

Journalism Profession and Training in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Case Study of Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This article is a descriptive and analytical account of journalism practice and professional training in Ghana. It assesses some of the factors which have affected the development of the profession in that country.

It offers a brief history of journalism in Ghana and reports among other things that there are about 650 journalists in the country, 467 of whom are employed by state-owned media organisations like the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation and the Ghana News Agency, and by the New Times and the Graphic Corporation, Ghana's two major newspaper establishments. According to the article, the journalism profession in Ghana is a male-dominated profession; only 13.3% of the 467 journalists in Ghana are women.

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The article also reported that there are two journalism training institutions in Ghana, and that the main policy objective of journalism training in Ghana is to produce professionally trained personnel to operate and manage the country's mass media. It concludes by noting that journalism education in Ghana does not appear to be based on any specially-recognised state policy or integrated national development planning.

La profession du journaliste et la formation en Afrique sub-saharienne: une étude de cas portant sur le Ghana.

RESUME

Cet article est une description analytique de la pratique du journalisme et de la formation professionnelle au Ghana. Il évalue certains facteurs qui ont eu un effet sur le développement de la profession dans le pays.

Il offre un bref historique du journalisme au Ghana et indique, entre autres, qu'il y a environ 650 journalistes dans le pays dont 467 sont employés par des organismes étatiques tels que le Ghana Broadcasting Corporation et l'Agence de Presse du Ghana, le New Times Corporation et le Graphic Corporation qui sont les deux groupes de journaux principaux du Ghana. Selon l'article, la profession est dominée par les hommes; seulement 13.3% des 467 journalistes du Ghana sont des femmes.

L'article indique aussi qu'il ya 2 grandes institutions de formation en journalisme au Ghana et que le principal objectif de la formation est de produire un personnel ayant une formation professionnelle adéquate pour gérer et faire fonctionner les organes de presse du pays. En conclusion, il fait remarquer que l'enseignement du journalisme au Ghana ne semble pas être basé sur une politique officielle reconnue ou un plan de développement national intégré.

Introduction

The history of journalism practice in Ghana dates back to the colonial era when in 1822, Sir Charles MacCarthy, the first Crown Governor of the Gold Coast (as Ghana was then called), established the *Royal Gold Coast Gazette*. Journalism practice by indigenous Ghanaians, however, started some 35 years later when in 1957 the *Accra Herald*, a manuscript newspaper, was launched by Charles and Edmund Bannerman (Jones-Quartey, 1974). In the colonial period, newspapers were run not by professional journalists but rather by nationalist leaders who were professionals in such other fields as law, medicine, religion and teaching and by amateurs who acquired their technical skills on the job.

The press in colonial Ghana was employed mainly to criticize the oppression, injustice and other evils of the colonial system and to agitate and mobilize the people for the independence movement. Ansah (1980, p.2) has noted that the press in pre-independence Ghana "was an advocacy press for whose running what was needed was commitment to the nationalist cause rather than professional skills in journalism".

With a few exceptions such as J.B. Danquah (a notable lawyer-politician), Nmandi Azikiwe (a leading Nigerian nationalist who edited a newspaper in the Gold Coast in the mid 1930s) and Kwame Nkrumah (the first president of Ghana), journalists in the Gold Coast were "a sorry crowd of under-educated, under-paid, untrained and unadjusted old men and young boys" (Jones-Quartey, 1974, p.37).

Journalism did not acquire the status of a profession in the Gold Coast until the early 1950s and the need for an importance of formal journalism training were recognized only after the country had achieved its political independence in March 1957. Instrumental in introducing professional

journalism in Ghana was Cecil H. King's Daily Mirror Group of London which in 1950 established the first modern press in the country, the Graphic Company, to publish the *Daily Graphic*. The company used its financial and technical resources to bring together editors, reporters, proof-readers, machine men, compositors and general administrative staff who, to quote Jones-Quartey (1974, P.38), "felt for the first time that they were in a profession or calling worthy of the name and of their talents".

The attainment of independence and the establishment of the Ghana News Agency, the reorganization of the Government Information Services Department, the appearance of more newspapers and the expansion of radio services engendered the need for professionalization and demand for the services of competent journalists. By the end of the 1950s, journalism had developed into a recognized profession - a recognition which was to be vitiated by a number of factors in the post-independence era. This paper presents a descriptive and analytic account of journalism practice and professional training in Ghana and assesses some of the factors which have affected the development of the profession in the country.

Journalism Profession in Ghana: Definition and Dimensions

The concept of professionalism implies:

- (1) the acquisition of a recognized body of knowledge;
- (2) adoption of certain traditions and usages;
- (3) maintenance of a set of well-defined standards;
- (4) application of certain sanctions in the event of non-compliance with the established rules of conduct; and
- (5) commitment, autonomy and opportunity to practise without undue interference from external sources (Ansah, 1980).

The journalism profession in Ghana may not satisfy all these properties of professionalism.¹ Nevertheless, one can speak of journalism as a profession in the country to the

extent that people can be equipped through formal and informal procedures with basic knowledge and skills to practise it; journalism possesses its own ethics, tenets and set of standards and practices; conditions can be created to encourage people to be committed to and practise it and a professional body exists among whose aims is to follow the conduct of people in the profession and "take firm and consequent measures against journalists violating the moral principles of journalism".²

The generally accepted definition of a "journalist" in Ghana is contained in the Report of the Committee on Service Conditions of Journalists in the Public Service (usually referred to as the Essah Committee). It defines "journalist" as "a person who collects, reports and comments on news and current affairs for publication in newspapers or periodicals or broadcasting by radio or television, including reporters, sub-editors, staff writers, proof readers, cameramen and editors".³ This definition corresponds with that given by the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) whose constitution and by-laws defines "Journalist" as "someone who, by training and qualification in journalism and job specification collects and disseminates news and information for public consumption; and through which he informs, educates, entertains and motivates people for the benefit of society".⁴

The difference in the Essah Committee's definition and that of the GJA lies in the latter's stress on training and qualification in journalism. This paper adopts the GJA's definition partly because, as has been observed earlier, one of the elements of a profession is some training and inculcation of basic knowledge and skills to facilitate effective performance. The choice of the GJA's definition is also partly based on the fact that the dominant criteria for recruitment of journalists by media organizations in Ghana include some training and qualification in journalism.

By the accepted definition, journalists in Ghana include employees who have worked on a full-time basis for at least two years in the following sections of the mass media:

- (a) the editorial section of newspapers, magazines and news agency; and
- (b) the news, production, publications and film sections of radio and television.

The journalism profession comprises press designers, proof-readers, reporters, editors, production personnel in radio and television as well as freelance journalists. Also classified as journalists are journalism educators who have had at least two unbroken years of full-time practice in any news medium.

Although no specific figures are available, the Ghana Journalists Association estimates that there are about 650 journalists in Ghana. By early 1987, the GJA had a registered membership of 500 with an estimated 150 others outside of the association.⁵ The estimated number of Ghanaian journalists working in the country now shows an increasing trend since there were less than 400 of them at the beginning of the 1980s. But available information indicates that most of the new entrants are young, newly-trained graduates from the Ghana Institute of Journalism, one of the two major training institutions in the country. Also analysis of the trend shows a growing tendency on the part of many leading and experienced journalists to depart from the profession as a result of a combination of factors to which we shall soon turn our attention.

Most journalists in Ghana work in the state-owned dominant mass media organizations. Available data indicates that 467 journalists out of the estimated 650 are employed at the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, the Ghana News Agency and at the New Times Corporation and the Graphic Corporation, the main newspaper establishments. By early June 1987, the Ghana News Agency had 137 journalists on its payroll, the New Times Corporation which publishes the daily *Ghanaian Times* and its weekly counterpart, *Weekly Spectator*, had 120, the Graphic Corporation, publishers of *Daily Graphic* and the weekly *Mirror*, listed 113 and the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation had 97 journalists among their employees. The journalism profession in Ghana is a male-dominated profession as most working journalists are men and only a small proportion are women. Thus, for example, only 62 or 13.3 percent of the 467 journalists employed in the state-owned media organizations are women. Though this number is small, it nevertheless is a marked increase over the less than 30 female journalists in the country at the end of the 1970s.

To date, the only known major study which gathered information on the personal and professional characteristics

of Ghanaian media personnel was Brouhard's (1979) survey of attitudes about media education among 187 selected media personnel in Ghana. Brouhard sought, inter alia, to find out about the value media personnel attached to formal education and aspects of their training which were most useful in their media careers. The study found that Ghanaian mass communicators in the sample were highly trained in media skills as most of them had been trained either locally or in overseas training institutions. Only 9 percent of the sample had no formal media training. Generally, the media personnel found their media studies valuable regardless of whether the training was provided locally or abroad. The survey also found that broadcasters tended to be older and more experienced than their counterparts in the print media. On the other hand, print media practitioners were more likely to have a higher level of education than personnel working in the broadcast media.

The majority of Ghanaian journalists are a part of the civil service structure and their salary levels reflect the salary structures in the civil service. In 1987, the salaries of journalists in the civil service ranged from a low of about C70,000 (approximately US\$438 at the mid-1987 exchange rate of C160 per US\$1.00 per annum for a beginning reporter to a high salary of about C50,000 (US\$938) per year for a supervising chief editor. The average salary of the journalist in the civil service is higher than the average salary of other civil servants but it is considerably lower than the salaries of people in such professions as medicine, law, university teaching and business. The relatively low salary scales and conditions of service of Ghanaian journalists in the civil service were the subject of a major enquiry in January 1978.

The Committee on Service Conditions of Journalists in the Public Service was appointed in January 1978 by the Government to:

- (a) study and make recommendations on improved service conditions for journalists in the public service, and
- (b) to examine and recommend other measures for improving the work and morale of journalists.

Among the recommendations the Committee put forward, after a comprehensive study of the service conditions of journalists, were:

- (1) the institution of fringe benefits such as non-taxable housing allowance, transport allowance and special duty allowance;
- (2) general rise in salaries for journalists in the civil service;
- (3) security of tenure, and
- (4) that the government recognizes the peculiar nature of the journalistic profession and not order journalists to print or suppress news, to refrain from commenting on any issue or in any way to pervert the truth.⁶

The practice of journalism in post-independence Ghana has generally been marked by a number of factors. Prominent among these factors are:

- (1) political interference in the management and organization of the media;
- (2) restrictions on press freedom and pursuit of facts and truth;
- (3) governmental restraints on journalistic efforts to report on and criticize governmental conduct and policies;
- (4) arrests, detention and other forms of physical harassment of journalists;
- (5) forced retirement, redeployment and instant dismissal of editors and other decision-makers in the state-owned media organizations;
- (6) both covert and overt official censorship and extreme self-censorship; and
- (7) downright sycophancy and undue adulation of political figures and people in authority.

These features were particularly evident in the Nkrumah era (1957-1966), the regime of the National Redemption Council / Supreme Military Council (1972-1978) and under the present government of the Provisional National Defence Council (since 1981).

Attempts were made during the Third Republican period (1979-1981) to eliminate or blunt the impact of these features on journalism practice with the establishment of a Press Commission. Under the Third Republican Constitution,⁷ a Press Commission was set up to, among other responsibilities, appoint chief executives and boards of directors for the state-owned media, devise measures to preserve press freedom and maintain the highest professional and journalistic standards in the media, including the investigation and adjudication of complaints made against media practitioners.⁸ The Press Commission was a unique experiment in black Africa in divorcing state-ownership of the mass media from governmental control and to ensure high standards of professionalism in the media. The Commission was a mechanism designed to insulate the state-owned media organizations from governmental encroachments and, thus, help give media practitioners a measure of job security and create a congenial atmosphere in which journalists could freely inform the people and serve as watchdogs on the government without fear of reprisals from the governing body.⁹ But this experiment was abruptly terminated when the military led by Flight-Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings once again overthrew the constitutional, democratically elected government and set up the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) in December 1981.¹⁰

All in all, the three decades of independence in Ghana have seen a gradual impairment of the social status and recognition of the journalism profession. The factors listed above have had a very debilitating and unnerving effect on the performance of Ghanaian journalists and a dampening impact on their professional standards. Many competent, experienced and leading professional journalists have been compelled to leave the country to practise their profession elsewhere or to move away from the press and broadcast media into the more lucrative, more socially prestigious yet less politically hazardous enterprises of public relations and advertising or to depart from the communication field altogether. The Ghanaian journalists have performed their functions under constant fear, frustrations, depressed morale and "general apathy towards their work".¹¹ The Essah Committee was even more emphatic in its observations about the dilemma of Ghanaian journalists. In its report, it noted

that journalists in the country "hold their heads low in society because they know what they are part of but cannot change. Nor can they resign easily because they see few other avenues open to them to practise their trade".¹²

A combination of the factors has also generated considerable cynicism among sections of the population and the perception that the Ghanaian journalist has become bland, innocuous and generally ineffective or incompetent in his role as an articulator of public opinion and carrier of broad and diverse viewpoints on significant national issues. This perception has created a low estimation of journalism and emasculated the credibility of Ghanaian journalists in the society. Commenting on the social standing of Ghanaian journalism, the Essah committee remarked, "journalists in the public service have largely become objects of hatred and contempt in the society that normally expects so much of them. Instead of being regarded as leaders of public opinion - they are almost generally regarded as stooges, ignorant dealers in misinformation or perverters of truth".¹³

Journalism Professional Training

As is the case with other sub-Saharan African countries, journalism training in Ghana is a post-independence phenomenon. In the colonial period, journalism training consisted mainly in acquisition of technical skills on the job or short overseas courses. The need for professional training in journalism was felt with the gradual introduction in the country during the 1950s of modern newspaper and broadcasting equipment and the increasing demand for professionalism in newspaper production and organization, in broadcasting and other communication areas.

Formal journalism training in the country started in February 1959 when the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ) was established with the dual objective of giving "formal and systematic training in journalism" and of fostering "development of a patriotic cadre of journalists to play an active role in the emancipation of the African continent".¹⁴ The political and ideological undertone in the institute's aim reflected the politico-historical context: Kwame Nkrumah had led the first African country to independence and he now directed his efforts and the nation's resources and

Candidates who are admitted into the School are mainly university degree holders in appropriate fields and non-graduates who have had at least five years of relevant professional experience and who pass a qualifying test. The School's curriculum is designed to combine professional training with academic knowledge and research skills. For the award of the graduate diploma in communication studies, students take courses in Print and Broadcast Journalism, Mass Communication, Communication Research Methods, Public Relations/Advertising and Social Psychology. Students are also required to complete an eight-week internship with a media establishment.

The one-year master's programme is oriented towards research and theoretical knowledge and is open to students who excel in the graduate diploma course. Candidates who possess a good first degree in Journalism and Communication Studies from a recognised university may also be admitted to the master's programme without having to do the graduate diploma course. In the master's programme, students take three main classes in Development Communication, Communication Theory and Research, and International Communication and one elective class from the following: Development of Media Systems in Africa; Media Management, and Communication and Public Opinion. An additional requirement for the award of the master's degree in communication studies is the submission of a publishable research-based scholarly article.

The SCS is a relatively small institution with 25 graduate diploma and seven master's students in the 1986/87 academic year. To date, it has trained about 200 graduate diploma and 15 master's degree students. Graduates from the School are employed as senior reporters, sub-editors, teachers and researchers in newspaper organizations, government information services, the nation's sole radio and television station, the national news agency and the Ghana Institute of Journalism. But partly because they find public relations and advertising more lucrative and less hazardous, most of the School's graduates find positions in those field.

Besides the Ghana Institute of Journalism and the School of Communication Studies, three small privately-managed institutions have journalism classes in their curricula. The institutions offer courses in print, radio and television

writing, public relations and advertising. Admission requirements are five G.C.E. 'O' Level passes or their equivalent. The scanty information available on the institutions indicates that they are affiliated to schools of journalism in London such as the MacMillan Institute of Journalism and prepare students to take external examinations in journalism and communication. The duration of journalism courses offered in those institutions varies from three months to nine months, and upon successful completion, students are awarded diplomas or certificates in advertising or public relations or communication studies. Although there are no figures available, it is estimated that only a handful of students undertake their journalism studies either in the privately-managed institutions or through correspondence courses. But diplomas and certificates obtained through those institutions are hardly recognized by media organizations which do not consider the institutions as providing adequate professional training in journalism.

The Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) is the only media organization in the country with its own radio and television training schools. The GBC Radio Training School was established in 1955 to plan and organize training courses which aim at equipping the corporation's radio production personnel with the skills required to produce and broadcast good entertainment, informative and educational programmes. The school organizes induction courses for newly-employed radio production personnel, general courses in sound broadcasting techniques for producers and announcing and newsreading courses for newsreaders and other announcers. These in-service training courses vary in duration from two weeks to six months. The GBC Television Training School was started in January 1963 before television was inaugurated in 1965. It organizes short-term in-service training programmes mainly for television production staff with a view to broadening their knowledge and sharpening their skills in television programme production.

Generally speaking, the main policy objective of journalism training in Ghana is to produce professionally trained personnel to operate and manage the country's mass communication media. However, journalism education does

not appear to be based on an specially recognized state policy or integrated into national development planning. Yankah (1987, p.7) has remarked that "decision-makers are quick at making use of mass communication for political and bureaucratic operations but have little or no space for communication training in social planning". As is the case elsewhere in sub-Saharan African countries, the kind of journalism education provided by training institutions in Ghana tends to prepare journalists to work in urban rather than the rural environment where the majority of the population lives.

Very little of the content of training programmes is specifically geared towards creating, among the journalists and other communication practitioners, awareness and knowledge of the socio-cultural, economic and political realities of the rural environment as to provide skills for using or generating opportunities to use simple, rural community-based media and strategies. The dominant type of journalism training, thus, helps to perpetuate the situation where the orientation, content, style and structure of communication media only service the needs and interests of the minority urban population whilst paying scant attention to the majority rural population. In this respect, Ansah (1985, p.46) has commented that "social justice demands that the interests of the disadvantaged, illiterate, rural poor, who form the majority, should also be provided for. This can best be accomplished through the training of media personnel in the use of mini media - community radio and the rural or community newspaper".

Concluding Remarks

The practice of journalism as a profession in the country emerged only in the 1950s and formal journalism training in sub-Saharan Africa started in Ghana with the foundation of the Ghana Institute of Journalism in 1959. Ghana was also the first black African country to launch a post-graduate training in journalism when the School of Communication Studies at the University of Ghana was established in 1973. However, the journalism profession in the past 30 years has been beset with many inhibiting factors and journalism training does not appear to be based on any extensively

deliberated and recognized state policy or plan on the development and utilization of the mass media for development purposes.

Among the factors which will greatly influence the evolution of journalism profession in Ghana in the coming decades are:

- (1) training of Ghanaian journalists, especially at the university level;
- (2) improved conditions of service and better technical resources;
- (3) greater preparedness on the part of journalists to exhibit professional performance and conduct worthy of enhanced social recognition and prestige;
- (4) the public's perception of the competence and commitment to ideals with which journalists are performing their role; and
- (5) the willingness of the governing body to create and maintain a congenial political atmosphere for the journalism profession in the country.

Notes

1. For a more comprehensive discussion of the concepts of journalistic professionalism and professionalization, see, for example, Swen Windahl and Karl E. Rosengren, "Newsmen's Professionalism: Some Methodological Problems", *Journalism Quarterly*, 55, 3, 1978, pp.466-473; Peter Golding, "Media Professionalism in the Third World: The Transfer of an Ideology", in James Curran, Michael Gurevitch and Janet Wollacott (eds.), *Mass Communication and Society*, London: Open University, 1977, pp.291-308; Donald K. Wright, "An Analysis of the Level of Professionalism Among Canadian Journalists", *Gazette*, 20, 2, 1974, pp.133-144; and Oguz B. Naynan, Charles K. Atkin and G.J. O'Keefe, "Journalism as a Profession in a Developing Society: Metropolitan Turkish Newsmen", *Journalism Quarterly*, 50, 1, 1973, pp.68-76.

2. *The Constitution and Bye-Laws of the Ghana Journalists Association*. Mimeographed Document, Accra, December 1984, p.2. Besides the Ghana Journalists Association, another organization of journalists is the Guild of Editors of Ghana.
3. *Report of the Committee on Service Conditions of Journalists in the Public Service*, Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1978, pp.2-3.
4. *Op. Cit.* , p.1.
5. Personal interview with the President of the Ghana Journalists Association in Accra, June 3, 1987.
6. *See Report of the Committee on Service Conditions of Journalists, Op. Cit.*, especially pp.30-35.
7. The Third Republican Constitution was the first in Ghana to give direct and special reference to the mass media. It prohibited press licensing, outlawed censorship and guaranteed freedom of expression and equal access to the state-owned media of opposing and different view-points. For a detailed discussion of constitutional provisions on the mass media in Ghana, see, for example, Yaw Twumasi, "Media of Mass Communication and the Third Republican Constitution in Ghana", *African Affairs*, 80, 1, 1981, pp.13-27.
8. Articles 192, 193, 194 of the *Constitution of the Republic of Ghana*, 1979, Accra: Ghana Publishing Corp., 1980
9. See P.A.V., Ansah, "The Press Trust: A New Perspective on the Press", *Universitas* (Legon, Ghana), 6, 1, 1977, pp.24-37.
10. See S.T. Kwame Boafo, "Ghana's Press Under the PNDC: Performance Under Confinement", *Gazette*, 35, 2, 1985, pp.73-82.

11. Opening Speech, President of the Ghana Journalists Association at the Annual Meeting of the Association in Accra, January 8, 1983.
12. *Report of the Committee on the Service Conditions of Journalists*, Op. Cit., p.10.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *The Ghana Institute of Journalism: Prospectus*. Accra: New Times Corp., 1975, p.5.
15. *Ghana Institute of Journalism Decree, N.R.C.D.275*, August 1974, p.1.

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