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Review of Curriculum for Journalism Students in Middle Level Colleges in Kenya

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Abstract

Few can succeed as practitioners in mass communications without mastering the principles and practices of broad areas of knowledge that comprise the basic ingredients of college education. However, these principles have to be ingrained in the teaching curriculum of every media college. This study aims to establish how the journalism syllabi for training diploma and certificate students in middle level colleges in the Eldoret Municipality of Kenya are developed. The study targeted 18 colleges with a total target population of 72 participants. That is three class representatives from each college (54), and the 18 heads of journalism departments. Due to the small number of the target population, a Census technique was used in the collection of data from class representatives and heads of departments from the 18 colleges. The study collected data from sampled respondents by using questionnaires and interview schedules. The questionnaires were both open-ended and closed-ended, and Likert scaling was used to measure either a positive or negative response to a statement. The findings of the study showed that there was no standardized form of curriculum implementation and journalism tutors did not participate in curriculum development. The study recommends the establishment of a strong link between journalism training institutions and other stakeholders such as the Kenya Institute of Curriculum

Development (KICD), and the Ministry of Education Science and Technology to effectively serve society.

Keywords: *Curriculum, journalism, middle level colleges, development*

Introduction

Dewey (1901), states that good education should have both a societal purpose and a purpose for the individual student. Therefore educators have a responsibility for providing students with experiences that are immediately valuable and which equip the students to contribute to society. Smith also argues that these can be done through experiential education – a process that occurs between the teacher and the student that infuses direct experience with the learning environment and content.

The middle level colleges that offer diploma programmes in Kenya have –not, however, received as much attention in terms of approval from distinguished organizations for their journalistic training levels. According to Nguri, Mumbi and Kamweu (2009), only the Kenya Institute of Mass Communication (KIMC) has been distinguished in the quality of media practitioners it produces. The rest, mostly privately owned, award diplomas usually arranged with overseas-based institutions. These state Nguri et al. attract little attention, if any, from the government and other prominent stakeholders in the industry. Nguri et al. further add that the registration for media training is not professionally regulated as is the case with, for example, pharmacy, accounting and medicine, where training cannot start before professional boards validate the institution. Such control measures ensure quality training. This is not the case with media training. In the absence of such regulatory authority several institutions have presented themselves to ensure every trainer is offering the right kind of journalistic instruction and exposure within a conducive atmosphere. This study focuses on the quality of journalism training offered.

According to Wamari (2010), quoting the chief information officer at the department of information, “There is no chaotic training field that beats the media. Journalism is even being offered in the cyber cafes by any person who feels like it, well assured that nobody will raise questions” (p. 9). Wamari also says that a proprietor of one of the unregulated media colleges in Nairobi admits that there is indeed hardly any control over standards of training, but argues that the interest is in fulfilling the aspirations of individuals who want training but have not gained access to the mainstream journalism institution. It is against this backdrop that the study seeks to determine how the journalism syllabi for training diploma and certificate students in middle level colleges are developed.

Materials and Methods

The study was carried out in journalism training colleges in the town of Eldoret, situated in the UasinGishu County of Kenya. The study population comprised of 18 journalism training colleges in Eldoret. The study targeted a total of 18 heads of department (HODs) (Table 1). The study also targeted class representatives for all the three cohorts of training: first years, second years and third years. From the 18 colleges the total target populations of class representatives were 54 (Table 1). Out of the 72 sample population, a total of 63 respondents answered questionnaires given to them. This means that 9 other targeted respondents did not complete the questionnaire for various reasons.

Table 1

Target Population

<u>Colleges</u>	<u>Target respondents</u>		
	<u>HODs</u>	<u>Class Representatives</u>	<u>Total No. of target respondents per college</u>
Alphax	1	3	4

Nairobi Aviation	1	3	4
Eldoret Aviation	1	3	4
Regions group of colleges	1	3	4
African Institute of Research and Development Studies	1	3	4
Eldoret Professional Accountancy College	1	3	4
Hezz College	1	3	4
Royal College	1	3	4
Elgon View College	1	3	4
Eldoret Institute of Professional Studies	1	3	4
Kenya Institute of Banking	1	3	4
Herbadeen College	1	3	4
African International College	1	3	4
Excel Texas Institute	1	3	4
Splendid College	1	3	4
Chesters Institute	1	3	4
Tropical College	1	3	4
Hitec International College	1	3	4
Total	18	54	72

Results

Class Representatives Program of Training

When the class representative respondents were asked to state their program of training, the majority of them (61%) stated that they were enrolled for a diploma course, while 39% said they were enrolled for a certificate course. This meant that the data collected for the

study was collected from respondents pursuing different programs offered in colleges and hence the data is representative. Figure 1 represents the different percentages of respondents in each program.

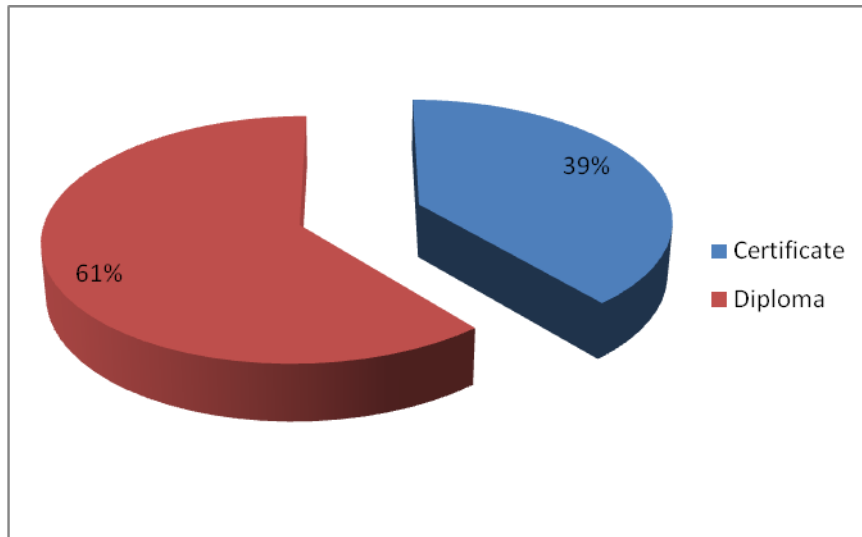


Figure 1. Program of training of class representatives

Level of Education of HODs

The study sought to determine the level of education of HODs which is directly linked to their competency in journalism training. When the HODs respondents were asked about their level of education, 78% said they had a degree certificate while 22% said they had a master's certificate. This meant that all the HODs involved in the study had a degree certificate and above and therefore their responses as HODs could be relied on because they qualify to hold their positions. Figure 2 represents the distribution of respondents by education level as per survey questionnaire.

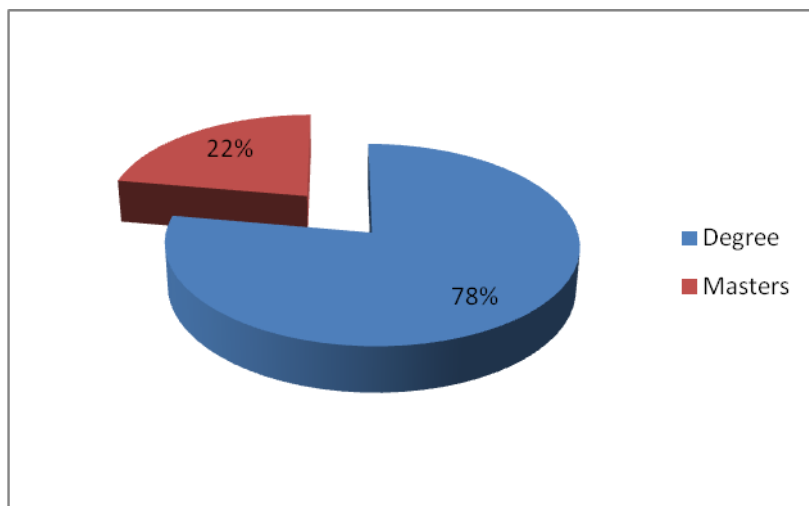


Figure 2. Respondents' education level

The class representatives agreed that: Journalism training institutions in Eldoret participate in college curriculum development; media professionals are involved in the development of the curriculum used for training in middle level colleges; curriculum used in middle level colleges is approved by a professional body; and that diploma curriculum in middle level colleges involves reporting on key issues such as HIV/AIDS, health and community media. The class representatives disagreed that: Journalism training institutions in Eldoret have a frequency of curriculum review; journalism training institutes in Eldoret have a statutory body that regulates their establishment and that all media training institutions in Eldoret have one harmonized curriculum in use. Table 2 shows the statements and their respective means as collected from the class representatives.

Table 2

Class Representative's Perception of Curriculum Development

<u>Class Representatives</u>	<u>Percentages</u>					<u>Mean</u>
	SA	A	D	SD	N/A	
My college participates in curriculum development	16.7	83.3	00	00	00	2.83

My college involves media professionals in the development of the curriculum used for training	37.0	55.6	7.4	00	00	1.70
My curriculum is approved by a professional body.	63.0	31.5	5.6	00	00	1.43
My college has a frequency of curriculum review	9.3	31.5	14.8	00	44.4	3.39
My college has a statutory body that regulates its operations	37.0	40.7	14.8	00	7.4	3.00
All media training institutions in Eldoret have one harmonized curriculum in use	7.4	31.5	22.2	7.4	31.5	3.24
My curriculum involves reporting on key issues like HIV/AIDS, Health and community media	53.7	14.8	00	00	31.5	2.41

The HODs were also asked a series of statements concerning curriculum development in middle level colleges. They agreed that journalism training institutions in Eldoret have annual or medium strategies on the future of their departments but they disagreed that: they participate in college curriculum development; journalism training institutions in Eldoret have a frequency of curriculum review; and that journalism training colleges in Eldoret have regular timetables for experts to lecture specialist subjects in the curriculum. Table 3 shows the results for each statement.

Table 3

HODs Perception of Curriculum Development

<u>HODs</u>	<u>Percentages</u>					<u>Mean</u>
	SA	A	D	SD	N/A	
I have a regular timetable for experts to lecture specialist subjects in curriculum.	00	00	33.3	66.7	00	2.67
I participate in college curriculum development	00	00	55.6	44.4	00	2.56
I have a frequency of curriculum review	00	00	77.8	22.2	00	3.22
I have annual or medium strategies on the future of my department	11.1	88.9	00	00	00	1.89

The agreement from class representatives and HODs that there is no harmonized curriculum and that tutors do not participate in curriculum development shows a lack of coordination in carrying out this program in middle level colleges. With the exception of Kenya Institute of Mass Communication (KIMC) in conjunction with Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC), journalism training colleges adopt different curricular in their trainings based on different examination bodies such as Institute of Commercial Management in London (ICM), Association of Business Managers and Administrators (ABMA) and Association of Business Executives (ABE). The many unharmonized curricula pose some danger. Most colleges choose these foreign examining bodies because currently there are no local examining bodies offering certificate and diploma examinations. Furthermore these foreign bodies don't have the minimum admission grade for students to enroll for various courses. This lack of entry requirements was also evident in the interview schedules. For example, according to one of the heads of department, minimum entry requirements did not

exist due to their examining body merely requiring an age limit of above 18 years as qualification for course enrolment.

Interviewer: In this college, what is your minimum entry requirement for a diploma in journalism?

Response: As per my department we do not have minimum entry requirements for we are doing ICM [Institute of Commercial Management] which focuses on the age. With this curriculum it is like anyone who has attained an age of 18 years is legible. However as a department, we have said somebody must have done KCSE [Kenya Certificate of Primary Education] and attained at least a D (Personal communication, February 18, 2014)

This statement is backed up by the ICM (n.d, Course/Level Entry Requirements, Para.4) which states, “the institute operates an ‘Open Entry’ policy in respect of most of its certificate level vocational programmes, subject to appropriate work experience...” According to the ICM: All students are required to commence their studies at the certificate level unless they are able to claim subject for subject or level exemptions; the minimum age for registration for the majority of programmes is 18 years; and applicants over the age of 20 who do not hold one of the recommended entry qualifications may also register for some certificate level programmes provided they have been in full time employment for a minimum of two years and can produce a letter from their employer to confirm this (ICM, n.d, Entry to an ICM Diploma Level Programme (NQF Level 5), Para 2).

Each of the colleges showed a free will to implement the curriculum in the way they understood it, which may or may not be in line with the market requirements. There was a general agreement among the interviewees when they were asked if they contribute towards making the curriculum they use. One of them concurred by saying that:

I have no idea. Personally I only implement. Like I said the ICM curriculum is from London.

Here we have no chance to suggest on what maybe we think should have been offered.

This

to me is again a challenge, though many say journalism is all the same throughout the world.

There should be away in which the curriculum is domesticated. For example, most of the cases in media law are foreign cases. Now if a student is not clever enough, applicability in

the Kenyan context might be a real problem. Most of even the other referred books are also

foreign-authored; no single book from Kenya has been referred. I tell you if you are not careful, students treat those laws and ethics taught as foreign. All these lecturers here have no idea [I] am sure how the curriculum they are teaching was developed.

ICM teaching centers are provided with a detailed syllabus and a reading list for each subject area; each unit syllabus clearly defines the areas that a lecturer requires to cover for each subject and examination questions are based on the areas and topics detailed for each unit; each unit syllabus is normally linked to one main textbook and the examiners base their questions on the content of the nominated core text (ICM, n.d).

When the study further sought details about the role of lecturers in curriculum development, it was evident that they had no role to play. Respondent 4, when asked, reported that: “For the time I have been around, we have no role. We are all guided by the curriculum from ICM. It comes when it is set and ready for implementation.”(Personal communication, February 18, 2014) “We” in this case referred to the lecturers because HODs in colleges belong to the fraternity of lecturers. The respondent further insisted on the same answer when he was probed by the interviewer.

Interviewer: Does it mean your lecturers do not participate in the making of the curriculum?

Response: Yah, it's difficult for the curriculum [which] like I said is just sent or uploaded by the ICM in UK. So our work is simply to teach as per the set curriculum. We teach as the ICM examines and marks the set and done examinations. Therefore this makes our work

easier. (Personal communication, February 18, 2014)

This comment is substantiated by Nguri et al. (2009) who say that only the KIMC has been distinguished in the quality of media practitioners it produces. The rest, mostly privately owned, award diplomas usually arranged with overseas-based institutions. This finding is evidence of the abstract nature of the curriculum which is actually developed without the input of lecturers who are the implementers of the curriculum.

From the analysis of the questionnaires and interviews, it largely appears as though middle level colleges do not fully prepare students to the desired standards. This finding is substantiated by the ICM (n.d) and is further supported by Ehindero (1986) who states that every education programme should be socially relevant and culturally sensitive. In other words the application of learning outcomes should benefit the immediate community of the learner and should suit and impact on the learner's cultural background.

Ehindero (1986) argues that any education programme that seeks to segregate the learner from his cultural background should be held suspect. He further notes that the aims of education and curricula are to serve the society in some important ways which include preserving, rediscovering and critically transmitting the cultural heritage, and contributing to the improvement of the society by helping to refine and redefine national aims and techniques through the use of the best and most relevant knowledge currently available. These views are supported by Klieberd (2004) and Berding (1999) as discussed in the

theoretical framework where it is argued that curricula should not be presented as finished abstractions but, instead, should include the preconceptions of learners as well as incorporating their outlook on the world.

Discussion

It is clear that the findings within this study suggest that HODs in journalism training in middle level colleges in the town of Eldoret do not participate in curriculum development. The ICM (n.d), one of the foreign-based examining bodies, reported that ICM teaching colleges are provided with a detailed syllabus and a reading list for each subject area. Each unit syllabus clearly defines the areas that a lecturer requires to cover for each subject and examination questions are based on the areas and topics detailed for each unit. The ICM further states that each unit syllabus is normally linked to one main textbook and the examiners base their questions on the content of the nominated core text.

The failure of the college trainers to participate in the development of curriculum raises the question of contextualization and curriculum reviews based on the dynamics of Kenyan media given that all colleges offer foreign examinations with recommended text books from their countries of origin. These findings are substantiated by Oriare, Okello-Orlale, and Wilson (2010) who say that because of the absence of common journalism education standards, quality training of journalists is wanting. Inadequately trained and inexperienced journalism lecturers, ineffective regulation of training colleges and a lack of financial and material resources all militate against quality journalism education.

The above literature concurs with the HODs views – they disagreed that they participate in college curriculum development. One of the HODs in an interview session said:

I have no idea. Personally I only implement. Like I said the ICM curriculum is from London. Here we have no chance to suggest on what maybe we think should have

been offered. This to me is again a challenge, though many say journalism is all the same throughout the world. There should be away in which the curriculum is domesticated. For example most of the cases in media law are foreign cases. Now if a student is not clever enough, applicability in the Kenyan context might be a real problem. Most of even the other referred books are also foreign-authored; no single book from Kenya has been referred. I tell you if you are not careful, students treat those laws and ethics taught as foreign. All these lecturers here have no idea [I] am sure how the curriculum they are teaching was developed. (Personal communication, February 18, 2014)

Conclusion

In summary, class representatives agreed that: Journalism training institutions in Eldoret participate in college curriculum development; media professionals are involved in the development of the curriculum used for training in middle level colleges; curriculum used in middle level colleges is approved by a professional body; and they agreed that diploma curriculum in middle level colleges involves reporting on key issues such as HIV/AIDS, Health and community media. The class representatives disagreed that journalism training institutions in Eldoret have a frequency of curriculum review; journalism training institutes in Eldoret have a statutory body that regulates their establishment and that all media training institutions in Eldoret have one harmonized curriculum in use.

The HODs were also asked a series of statements concerning curriculum development in middle level colleges. They agreed that journalism training institutions in Eldoret have annual or medium strategies on the future of their departments. The HODs disagreed that they participate in college curriculum development, disagreed that journalism training institutions in Eldoret have a frequency of curriculum review and disagreed that journalism training

colleges in Eldoret have regular timetable for experts to lecture specialist subjects in curriculum.

Conclusively therefore, with regard to curriculum development, there was general agreement that trainers in journalism middle level colleges in Eldoret do not participate in curriculum development. It was also clear that there was no schedule of curriculum review in these colleges. The ICM, one of the foreign based examining bodies, reported that ICM teaching colleges are provided with a detailed syllabus and a reading list for each subject area. Each unit syllabus clearly defines the areas that a lecturer requires to cover for each subject and examination questions are based on the areas and topics detailed for each unit. The institute further states that each unit syllabus is normally linked to one main textbook and the examiners base their questions on the content of the nominated core text.

Recommendations

In order for effective journalism training programs to be implemented in middle level colleges, journalism trainers ought to participate in curriculum development. They also need to have a regular schedule of reviewing the curriculum in order to cope with the changing needs in the media industry. This is due to the fact that the media, as an informative body, is such a dynamic industry. In addition, if the trainers are not involved in curriculum development and keep teaching a foreign curriculum, some domestic issues are likely to be neglected which puts the media at stake. This concurs with Kliebard (2004) who noted that journalism students came to school to do things and live in a community which gave them a real guide to experiences that foster their capacity to contribute to society. Ehindero (1986) makes it clear that every education programme should be socially relevant and culturally sensitive. In other words, application of learning outcomes should benefit the immediate community of the learner and should suit and impact on the learner's cultural background.

Ehindero (1986) argues that any education programme that seeks to segregate the learner from his cultural background should be held suspect.

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