

Influence of Media Training on the Competence of Journalists in Kenya: Perceptions of Standard Group Limited Managers and Senior Journalists

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Abstract: A number of researches have indicated that training institutions have failed to impart skills and knowledge to students that would be transferred to the industry upon graduation and employment, hence the quality of journalists graduating is wanting. The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of media training on the competency of journalists in Kenya. Curricula were sampled from selected Kenyan universities and adequacy of training material investigated. Non-probability sampling procedure involving purposive and snow-ball sampling methods were used to identify the 9 participants comprising media managers and senior journalists in one media organization. Data was analysed thematically and presented in a narrative form in accordance with the themes. According to the SG media managers and senior journalists, journalists trained in Kenya lack practical skills required in the job market. Consequently, media houses are recruiting graduates in other disciplines such as English, Medicine, and Law while others have resorted to re-training the new recruits. It is recommended that media training institutions, regulators and other stakeholders should revamp existing curricula with the view to making them competency based. Keywords: Influence of Media, Journalists, Perceptions Standard Group Limited,

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Introduction and Background of the Study

Performance of media in Kenya is closely related to the level of journalism training where appropriate training provides students with knowledge and skills to write accurate, fair, balanced and impartial stories (Mbeke, 2010). In the 21st Century, there has been a move from traditional journalism to online journalism, bringing on board mixed news media which required professional journalism across many media platforms.

According to Haak, Parks, and Castels (2012), in a technology-driven environment of accelerated transformation, journalism has gone through a gradual transformation in the way it is produced, distributed and consumed by the audience. Haak et al. (2012) further argued that many journalists are of the view that journalism is facing a crisis because competition has increased, forcing media owners to overwork personnel in the news organizations to do more for less. This increase in workload however, is not comparable to investment in staff training.

The Kenyan media has not been left behind in the adoption of the new technologies. According to Mbeke (2010), a majority of media houses in Kenya have established internet services which they use to disseminate information and many of them have websites where they engage in internet journalism including blogging. The

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new technologies have led to the rise of citizen journalism where the public collect and share new information (Mbatia, Busienei, & Ndonye, 2014).

However, despite the blooming technologies, a number of researches have indicated that training institutions have failed to impart skills and knowledge to students that would be transferred to the industry upon graduation and employment (Gichobi 2015). The media in Kenya is thus criticized for its one sided reporting and sleazy tabloid style of pornographic content (Lando, 2013). The critical question to this research is to examine what the training institutions and media houses in Kenya are doing to salvage the industry, gain the trust of the public and continue to mentor young up-coming journalists (Wefwafwa, 2014).

Blom and Davenport (2012) observed that many researchers in and out of the journalism discipline are skeptical about the significance of the journalism degrees conferred and their lack of "great prestige" in comparison to other disciplines like the law schools, medicine and engineering schools.

Problem Statement

A study done by Wefwafwa (2014) on training standards in Kenyan media colleges established that, they lack common journalism training standards; henc, the quality of journalists graduating is wanting. Part of the reasons for this low journalism practice standards is inadequate training, inexperienced lecturers, ineffective regulation of the training institutions and inadequate funding (Ireri, 2017).

Berger (2009) noted that complaints have been made by the media stakeholders that many training institutions offer low quality courses, consequently, flooding the industry with "half-baked professionals". Due to this short fall, recruiters from media companies are not always contented with the qualifications of recent graduates and that skills acquired by the journalism trainees often do not meet the expectation of employers (Kaane, 2014). This has been echoed by Linus Kaikai the Kenya National Televison (NTV) Managing Editor who emphasizes that media schools should invest in producing fully qualified journalists who do not need further training upon joining the job market (Gichobi, 2015).

According to Lohner, Banjac, and Neverla (2016), Media Council of Kenya (MCK) is the body mandated in part to register and accredit journalists by certifying their competence has not articulated the official standards that are the basis of quality training of journalists in universities in Kenya.

As a stop gap measure, media houses have opted to retrain their new staff before they are fully assimilated into the media house. The question then arises, whether or not it is the responsibility of media house' to retrain or to work with market ready graduates; A case in point was the arrival of China Global Television (CGTV) in Kenya in 2012, which saw local stations such as National Television (NTV0, Kenya Television Network (KTN), Mediamax and K24 lose well trained and talented broadcast journalists. An immediate result was the reorganization of the affected stations with some stations pulling some of its programming and KTN's ratings plummeting. Some media houses have had to counter-poach so as to fill in the gaps of journalists who leave (Wasserman, 2015).

This research sought to identify the shortfalls of journalism graduates from the perspective of a media house and make an assessment of the approaches which can be adopted by journalism training institutions of higher learning in meeting the demands of media houses.



Research Questions

- 1) Were Kenyan journalists competent in relation to their training?
- 2) How adequate were the training facilities for media training in universities in Kenya?
- 3) In what ways did industry regulations influence journalism practice in Kenya?
- 4) How did institutional curricula influence professionalism of journalists in Kenya?

Training of Journalists

Journalism has shifted from the basic publishing or broadcasting into interactive dialogue with the audience, often in real-time as events continue to transpire and evolve. In fact, Krachvuk (2011) observed that journalism is no longer about publishing anymore; rather it entails communicating and having a conversation with the audience. Due to this rapid evolution, journalists are now faced with a challenge to understand and make use of all these new media tools and this can be daunting especially with no proper training. New media journalism now requires journalists not only to make pictures but also to shoot videos and create multimedia content.

Krachvuk (2011) argued that in order to be marketable in the job market, every journalist should have a certain set of skills he or she can use. These include: ability to use software for graphics and video editing and blogging and familiarity with the basics of hypertext mark-up language (HTML), cascading style sheets (CSS) and viral marketing (Kravchuk, 2011). This means that journalism trainers and the media industry need to equip their learners and staff with hands-on skills that will make them relevant in the industry and not declare them redundant as is the case now being witnessed in several media houses in Kenya where a number of staff have been laid off.

According to UNESCO (2013), communication training and education in Africa is an import from North America and Western Europe and so is inspiration for teachers, curricula and textbooks. Most of the trainers are Western educated, curricula a replica of the Western models, and most books written and published in the West. Courses offered in journalism training curricula in Africa vary from one area to another. Emphasis is laid on the skills training with print and broadcast journalism, advertising and public relations dominating the curricula in East and Southern Africa. In West and Central Africa, as well as in South Africa, the curricula generally combine both the theoretical and practical courses. Courses offered range from certificate to diploma courses, Bachelors, Masters and PhD programmes (UNESCO, 2013).

Competency of Journalists

According to UNESCO (2007), the practice of journalism requires a spectrum of competencies which include: competency of general knowledge and intellectual capability, research, writing, editing, design and production; ability to use the tools of journalism practice and adaptation to new technologies and be innovative in the formulation and dissemination of information; must have a professional understanding, including a background in ethics; the importance of journalism in society, the history of journalism, organization of the news media, as well as laws and ethics that apply to the journalism practice.

Clarke (2014) developed a pyramid for competent journalists whose cornerstones were anchored on news judgment and reporting. The foundation also



included language and analysis while the central stone was technology, in between was audio-visual knowledge and numeracy and near the top civic and cultural literacy and at the peak ethics. According to Clarke, his pyramid of competence reaches the peak with a grounded understanding of mission and purpose of journalism.

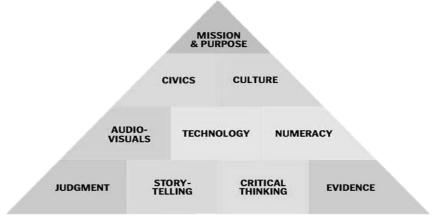


Figure 1: Pyramid for Competent Journalists

Source: Clarke (2014)

Clarke (2014) argued that journalism is an initiative that creates wealth that can be used to influence better dissemination of information. Even though conflicts between professional and commercial interests exist and are almost unavoidable, all involved in the enterprise must have a clear vision of the mission and purpose as to why they exist. According to Godkin (2008), unlike the established professions such as medicine, engineering, law and others, any standard of journalistic competence must be centered on the practical application rather than theory as displayed by Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory.

Adequacy of Facilities in Media Training

One of the challenges faced by media trainers in Kenya is deficiency of contemporary equipment and resources, which inadvertently compromises quality. According to Mbeke (2010). Many journalism schools in Kenya have not adopted the new journalism approaches such as e-journalism, citizen journalism and digital photo processing. Mbeke (2010) maintained that the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Nairobi does not have a single studio for training broadcast journalism and that only a few universities namely; Daystar University, United States International University and Kenyatta University are well equipped with studio facilities for training broadcasters.

The cost of training is also high and therefore discouraging for many young students aspiring to pursue careers in the media. Private training institutions seem to have better facilities than government ones (Mbeke, 2010) yet, the need for specialized journalism training is important. It is also critical to take note of current concerns such as gender and development in journalism training in Kenya in order to enhance the quality of journalism products.



Curriculum Development and Design

Davenport and Blom (2012) argued that in order to effectively carry out the respected assignment of preparing students to be successful and competent journalists, educators should make critical decisions on the core journalism curriculum and other courses that all journalism students must undertake to graduate, no matter their intended area of specialization. The media industry has been in constant motion with new develop compelled widespread discussions about the responsibilities in higher education for training journalists, trainers and educators to continually experiment on innovative ways to create the ultimate and super curriculum to serve their undergraduate students, at the same time, they also struggle to find the right formula to implement and integrate skills and theory classes.

Role of Regulation in MediaTraining

A number of institutions are responsible for ensuring regulation of the media and journalism practice in Kenya. However, regulation of training institutions is unclear. Media training is somehow unregulated and the standard of journalism education varies significantly even though the UNESCO Model Curricula for Journalism Education is taken into consideration by several institutions (Lohner, Banjac, & Neverla, 2016).

The Media Council of Kenya is the body that sets media standards, regulates and monitors compliance. According to AMWIK (2014), The Media Council Act 2013 is an Act of Parliament that gives effect to Article 34 (5) of the Constitution which provides for Freedom of the Media. The Media Council Act, 2013 empowers the Council to consider and approve applications for accreditation by training institutions that want to offer journalism programmes. This is to ensure that such institutions include the basic minimum in the training curricula as prescribed by the MCK in conjunction with other relevant authorities.

However, MCK has raised a concerns that the level of funding by the government is inadequate to enable it run its operations (Cheploen, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

This research is anchored on Situated Learning Theory. According to Collins, Brown, and Newman (1988), situated learning also known as situated cognition is a learning theory propagated in the late 1980s by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger and later expanded by John Seely Brown and his fellow researchers. This theory is based on the assumption that knowledge should be offered in an authentic context that should involve its application (Aydede & Robbins, 2009). The authors opine that learning should not be seen primarily as transmission of abstract and contextualized knowledge between individuals, but rather be a social process within pre-determined conditions to include activity, context and culture.

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), training can make use of the two main ideologies of situated cognition into classroom practice: Firstly, the trainer should present an authentic context and secondly, encourage mutual interaction and collaboration. The founders of the theory believe that rich contexts can replicate the learners' view and understanding of the real world and expand on the knowledge being transferred to them in different circumstances.

The theory of situated learning necessitates the introduction of new modes of practice in how instruction is designed and conducted both in schools and other



instructional settings. The dynamic of instruction must be designed in such a way as to accommodate negotiation of situational intent between teacher and student, who together must deal with the identifiable resources and conditions of an immediate instructional context (McLellan, 1996).

Methodology

This study adopted a case study design. Yin (2009) described a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon in detail and this is done within its real-life context especially when the borders between the phenomenon being investigated and its context are not clearly evident. The case of a local media house helped to reveal any issues experienced by media managers and senior journalists. Standard Group Kenya offered the typicality of conditions experienced in other media houses in Kenya.

The choice of this case study was guided by Zainal (2007) who described a case study as a method that enables researchers to closely scrutinize data within a specific context and that in most cases; a case study method selects a small geographical area or a limited number of individuals as the subjects of the study.

This study was situated in an instrumental case study where the case itself was secondary to understanding a particular situation or phenomenon. Besides, in instrumental case study, the focus is more likely to be known prior to the study and designed around established theory. Lastly, a collective case study involves exploration of multiple instrumental case studies (Stake, 2005).

This study targeted media managers and senior journalists at the Standard Media Group. Equally, relevant documents such as curricula from the University of Nairobi, Daystar University and Riara University were analyzed. The University of Nairobi was chosen because it is among the first public universities to offer journalism, Daystar was among the first in private universities while Riara University started offering the journalism programme in early 2017. 12 participants from the Standard Group were interviewed.

Result and Discussion

Results for data on perceptions on the competence of Kenyan journalists, adequacy of training facilities, influence of industry regulations on journalism, and the influence of institutional curricula on journalism training are presented in this section.

Competence of Kenyan Journalists

Participants identified various competency related issues in the media industry which emanate from training. Through the lenses of news judgement, language and analysis, technology and audio-visual knowledge, all the participants from radio, Television, online and print sections commented on the fact that Kenyan journalists are not competently trained to handle the rigorous work environment.

Overall, the findings from media managers and senior journalists indicated that media training in Kenyan schools was wanting and that they were churning out graduates that could not perform optimally in the industry once employed. The Kenyan new recruits were not competently trained; raising issues as to whether the students were taught by people who had experience in the media. These findings are in line with report of Ireri (2017) on mass communication training in Kenya, where 91% of the participants sought additional training. This could be due to the lack of



qualified teachers which was likely to create a feeling among Kenyan journalists that they needed further training.

With consideration to UNESCO's model curricula, competencies and the findings of this research, Kenya's journalism training appeared not to meet the minimum requirements for impactful training. According to UNESCO (2013), one of the bases for journalism training is the internal capacity of a school which covers infrastructure, curriculum, qualifications, experience of teachers and opportunities for media production.

Media houses were forced to re-train the new recruits especially on issues that could be taught in school such as house policies. But media houses did not however re-train the graduates afresh as it was expensive. This has been the outcry by media practitioners that the new recruits were not properly trained as expressed by the General Manager of Nation Media Group, Linus Kaikai, that media schools should invest in producing fully qualified journalists who do not need further training upon joining the job market (Gichobi, 2015).

Adequacy of Facilities in Media Training Schools

In relation to adequacy of facilities, communication scholars such as Mbeke (2010) and Ireri (2017) have documented lack of modern equipment and resources for media training in schools. Their argument is that the kind of journalism training which occurs in Kenya is outdated. This was confirmed by the participants who indicated that they did not have the facilities to aid in media training, whereas Mbeke (2010) opined that private universities are better equipped to offer media training; some of the participants trained in private universities reported that the facilities were not adequate.

Two participants who trained abroad reported that they had the required facilities hence the training was more effective and hands-on. One participant did not know how to operate a camera even though he had gone through four-year training in communication in Kenya but when he went abroad he was taught how to use a camera within a few weeks of enrolment. The participants generally observed that Kenyan media training institutions were sufficiently to investing in training facilities.

Due to inadequacy of facilities, students encountered some equipment for the first time when they got employed. A respondent lamented that most of the students were so 'green' that some of them could not handle basic equipment such as computers yet they had graduated with diplomas or degrees in media. This is contrary of some of the competencies outlined by UNESCO (2007) that journalists in all media houses should know how to operate both Macintosh and Windows desktop and laptop computers, use word processing and picture editing programs, and create a simple data base of their work. With the new technology and globalization Kenyan journalism students and graduates cannot compete at par with their counterparts from other countries such as Brazil where journalism schools adjusted to the technological changes by installing laboratories, creating new subjects and purchasing new equipment (Tarcia, 2008).

Influence of Industry Regulation on Journalism

Participants were of the view that the regulators both in the training and in the industry have not executed their mandate as required. One of the predicaments of the Media Council of Kenya was that the organization had only managed to register



journalists and issue press cards as reported by one of the participants. MCK had also managed to offer some training to media practitioners but the organization had not managed to regulate training in the journalism schools as it was stipulated as one of its roles. The Media Council Act, 2013 empowers the Council to consider and approve applications for accreditation by educational institutions that seek to offer courses in journalism. This is to ensure that such institutions include the basic minimum in the training curricula as prescribed by the MCK in conjunction with other relevant authorities (AMWIK 2014).

MCK prepared and launched a standardized curriculum for media training in middle level colleges in Kenya in 2016 but more than a year later, the organization has not given any directions as to how the curriculum should be implemented. A respondent argued that MCK does not have the capacity to play its role effectively, indeed, this was confirmed by Cheploen (2016) that the council had complained that the government had not funded it adequately to enable it carry its operations.

The commission for University Education Kenya was also faulted for not having the capacity to carry its mandate. The argument was that CUE seem not to consult with the professionals in the media industry to obtain advice on requirements for media training. For this reason, universities are designing programmes which get approved but they do not have the basic facilities and experienced to offer the training.

There was a suggestion that other organizations such as Communication Authority of Kenya (CAK), Kenya Bureau of Standards together with the Ministry of Education (KEBS) should play a role in ensuring training standards in media schools should be adhered to. It was suggested that KEBS should give an approval on the media equipment imported into the country. CAK has been advocating for broadcast of local content on Kenyan media but if the students are not being trained on how to come up with the local content, then the media houses suffer.

Influence of Institutional Curricula

According to the findings, there were gaps in the training curricula of journalism. The units offered did not seem to serve the purpose of instilling the right skills and expertise in the students. Studies reveal that countries such as the US redesigned their curricula and developed new courses to prepare students for practicing news in multiple media platforms (Castaneda et.al 2005). Lanerolle and Harber (nd) suggested that the core curriculum should move away from the print bias that has dominated most journalism teaching, to a more 'media-neutral' position where there is a balance in the need to prepare students for the job market and also to prepare them for the constant change in the media industry due to new developments.

According to most of the participants, students were given more theoretical classes as compared to practical sessions due to inadequacy of facilities even though the curricula indicate that these units should be taught practically. Students therefore graduated without gaining the much needed hands-on skills and they had to be retrained once they got employed. According to CUE guidelines, university curriculum is often designed by the individual departments with the more experienced lecturers giving their input regarding the content to be included in the curriculum. The findings corroborate Mwebi (2015) argument that the curriculum development process at the university level in Kenya is facing a myriad of challenges in this century where university expansion and enrolment has reached an all-time high.



According to UNESCO (2007), for journalists, competency in the national language and the language they use in their work is essential. In many countries, and for journalists hoping to work beyond their national borders, competency in English and other languages is recommended. The findings reveal that most of the Kenyan journalism students are not competent in language especially English hence media employers especially in print prefer to hire graduates of English Literature. The University of Nairobi, Daystar University, and Riara University offered one unit in English; and unit in Kiswahili.

A respondent who studied Communication and Literature revealed that the units he studied in Literature helped him improve his creative writing skills. The units were Introduction to Prose, Creative Writing, and Stylistics. This had been revealed by Philip Ochieng that Kenyan reporters are not the most educated in the dominant language of Journalism-English (Wanjohi, 2015).

The findings revealed that journalism schools are not up-to date with the new developments in technology which are shifting the way news is produced and consumed by the audience. Participants advised that media schools should train more on Online Journalism, Social media management and data mining and management. A study by Kwanya (2014) revealed that the World Wide Web and social media have taken the center stage in journalism leading to rise of new media concepts such as online journalism, citizen journalism, community journalism and civilian journalism and that journalists need new media skills which can be learnt from webmasters and those newspapers need not hire journalists but senior content producers who can create multimedia content and write articles as well.

Specialization or beat reporting is crucial in news reporting. Media houses prefer to hire graduates of areas such as Medicine, Law, and Business among other key areas to report on the relevant disciplines competently. In contrary, Mbeke (2010) observed that most training institutions offer courses that are general in nature. It is therefore necessary to mainstream topical issues and concerns such as gender and development in journalism training in Kenya in order to enhance the quality of print, reporting, and broadcasting.

In accordance to UNESCO (2007) on the competency of journalists, a specialized knowledge of at least one subject area is important to journalism. This was reiterated by His Highness the (Aga Khan, 2017) that journalists should specialize in areas such as economics, agriculture, religion and report well on them. The University of Nairobi has elaborate units in the beats of health, business, education among others. Daystar University appears not to offer any specialized units while Riara University offers a unit called Specialized Reporting, although, it is impractical for students to master any of the beats in one semester.

The period it took to train journalists was challenged. Undergraduate courses should take four academic years as per the CUE requirement. The duration for diploma programmes is not clear as some take one year while others two years. The proposed standardized middle level training curriculum should take a minimum of three years. At the University of Nairobi, students are taught for three hours over a duration of fifteen weeks which makes forty-five credit hours per unit. At Riara University, out of the fifty-three units on offer, eight of them which were heavy on practical had been given four credit hours per week therefore giving a total of sixty hours per trimester. The arguments by the participants was that the course content for some of the units need to be re-looked into particularly in reference to a unit called



writing for media at Daystar University where students were expected to learn how to write for broadcast, print and online within a semester.

A respondent suggested that students should produce broadcast programs every semester; and take a number of other units every semester. This would potentially lead to students being overloaded. This was mentioned by Lanerolle and Harber (n.d) who gave an example of Witswatersrand University in South Africa which collaborated with Multichoice and experimented on the idea of having students making short programmes that would be broadcasted on one of the DSTV mobile broadcast channels. The course demonstrated the challenge of having students undertake practical work in more than one medium simultaneously; the stress would sometimes be too much that it compromised the students' learning. Nevertheless, the students will have enough portfolios to show case to their potential employers and this gives them an upper hand in job searching.

Conclusion

Overall, the study revealed that journalists trained in Kenya are not competent and lack practical skills relevant to their tasks once employed. Due to this reason, media houses are recruiting graduates of other disciplines such as English, Medicine, and Law among other key areas. Some media houses have resorted to re-training the new recruits to enable them perform their duties. Journalists are of the opinion that training schools should do better by investing in the right infrastructure to aid in media training. On the other hand, universities are introducing journalism programmes yet they have not done appropriate research to find out what is required in terms of facilities and trainers. The regulators have also failed to play their role by ensuring there is quality in journalism training. Universities, regulators and media houses need to intervene so as to salvage the journalism industry and redeem its name.

Recommendations

The study made the following recommendations:

- 1) Media trainers need to be in touch with what is currently happening in the industry and impart the right skills to the students.
- 2) The trainers need to have some media experience so as not to teach the students from books but from the knowledge they have acquired from the industry.
- 3) The trainers need to be more rigorous in training so that the students get used to the pressure of working in the media and beating strict timelines.
- 4) Training institutions should invest in the right facilities to enable students get practical skills.
- 5) Training institutions should ensure that they admit manageable numbers of students per class so that they all have an opportunity to learn how to use the equipment and software. Small numbers ensure maximum attention is given to the students and interaction becomes easy.
- 6) Training institutions should collaborate with the media industry through short programmes where students and the media professionals interact and have meaningful discussions, offer internships, and apprenticeship opportunities to the students. The professionals can also mentor the young upcoming journalists so that there is continuity in professional dissemination of information. Collaborations with the industry will also ensure that students have access to the facilities that are being used in the media houses.



- 7) Trainers should be at the fore front in coming up with new innovations to aid in media training and dissemination of information. This can be through carrying out research in new areas. A suggestion was given for schools to give skills on Virtual Reality which is the next big thing in the world.
- 8) Universities should form associations and partnerships with players in the industry so as to evaluate the methods of training and address any difficulties encountered in training.
- 9) Training institutions should involve experts in curriculum development so that they do not just replicate curricula of other universities but rather do intensive research and understand the needs of the industry and what new areas to include in the curricula.
- 10) Universities should carry out curricula reviews in conformation to CUE requirements, reviews will ensure that new market trends are captured.
- 11) There is a need for regulators both in the training and in the industry to play their active role in ensuring journalists are competently trained. They should carry out research on requirements of the industry and ensure schools meet the requirements before they are allowed to offer journalism programmes. MCK should ensure it rolls out the proposed standardized curriculum for middle level colleges and together with other bodies such as CUE instill the same standards in the training of journalists at the universities.
- 12) Media houses should have an interest to find out how training is done in schools and offer solutions on the best practice rather than resorting to hiring graduates of other programmes who do not have any media training. Media houses also have an upper hand in redeeming the media industry right from the training; this could be through their willingness to collaborate with training institutions and offering internships to students. At the end, it will be a win-win situation whose effect will roll down to the audience whose media needs will be met.

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