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Media Training and Journalism Competence in Kenya: Perspectives from Standard Group Media Senior Managers

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Abstract:

The performance of the mainstream media in Kenya is closely blamed on its relationship with the level of journalism training. Studies demonstrate that appropriate training provides journalists with the knowledge and skills to write accurate, fair, balanced and impartial stories (Mbeke, 2010). This study's main objective was to understand whether media training has been sufficient for the competence of journalists who work at the Standard Group. A qualitative approach was applied and an intrinsic case study method employed. The tool for data collection was the semi structured questionnaire was administered to senior managers of the standard group who were interviewed until data saturation was reached. Additionally, the data collected were subjected to thematic analysis. The findings indicated that media training in Kenyan schools is inadequate. To this effect, media schools are churning out graduates that cannot perform in the industry once employed. According to respondents, Kenyan new recruits are not competently trained. These findings are in line with a research conducted by Ileri, (2017) on mass communication training in Kenya, which indicated that 91% of the study's respondents wanted extra training. The argument was that this could be due to the lack of qualified teachers which is likely to create a feeling among Kenyan journalists that they need further training.

Keywords: Media training, journalist competence, journalism, performance, reporting, management

1. Introduction

The performance of the mainstream media in Kenya is closely blamed on its relationship with the level of journalism training. It is believed that appropriate training provides Journalists with the knowledge and skills to write accurate, fair, balanced and impartial stories (Mbeke, 2010). In the 21st Century, there has been a shift from traditional journalism to online journalism, bringing on board mixed news media which requires professional journalism across many media platforms. According to Haak, Parks and Castels (2012) in a technology-driven process of accelerated change, journalism is being transformed in the way it is produced, distributed and used. This therefore shows the need for better training of Journalists. Haak et.al. (2012) further argue 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 lack of innovation and poor working culture could be an indicator that training in new trends has been lacking.

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 (Wefwafwa, 2014; Gichobi 2015). Lando (2013) adds that the media in Kenya are increasingly criticized for their one-sided reporting, sleazy tabloid style of pornographic content and failure to control business interests of proprietors and advertisers. The critical question of this research was to examine what the training institutions and media houses in Kenya were doing to salvage the industry, gain the trust of the public and continue to mentor young, up and coming journalists.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

A study done by Wefwafwa (2014) on training standards in Kenyan media colleges established that they lack common journalism training standards and as a result, the quality of journalists graduating from the colleges 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 (Ileri, 2017).

Berger (2009) notes that complaints have been made by media players that most training institutions offer sub-standard courses, consequently, flooding the industry with "half-baked professionals". Due to this short fall, recruiters from news organizations are not always satisfied with the qualifications of recent graduates and that skills acquired by the college and university graduates often do not meet the expectation of employers (Blom & Davenport, 2012; Kaane 2014).

This has been echoed by Linus Kaikai the 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).

If the quality of journalism education is improved, both journalism educators and students stand a better chance of influencing journalistic production at the news-institutional level and will result in a staff that is well-trained and critical which can positively influence the processes of democracy and development in societies, especially in the developing world (UNESCO, 2013). According to Lohner, Banjac and Neverla (2016), MCK is the body mandated in part to register and accredit journalists by certifying their competence. However, the council has not articulated the official standards that are the basis of quality and 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 challenge that faces them is that once the new recruits have been re-trained and are market ready, either they move to other media houses which pay them higher salaries or they are poached by highly competitive media houses. This leaves the affected media houses probing further on whether this in-house training is a sustainable and a viable approach. The question then arises, is it the media house' mandate 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 NTV, 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 seeks 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 these demands from media houses.

2. Literature Review

Journalism has evolved from basic publishing or broadcasting into an interactive dialogue with the audience, often in real-time as events transpire. In fact, Krachvuk (2011) observes that journalism is no longer about publishing anymore; rather it is communicating and having a dialogue with the audience. Due to this rapid evolution, journalists are now faced with a challenge to understand and use all these new media tools and cultures. This can be daunting, especially without proper training. New media journalism now requires journalists not only to make pictures, but also to shoot videos and create multimedia content that is in line with the cultural views of a region. Krachvuk (2011) argues that in order to be competitive in the job market, every journalist should have a certain set of skills he/she can use. These include: ability to use software for picture 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 to the industry and not declare them redundant as is the case now being witnessed in several media houses in Kenya where a number of staffs have been laid off.

Journalism is a more or less an autonomous field of study across the globe, yet the education and training of journalists is a subject much debated/but only rarely researched (Deuze, 2013). According to University of Wollongong (n.d), historically, much of the tension between universities and industry has been due to the fact that Journalism has been considered a craft in which skills are acquired on-the-job, often by osmosis, with younger journalists picking up skills by observing their older colleagues in action, and/or by attending a small number of in-house courses. The Journalist practice is therefore marred by malpractice. Lack of ethics, entertainment as a value is placed in high regard as opposed to education and factual content. Talents such as acting and singing are a gate pass for a media job as opposed to trained professionals

Over time, technology has played a greater role in the acquisition of information, and its subsequent conversion into a journalistic format, media organizations have acknowledged that they no longer have the capacity to provide all the training journalists require operating in an increasingly technology-driven world. Because of this, they have gradually embraced the notion of university-based training for prospective journalists. However, in doing this, a number of employers have been reluctant to mandate that a degree in Journalism is a prerequisite for a career in Journalism. This has left the journalism profession open to malpractice.

According to and Blom and Davenport (2012) the role of higher education in preparing reporters and editors for the job has grown quickly since the first writing courses were offered in the U.S colleges in the 19th century and at the start of the first journalism department in 1908. Bhuiyan (2010) argues that journalism schools in the United States have for many years been bulking up on the convergent media courses to prepare the next generation of reporters for an industry that is being reshaped by digital communication technologies. According to Bhuiyan (2010), some have embraced the need to teach 'new media' wholeheartedly, some gingerly and some not at all. Deuze (2013) opine that it is better when the journalism industry orientates itself, not to specific genre or function, but to a spirit of discovery where the students, faculty and the industry collaborate in order to bridge the gap between the academy and the industry. Examples of international collaborative efforts to aid in journalism training include: European Journalism Training Association (EJTA) whose aim is to enable institutes of journalism education as well as professional training centers to collaborate to enhance common qualities. The association is able to achieve this through meetings to exchange ideas between journalism educators from all over Europe, research on major questions affecting journalism education, hold platforms for joint productions and carry out projects that enable students, teachers and journalists to develop a view on the functions of journalism within the European context (EJTA, n.d). According to UNESCO (2002) communication education in Africa, like modern mass communication on the continent, is an import from West Europe and North America. The source of

inspiration for teachers, curricula and textbooks is Western. Teachers are mostly Western educated; curricula are drawn from Western models and most textbooks are authored and published in the West and North America. Subjects offered in journalism and communication training programs in Africa vary from one region to another. In East and Southern Africa, except South Africa, the emphasis is mainly on skills training with print and broadcast journalism, advertising and public relations dominating the curricula. In West and Central Africa, as well as in South Africa, the curricula generally combine theoretical and practical courses. Programs offered range from certificate to diploma courses and the Bachelor of Arts/Science in East, Central, West, and Southern Africa to the Doctor of Philosophy in Nigeria and South Africa.

The need for quality cannot be overemphasized. Berger and Foote (2013) argue that the ultimate goal of journalism education, regardless of its provider, is to empower not only the student but journalism itself. In other words, the quality of journalism education is supposed to have an impact on the quality of citizenship and society. Journalism education educates not only the practitioners, but the public as well. This goal suggests a significant role for journalism educators: to serve media industry interests as a means towards the greater goal of serving the public and to also directly promote news literacy. Berger (2009) suggests that instead of trying to ban the growing number of institutions, the media industry should alert the public as to which schools and programmes produce the graduates they will employ.

2.1. Theory Framework

This research is anchored on Situated Learning Theory. According to Collins, Brown and Newman (1988) Situated learning or situated cognition is a learning theory developed in the late 1980s by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger and soon expanded by John Seely Brown and his colleagues. Situated learning theory is based on the assumption that knowledge should be presented in an authentic context that involves its application (Aydede and Robbins 2009). Both authors argue that learning should not be viewed as the transmission of abstract and contextualized knowledge between individuals, but a social process within certain conditions which include activity, context and culture.

According to Lave & Wenger (1991) education can apply the two basic principles of situated cognition in classroom practice: First, present an authentic context and second, encourage social interaction and collaboration. It is believed that rich contexts can reflect students' interpretation of the real world and improve the knowledge being transferred to them in different situations. Collaboration can lead to the articulation of strategies that can then be discussed, which in turn can enhance the process of generalizing that is grounded in students' situated understanding (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

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 the 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).

3. Methodology

The research philosophy espoused in this study is constructivism. Further the research approach employed was the qualitative approach. Creswel (1997, 2007) defines qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore social or human problems. This approach was deemed appropriate for this study because the researcher intended to understand the influence of mass media training from the perspectives of media managers and the senior journalists. Jwan and Ong'ondo (2011) posit that qualitative research is guided by the principles that research can be subjective, particularly and context-based and need not necessarily be based on simple random samples and it should be generalizable. According to Obuya (2015) quantitative researchers seek casual determination, prediction and generalization of findings. The main aim of this research was to seek understanding and make meaning from the information obtained from the participants

This study adopted a case study method. Yin (2009) defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and 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 offer the typicality of conditions experienced in other media houses in Kenya.

The study location was in Nairobi. Nairobi is deemed relevant because of its cosmopolitan nature whereby people from different cultural backgrounds co-exist with each other in different spheres and one of this is employment. The Standard Group is one of the oldest and largest media groups founded in 1902. It is a multi-media organization with investments in media platforms spanning newspaper print operations, television, radio broadcasting, digital and online services, as well as outdoor advertising (Standard Group, 2015).

The population for this study comprised of media managers who included: A Chief Sub Editor for print, a manager for online the edition, a sub editor in radio, a radio manager and programmer. The population also comprised of senior journalists working on the converged platforms of television, radio, print and online editions. According to Kombo and Tromp (2011) a population is a group of individuals, objects or items from which samples are taken for measurement. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) argue that a researcher needs to pick a target population from which to generalize the results of a study. Participants were selected on the basis of their experience with media training and mass media communication.

Wambugu, Kyalo, Mbii and Nyonje (2015) define sampling as the process of selecting the right individuals, objects or events for study. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) note that sampling is the process of selecting a number of individuals for a study in a way that the individuals represent the large group from which they were selected from. The selection

criteria for inclusion included professionals in the area of this study who articulated their experiences as it relates to the phenomenon being investigated; that is the influence of mass media training on the competence of journalists in Kenya.

This study employed non-probability sampling approach which Kombo and Tromp (2006) described as a method of sampling that aims to be theoretically representative of the study population by maximizing the scope or range of variation of the study. The researcher used purposive and snowball sampling to accomplish the non-probabilistic sampling. In purposive sampling, the researcher purposely targets a group of people believed to be reliable for the study (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). SG managers and senior journalists were chosen because they are reliable for this study as they encounter mass media communication on a daily basis.

The reason for the choice of the managers and senior journalists was that they have significant influence in the overall production of media products ranging from news to other programmes. The few selected media managers and senior journalists were then used as informants to identify others who qualified to be included in the sample because they meet the sampling criteria (Wambugu, Kyalo, Mbi & Nyonje 2015; Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003).

3.1. Data Generation Technique

SG managers and senior journalists were taken through in-depth interviews. According to Leegard, Keegan and Ward (2003, p138) in Ritchie & Lewis (2003), in-depth or interviews are one of the main methods of data collection in qualitative research. It is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, programme or situation (Boyce & Neal 2006). The in-depth interview is often described as a form conversation with a purpose (Webb & Webb, 2010).

The interviews were semi-structured. Doyle (2015) notes that, a common practice in semi-structured interviews is to lead with open-ended questions and then spontaneously devise follow-up questions to draw out more specific evidence from the respondents. 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, the pretesting was done on a media producer from China Global Television (CGTV) and a presenter from Wholesome Television (WTV). Pretesting is regarded as an effective technique for improving trustworthiness of qualitative data collection procedures and the interpretation of findings (Bowden, Fox-Rushby, Nyandieka, & Wanjau, 2002; Brown, Lindenberger, & Bryant, 2008). Pre-testing was done so as to evaluate the language competency and content validity of data collection materials. It was also used to estimate the time the full interview would take gauging the extent of respondent fatigue (Hurst, et.al, 2015). CGTV is an international television network which brought in the diversity of offering the journalism programme in early 2017.

3.2. Findings on the Competence of Kenyan Journalists from Media Players

The respondents identified various competency related issues in the media industry which emanate from the training. Through the lenses of news judgement, language and analysis, technology and audio-visual knowledge, all the respondents from radio, TV, online and print sections commented on the fact that Kenyan journalists are not competently trained to handle the rigorous work environment. One of the issues raised was that there is a predicament with the trainers who do not work or have never worked in the media therefore cannot understand the right skill set to give to the students. The argument was that if the trainer does not understand how the industry operates then he/she will not be able to know exactly what to teach the students. This is as depicted by respondent A1 who states:

A1: But who trains these journalists, are there people who work in the media who train them? So, do they know the skills sets for the job? Some of the trainers have never stepped in the media house even to visit. We therefore feel that the students being trained obviously don't get full training. A lot of the job training happens because of this.

With the constant change in the industry, the trainers should also keep upgrading their knowledge and experience through short trainings based on the current and developing issues. The argument was that the hiring of journalism trainers should not just be based on academic proficiency but the trainers must either be in the industry or should have gained some experience before teaching as the respondent below indicates:

B4: Hire people who have the industry experience it really helps because if someone just went to study mass communication then now, they are teaching then there is a disconnect because they don't know what the industry demands so they end up teaching the students basics which is not helpful.

According to respondent (A1), as a stop gap measure, the media houses have been forced to do in-house trainings so as to bring the new recruits up-to standard. The Standard Group Limited has partnered with the Agakhan University and formed an academy where graduates in journalism and mass communication are taken through additional six months of training. After this training, the students do three months apprenticeship with the media house in various departments such as print, production, editorial, online and broadcast. They observe and work hand in hand with the professionals in the different departments. Selection of the students is on merit where they look at the leadership potential, work ethics, and the passion for the job.

A1: The reason we do inhouse training is because of that gap, we pick students from universities mostly in Kenya and take them through training. We work with Agakhan University but we are the trainers. This is because media schools do not have experienced trainers. We give the students a hands-on training. For example, if the lesson is on writing for news you are taught properly what is writing for news and you are given practical examples and sent out on assignments, so you learn more than what you are taught in class.

The students are trained by the media professionals who are in the industry and therefore understand what skills to impart therefore enabling the students to be competent by the time they are employed. However, the respondents A1

and B4 lamented that the training is expensive and therefore they are not able to train as many students as they would wish to.

A1: But it's also a very huge budget on us so we can't train that much as we would like to

B4: It is very costly for the media house to engage in training but because of the gaps we have to do the training.

Additionally, the standard Group also has graduate trainee program known as the 'scribe Inc.' where candidates are taken through all media platforms training namely; storytelling and news writing, feature writing, media law, ethics and court reporting, design and layout, online journalism and broadcast media. Once done with the program, the candidates are multi-skilled journalists who are able to write on all platforms. This is because the media house does not trust the trainees who come straight from colleges. Respondent A2 says;

A2: We always ask whether the people we recruit are good enough for this company, once they are sourced from the university, they are taken to the scribes inc for training. Training is important because the Standard Media has a style, code of conduct for all those platforms, convergence, TV, radio online and print so if you have been trained as print you are not an online journalist, you are trained here so that you are able to perform as an online journalist.

The respondents also raised issues on the behavior of the students when they get to the media as interns and as fresh graduates. The argument is that the students have not been taught on how to behave once they get into the industry, they have not been prepared to take initiative and perform the various duties allocated to them, and instead they wait to be lectured the same way it was done in school.

A3: I've always complained about the difference between what we expect on the job and what people are taught in school, one of the problems would be that interns are not taught how to behave when they come to work they still expect the work place to be classroom where you sit them down then you show them all the procedures.

According to respondent A4, new journalism graduates are not updated on the current affairs; they don't know how to carry out effective interviews. They cannot carry out intensive research interpret and analyze the information given. They just report the information as given. They are not critical thinkers and this hampers the communication process. The students also lack analytical skills therefore they are not able to report beyond what they see and approach the stories in different and interesting angles.

A4: We should have journalists who are updated on the current situations, journalists who are innovative, and those who know how to research. A good journalist should have his report, a bit of Google and other bits of information here and there and interpret the information, do some interviews and afterwards produce a comprehensive news item. We should not just have reporters who concentrate on 'he said, he refuted, he critiqued' etc.

4. Discussion

Overall, the key findings based on the research questions are that Kenyan journalism graduates are not competently trained; media schools do not have the required set of facilities to aid them in media training; the regulators are unable to carry out their mandate effectively; and the training curriculum in media schools does not capture the current trends in the industry. Also discussed are two emerging issues that cut across the research questions in this study. These are: The trainers do not have the required skills to impart to the students due to the fact that most of them have never worked in the media and media employers prefer to hire graduates of other disciplines such as English and Literature due to their prowess in the language.

The findings reveal that media training in Kenyan colleges is wanting. To this effect, media schools are churning out graduates that cannot perform in the industry once employed. According to respondents A1, A2 and B4, Kenyan new recruits are not competently trained. The respondents wondered whether the students are taught by people who have experience in the media. These findings are in line with research conducted by (Irer, 2017) on mass communication training in Kenya, 91% of the respondents wanted extra training. The argument was that this could be due to the lack of qualified teachers which is likely to create a feeling among Kenyan journalists that they need further training.

With consideration to UNESCO's model curricula, competencies and the findings of this research, Kenya's journalism training does not meet the minimum requirements for impactful training. According to UNESCO, 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 (Berger, 2009; Berger, 2013; UNESCO 2013). Media houses are forced to re-train the new recruits. In-house training is important especially on issues that can be taught in school such as house policies. But media houses should not re-train the graduates afresh as it is expensive as the General Manager of Nation Media Group Linus Kaikai argues. For him, media schools should invest in producing fully qualified journalists who do not need further training upon joining the job market (Gichobi, 2015).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study reveals that journalists trained in Kenya are not competent because of lack of technical skills. They lack the practical skills that are supposed to enable them perform their tasks at ease once employed. Due to this reason, media houses are recruiting graduates of other areas such as English, medicine, and law among other key areas. Some media houses have resorted to re-train the new recruits so as 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. Media trainers need to be in touch with what is currently happening in the industry and impart the right skills to the students (Irer, 2017). 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. The trainers also need to be more rigorous in the training so that the students get used to the pressure of working in the media and beating the strict deadlines.

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