategies. From the beginning of my teaching, it was clear that audiovisual production needed to be divided into smaller sub-skills, including technical aspects, still image composition, audio and sound design, composition, and movement. This approach aligns with the learning and training concepts described earlier (Vygotsky, 1978; Csíkszentmihályi, 1990; Kolb, 1976, 1984; Dewey, 1986). During the first few years of the course, I dedicated each lesson to a single sub-skill, providing only one or two exercises for students to practice that specific skill. However, through self-reflection and dialogue with students, it became evident that the sub-skills were too broadly defined, while the exercises were too narrow in scope.

Analytic autoethnography follows ethnographic protocols and offers methodological transparency (Acosta et al., 2015). By systematically applying its principles, I was able to critically assess my instructional methods and refine my approach to teaching audiovisual production. Acosta et al. (2015) combined analytic autoethnography with collaborative autoethnography, as it allows practitioner-researchers to explore both their own experiences and those of others through personal narratives, self-reflection, and dialogic discussions. In practice, this meant systematically analyzing my role as a teacher – identifying what instructional input was most effective in enhancing students' performance. Student work played a crucial role in this process, as it allowed me to observe how they approached each task and how effectively they applied their skills. For example, initially, I focused on teaching different shot types, but I did not emphasize how these shot types should be utilized in the editing process. As a result, students successfully executed shot type exercises, yet struggled to apply these techniques in their storytelling. For instance, students produced a technically strong video that demonstrated proficiency in most audiovisual aspects; however, the intended message was not effectively conveyed. The key message had been written on a Post-it note shown in the video, but the lack of a close-up shot meant that the message was not visible in the final edit. To bridge this gap, several smaller editing tasks were introduced into the course.

Another valuable tool was systematic student feedback, collected throughout the course. This feedback helped me identify gaps in learning and teaching that students found most relevant. Students reported that an overload of technical details at the beginning of the course made it difficult to grasp their practical application. To address this, I shifted the focus towards developing students' ability to independently seek and apply relevant information when needed, rather than overwhelming them with excessive details at the start.

In terms of developing didactical approaches, students' work and feedback can sometimes be contradictory. For example, students often expressed a desire for more detailed instructions for specific tasks. This approach works well when practicing smaller sub-skills, such as

exercises aimed at understanding the 180-degree rule (Director's Line). However, when larger assignments – such as creating their own story – are accompanied by overly detailed instructions, the resulting stories tend to be too similar.

In one group, I tested whether requiring a voice-over would help students produce stronger final stories. Unfortunately, the result showed that in many cases the visual content, which should carry the primary message in audiovisual production, became merely illustrative of the narrated voice-over text.

To support my autoethnographic research, I conducted self-assessment surveys with students at both the beginning and the end of the course between 2017 and 2019. The pre-course surveys received a total of 68 responses, while the post-course surveys received 26 responses. Participation in the surveys was voluntary, and students were assured that their responses would not affect their grades. These surveys encouraged students to reflect on their existing competencies and provided input for course design.

In the pre-course surveys, I asked students about their previous experience in audiovisual production. Only six students reported having no prior experience in the field. The survey also included a self-assessment of their current level in various sub-skills, such as planning, audio, composition, shot types and continuity, editing, broadcast speech, lighting, analysis and providing feedback. Students were asked to rate their skills on a scale ranging from “very good” to “very weak”, with an additional option of “I don't know”. Overall, 51.5% of all selected responses (280) were “weak” or “very weak”, 25.4% (138) were “mediocre”, and only 8.6% (47) were “very good” or “good”. This suggests that, despite some prior experience in audiovisual production, students still recognize the need to further improve and develop their knowledge and skills.

In the post-course surveys, the trend was reversed: 68% (142) of all selected responses were “very good” or “good”, 25% (52) were “mediocre”, and only 5.3% (11) were “weak” or “very weak”. These percentages refer to the total number of sub-skill evaluations provided by students, not to individual participants. These results indicate that students felt they had learned and improved their audiovisual production skills.

In the post-course survey, students were also asked to identify which topics and assignments they found most useful, which ones they felt should have received more emphasis, and which could be given less attention or potentially omitted from the course. The most positively received components were those related to shooting and editing, such as shot types and continuity exercises. In contrast, the more abstract or theoretical parts of the course – such as lessons on file formats and copyright – were highlighted less favorably. Although a few students noted in their open-ended responses that they considered all topics and assignments important, the survey format required them to prioritize and select some topics as less relevant. The need for more hands-on practice was also emphasized in several open-ended responses.

In reflecting on my teaching practice, I applied Kolb's (1976, 1984) experiential learning cycle, through which I designed learning experiences – individual lessons or full course structures – implemented them with students, collected assignments and feedback, and evaluated my performance as a teacher in relation to student outcomes. The results from the pre- and post-course surveys encouraged me to make more radical changes to the course design. For example, based on student feedback, I removed lessons on file formats and copyright, as these were perceived as less relevant. Instead, I incorporated more hands-on assignments, such as one-point lighting exercises designed to create dramatic scenes. These activities helped students evaluate and apply different lighting angles effectively. Continuity-related assignments were also improved, as the original course design lacked practical exercises addressing movement directions, the 30-degree and 180-degree rules, cutting on action, and other essential continuity principles.

These pedagogical adjustments also helped me recognize the value of combining my roles as a teacher and a researcher. Autoethnographic inquiry provided a framework through which I could critically examine and improve my teaching practice while simultaneously contributing to academic knowledge.

For me, this was a clear example of how the role of a researcher has supported my development as a teacher. The duality of roles in autoethnography (Preissle, 1999; Anderson, 2006; Atkinson, 2006) helped me identify critical points in course development. Ethnographic research emphasizes a personal approach, enabling me to extend my experience as an audiovisual production teacher into a broader academic context. This process facilitated the development of a didactical model for audiovisual learning (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Jones et al., 2016). Duality and dialogic engagement are essential in educational research such as mine, as I continuously navigate between my roles as a teacher and a researcher. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) highlight that ethnographic data analysis requires a constant interplay between theoretical ideas and empirical data. The analytical process relies on a set of conceptual categories that structure and interpret the data. In ethnographic work, emergence is shaped by the depth and rigor of the analytical approach applied.

Through this iterative process, I refined my instructional approach to audiovisual production and developed a didactical model for fostering audiovisual competence.

5 Didactical Model of Acquiring Audiovisual Competence

This section first presents the didactical model and then provides an overview of the theoretical considerations of competence models that informed its development. Production textbooks primarily focus on production logic, covering the entire process from planning to distribution (Millerson, 2001; Lunch & Lunch, 2006; Thompson & Bowen, 2009a; Thompson & Bowen, 2009b; Musburger, 2010). The didactical model presented in this article integrates production logic with an awareness of contemporary content creation possibilities and connects these elements with student-centered learning principles, particularly self-assessment.

In Figure 1, the blue sectors signify production-related topics covered in production textbooks. The purple sectors signify awareness, referring to the ability to understand and analyze different types of content, as well as the knowledge and application of various technological tools. This sector is informed by concepts of media and digital literacy, which emphasize that every member of society should have access to and be capable of expressing themselves through media – in the context of this model, specifically through audiovisual media. The blue and purple sectors correspond to the teacher's expertise in the learning process – areas where students require feedback, guidance, and coaching. The student's role in the learning process is illustrated in the green sector, which, through self-assessment, enables students to determine their initial competence level in audiovisual production, set learning objectives for the course, and establish a pathway to achieving them. The uniqueness of this model lies in its synthesis of the well-established audiovisual production workflow with media and digital literacy frameworks. From a learning perspective, it incorporates self-assessment, which is grounded in both competency models and educational theories such as Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978) and Csíkszentmihályi's concept of flow (1990).

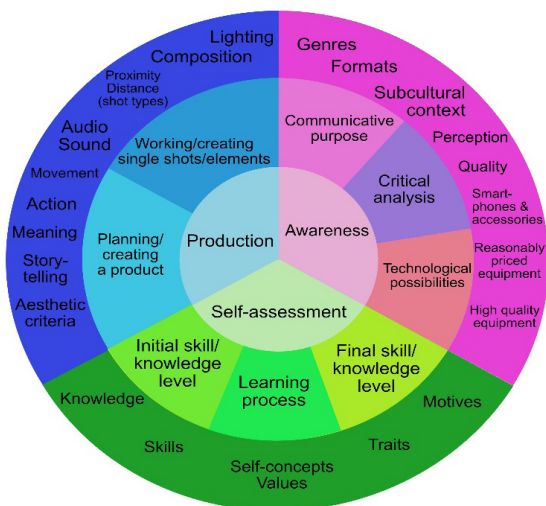


Figure 1: Sub-skill based model of audio-visual competence

Source: own processing, 2025

To better understand the theoretical foundation of the didactical model, the following section explores key competence models that inform its structure. Competence models are widely used across various fields to define a person's level of expertise and areas for potential development. The literature presents multiple perspectives on which elements constitute competence, as well as a diverse range of competence models applied in different disciplines. Tucker and Cofsky (1994, in Chouhan & Srivastava, 2014) identified five key components of competence: knowledge, skills, self-concept, values, traits, and motives. Among the various competence models I have explored, Tucker and Cofsky's (1994, in Chouhan & Srivastava, 2014) framework has been the most applicable, as these five components can be effectively integrated into the audiovisual competence model through students' self-assessment.

Tucker and Cofsky's (1994, in Chouhan & Srivastava, 2014) five key components are individual-centered and broadly applicable across various fields. In contrast, Griffin's (2008) approach incorporates media-specific categories, which form two core sectors (blue and purple) of the didactical model. According to Griffin (2008), visual competence encompasses an awareness of visual experience and representation, including the ability to analyze visual content and engage in the expressive creation and production of media. This awareness begins with recognizing fundamental visual elements, such as color, texture, and shape. Furthermore, analysis should link visual qualities to the expressive, social, and communicative dimensions of media messages (Griffin, 2008).

In the context of audiovisual education, Griffin's model reinforces the idea that visual literacy extends beyond recognizing visual elements – it also involves actively engaging in media production as a means of communication and self-expression.

While competency models define the foundational skills and knowledge areas, effective learning also requires an active process of self-evaluation. Therefore, self-assessment plays a critical role in this model. A third and crucial component of this model is self-assessment, which applies to both students and teachers. Self-assessment is essential because it encourages students to critically evaluate the quality of their work, fostering self-regulation and achievement (Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009). The criteria used for student self-assessment – including determining their starting level, learning track, and course goals (Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009) – are outlined through Tucker and Cofsky's (1994, in Chouhan & Srivastava, 2014) five components of competence, corresponding to both the blue and purple sectors of the model. Through self-assessment and with teacher support, students can define their Zone of Proximal Development

(ZPD). Table 2 presents an example of how Tucker and Cofsky's competence model can be applied in the context of audiovisual production, contemporary media awareness, and student self-assessment.

Competence Model Component (Tucker and Cofsky (1994, in Chouhan & Srivastava, 2014)	Production	Self-Assessment	Awareness
Knowledge	Understanding how to create a portrait with a blurred background	Is my current knowledge adequate? What else do I need to learn? How can I acquire this knowledge?	Analyzing portrait photography by other authors; understanding the technology required for creating a portrait
Skills	The student can operate the camera to achieve a blurred background	Are my current skills sufficient for achieving the desired background effect? How can I further develop my skills?	The student understands different techniques for creating a blurred background
Self-Concepts/ Values	The student recognizes their ability to create a portrait with a blurred background	What type of portraits do I want to create? Why do I prefer a particular style?	The student understands what constitutes a high-quality portrait
Traits	The student has the physical capability to create a portrait, such as sufficient vision for controlling the camera	What physical limitations exist? For example, can I work on a portrait for an entire day?	The student effectively utilizes tools that assist with camera control (e.g., focus assistance, exposure control)
Motives	The student understands the purpose behind expressing themselves through audiovisual production	What is my specific goal in this learning process? How does it align with my broader audiovisual production objectives?	The student is aware of various methods of self-expression and understands the advantages and limitations of audiovisual media

Table 2: *Explanation of the assignment 'Create a portrait photograph with a blurred background' within the didactical model of audiovisual competence*

Source: own processing, 2025

6 Implementing the Didactical Model for Audiovisual Competence in Higher Education

This section outlines the implementation of the didactical model for audiovisual competence within a basic production course. It examines how the course structure, learning objectives, and instructional strategies evolved in response to student needs and theoretical insights.

The basic production course (4 ECTS) is part of the journalism and communication bachelor's curriculum. Between 2015 and 2020, it was a mandatory course for communication students, with a total enrollment of 268. The course aims to provide a foundational understanding of the audiovisual production workflow, from conceptualizing an idea to finalizing a story.

In the field of media and communication, students typically have some prior experience with the subject (Fernback, 2014). Therefore, an essential step in determining their current Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is assessing their prior experience in audiovisual production. Findings from my autoethnographic research suggest that approximately one-third of students are already actively engaged in creating visual or audio content and possess professional equipment such as DSLRs, gimbals, tripods, and editing software. Despite their practical experience, these

students often express uncertainty about their knowledge and skills. Another third primarily use smartphones to produce visual content for social media, while the remaining third report limited experience with audiovisual production, although they still take photos or videos for personal use. Understanding students' prior experience is crucial for defining their ZPD, as it informs the structure and pacing of the course.

Over the research period, the course's learning outcomes have evolved significantly. With the implementation of the didactical model, students can now set their own goals in audiovisual production while being supported throughout the learning process. These outcomes are individualized and may encompass different aspects of audiovisual competence. For instance, some students may require basic training in composing a single frame, while others may focus on exploring meaning-making strategies. Appendix 1 illustrates how the formal learning outcomes have changed over the years. As shown in Appendix 1, in the first iteration of the course, significant emphasis was placed on technical aspects, such as file formats, audio and video recorders, and editing software. This focus is essential when preparing students to work in a specific professional context. For instance, if a journalism school has its own studio, it is important that students develop proficiency with the available equipment. However, when audiovisual production is approached as a general skill rather than a specialized discipline, technical expertise in specific workflows becomes less relevant. Therefore, in my course, the emphasis is on adapting general production knowledge and skills to the equipment available to students. Technical details are introduced based on individual needs rather than as a prerequisite. Some students are more interested in software functionalities, while others focus on cameras, drones, or other aspects of audiovisual production.

At the beginning of my teaching career, as a novice instructor, I relied on established approaches used to train future professionals, such as journalists and filmmakers. Initially, the course was structured around a linear production logic, starting with planning and ending with post-production. However, this approach led to considerable confusion, as many students perceived video production as only a minor part of their future professional roles. Starting with planning and pre-production proved too complex, as learners lacked an understanding of the various elements involved in video production. Moreover, teachers' critical feedback on storyboards and other planning documents that omitted essential components heightened students' anxiety, leading some to perceive video production as an overwhelming and unattainable skill. To address this, the didactical model integrates technical aspects and storytelling into various assignments while considering the ZPD. This approach allows students to choose whether to focus solely on technical skills, such as adjusting focus or setting white balance, or to experiment with different lighting conditions in relation to the narrative they aim to create.

Thus, in alignment with Csíkszentmihályi's (1990) concept of flow, practical work in the course is structured around different sub-skills. Assignments are designed to be flexible, allowing some students to focus on a single aspect of the topic while others integrate multiple elements within a sub-skill or across different sub-skills. A crucial component of the practical work is feedback and feedforward, which support students' self-assessment. The feedback process also enhances students' understanding of the purpose of assignments and clarifies the teacher's expectations (Hendry et al., 2016).

As previously mentioned, the teacher's role in this didactical model is to facilitate students' self-assessment. Therefore, the teacher should provide sufficient information and well-structured assignments that align with students' learning needs. To support this process, the course now begins with an analysis of different video genres and formats, primarily through collective viewing and discussion. This introductory phase provides students with a clear understanding of course requirements, which is essential for fostering self-assessment (Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009). Another key objective of this stage is to encourage students to reflect on their current level of knowledge and skills. This reflection helps the teacher determine the appropriate balance

between theoretical materials and practical tasks. At this point in the course, students' ZPD is assessed for the first time.

Monitoring students' progress throughout the course demonstrates that the didactical model also serves as a tool for teacher development. While the blue sectors – representing production-related aspects of the course – remain unchanged, teachers can refine the course through self-assessment, which in this context involves reflecting on students' progress and responding to feedback and feedforward. This iterative process enables the continuous improvement of materials, tasks, and exercises. Additionally, critical analysis of students' work helps teachers stay up to date with the purple sector of the model. Student-produced videos reflect the evolving trends, formats, and technological tools relevant to non-professional video makers.

7 Conclusion

Non-fictional audiovisual texts have become a significant component of communication for various professionals, including spokespersons, citizen journalists, and educators. The range of non-fictional video formats continues to expand, encompassing everything from recorded video conferences to fully edited video clips. However, relying solely on technology can result in a loss of control over key aspects of the message. Therefore, there is a growing need for didactical approaches that cater specifically to non-professional video makers.

The learning process is most effective when it aligns with the learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and intrinsic motivation. By breaking down video production into smaller sub-skills and developing them progressively, learners gradually gain control over the audiovisual text, which enables them to use these sub-skills as tools for crafting their own messages. Once individual sub-skills are mastered, they can be integrated to enhance overall production quality and communicative impact.

Despite its uniqueness and the successful outcomes observed in this study, the proposed didactical model has certain limitations. First, it has been implemented primarily within the context of formal higher education, specifically with bachelor's students in journalism and communication. Further testing is needed to evaluate the model, its sub-skill structure, and accompanying assignments across different educational contexts. At present, the model is best suited to structured learning environments; supporting fully autonomous learning based on this framework requires additional development, particularly in the area of self-assessment. It is also important to acknowledge that this study includes a strong autoethnographic component, which – while offering deep insights – may be perceived as subjective and context-bound.

Looking ahead, future research and pedagogical innovation should explore how this sub-skill-based model can be adapted to diverse learning contexts, including informal and non-formal education. The model's modularity offers promising flexibility, but its effectiveness depends on how well it supports learners' communicative goals across different professional domains. As audiovisual literacy becomes increasingly essential, educational frameworks must evolve to empower all learners – not just professionals – to create meaningful and purposeful audiovisual content.

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Appendix

2015: As a result of the course, the student...	2020: As a result of the course, the student...
1. Has an overview of different types of digital media, file formats in audiovisual production, and basic storytelling principles.	1. Knows the main characteristics of a single frame (light, audio, composition, proximity) and can work with them both separately and in combination.
2. Has an overview of audio and video recorders.	2. Can define their communicative purposes.
3. Can record technically correct audiovisual material.	3. Is able to choose the most suitable production techniques to express their communicative purposes.
4. Can apply basic principles to compose a frame and an audiovisual text.	4. Understands action, character, time, and space-creating techniques in audiovisual production.
5. Can apply basic principles of editing audio and video.	5. Uses available devices while considering their limitations and the communicative purpose of audiovisual production.
6. Can analyze their own work and provide constructive feedback to fellow students.	6. Is able to reflect on their knowledge and skill level in terms of audiovisual production.

Appendix A: *Comparison of learning outcomes in the basic production course at the beginning and end of the study period*

Source: own processing, 2025

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