

# Development of Indigenous Journalism and Broadcast Formats: Curricular Implications for Communication Studies in Africa\*

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## Abstract

This paper highlights the need for a new ideology of professionalism in the face of the social and political realities of the Third World. It calls for a reassessment of the role of journalists, and the function of journalism and journalism education in Africa. It argues that proficiency in the receptive and expressive language skills should be made an integral part of journalism education and neither relegated to the syllabuses of other departments which have a variety of objectives of their own, nor left to develop by chance. Language, the vital tool of journalists, has to be utilized in newer and subtler ways in contemporary communication environments.

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# Développement d'un journalisme local et des outils de dissémination de l'information: Implications sur les programmes de formation en matière de communication en Afrique

## Résumé

Cet exposé met en valeur le besoin d'une nouvelle conception professionnelle à la lumière des réalités socio-culturelles du Tiers-Monde. Il fait appel à un réexamen de la fonction et de l'enseignement du journalisme.

L'auteur fait remarquer que la qualité expressive et réceptive du langage devrait faire partie intégrante de l'enseignement du journalisme, au lieu d'être reléguée au programme des autres départements qui sont déjà pas mal occupés par leurs propres objectifs, ou laissé pour se développer au petit bonheur. La langue, qui constitue un outil vital pour les journalistes doit être utilisée d'une manière plus renouvelée et plus subtile, considération prise de la communication dans le monde contemporain.



## Background

Among the lessons learnt in the past two decades of communication scholarship are that Third World countries must evolve their own models of communication for development, and that there is a complex web of political and social variables which render ineffective many 'carefully researched', well-intentioned projects (Ascroft and Melkote 1983; Health 1984). But perhaps the most sobering lesson is that, in as much as a country is a socio-political unit of human beings, it is as difficult to short-circuit developmental stages of its technological growth as it is to short circuit the physical and intellectual developmental stages of human growth. The research literature points to a need for countries to evolve to a certain state of readiness before any kind of sociological evolution or revolution can take place. This is one of the reasons for the inability of the 'less developed countries . . . to leapfrog some of the stages in communication technology' as predicted by Schramm and Lerner (1976). The similarity of experiences in Third World countries across the globe suggests that the time has come for researchers to identify and describe the various developmental stages a country must pass through so that appropriate readiness programmes can be designed to hasten the developmental process. According to Tehranian (1985:7):

Different kinds of knowledge and learning advance at different rates. Additive (selective/technological) knowledge grows exponentially while regenerative (moral) knowledge has to be relearned again and again through experiences and sufferings of each generation. By contrast, transformative (spiritual) knowledge is the moral equivalent of major technological breakthroughs. It occurs infrequently and at times of great historical transitions and in the face of great moral and political crises.

This paper discusses journalism education within the context of the human resource development needs of African territories. It is part of a larger and more comprehensive discourse on communication education or, put in more precise terms, on education for communication. The discussion is based on the premise that journalism education is but one aspect of communication studies, and that it must fit into, and emerge naturally out of, a comprehensive programme of communication education.

## Theoretical Framework

Emerging from the theories of development and dependency which have been advanced by scholars over the years is the fact that there are international and domestic dimensions to underdevelopment (Rodney 1972; Haq 1976). The problem, therefore, must be attacked on two fronts.

At the international level, economic and technological advances in 'developed' countries have given rise to patterns of life and thought which

their citizens and their ideological adherents perceive as 'development', and to which they would have the poorer nations aspire. The history of their futile attempts to fashion Third World nations to fit into this model is well documented. Meanwhile, the state of dependency is very much in evidence in most countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America. In fact, the evidence tends to support the view that the asymmetrical nature of the global economy (Naesselund 1978; Domatob 1987) as well as the type of development programmes introduced in the sixties and seventies have helped to perpetuate underdevelopment of the poorer countries (Rodney 1972).

On the domestic front governments are perpetually weighed down by matters pertaining to their political survival. Meanwhile, the processes which will facilitate the internal generation of skills, technology, capital goods and services, finances and general economic structuring (ECOWAS report n.d.) continue to elude them. In other words, they are still struggling to gain that level of self reliance 'to change past patterns of hopeless dependency to new concepts of equality, partnership and interdependence (Domatob 1987). In the on-going search for the best means of getting this process on a firm footing, researchers in communication, education, and development in the Third World have made numerous recommendations. We highlight some of these discussions, focus upon the major recommendations, and critically examine their implications and feasibility for the training of communication students in general and of journalists in particular.

## **Scope and Function of Journalism in The Third World**

The debate on the role of jouranlists in developing countries is bedevilled by the lack of consensus on where to draw the line between *development journalism* and *development communication*. Barton (1969) referred to this dilemma as 'a clash of loyalties between journalism and the African idea'. Aggarwala (1978:201) who supports the use of communication for furthering economic and social development, urges that 'development journalism should not be confused with development support communication programmes (DSC) which utilize various media — not just mass but any media — for promoting economic and social development'. He also laments the fact that in the Third World context 'information and communication have become synonymous and interchangeable, hence both are seen as subject to government influence and direction'. Murphy and Scotton (1987:23) record an incident which underscores the fact that African journalists who are themselves seeking new and appropriate models for development journalism, insist on making a sharp distinction between the journalist, the public relations practitioner and the rural reporter, even in the face of evidence of the feasibility of these alternative approaches. Practical situations such as field experiences of information



officers and rural reporters should form a primary source of data in the search for new definitions of development journalism.

## **Basic Considerations that should Inform Alternative Education for African Journalists**

There is general agreement among scholars and international agencies concerned with Third World issues that national development should be the forward thrust of these countries' policies. African journalists, therefore, comprise only one of the number of groups working actively toward the attainment of this goal. To maintain their credibility, and to make sure that maximum use is made of their expertise, journalism education must be informed by the types of development activity in which new journalists are likely to become involved, their obligations to their governments and to the public, the extent to which they must work in co-operation and in co-ordination with other development agents, and a careful study of the feasibility of separating their role as reporters and providers of information from other communication functions. Another criterion that must be taken seriously is the journalists' role in facilitating the use of traditional media as opposed to their theorizing about the virtue of these media as channels of communication.

In an attempt to put these criteria in proper perspective, new directions for communication education will be discussed against the background of the recommendations made by scholars over the years.

### **Government policy**

Recommendations which pertain to government's role in facilitating communication for development include:

- (a) Decentralization of media systems and redistribution of the existing human resources to bring government and the people closer together (Boafo 1987).
- (b) Active involvement of the various 'organized audiences' in identifying, planning and executing their own development projects (Matta 1981, Awa 1987, Boafo 1987).
- (c) Reconceptualization and redefinition of the target groups for whom development projects are planned in terms of their specific cultural identities, specific cultural needs and specific abilities (Matta 1981, James 1987, Sreberny-Mohammadi 1988).

Inherent in the recommendations is a call for a change in the leadership style. African leaders tend to favour strong centralized governments in which they are able to maintain tight control of the media and extract the allegiance and co-operation of media employees. Their primary aim is to

'mobilize the media for economic, social, and other development' (Rugh 1969, Edeani 1985, Ochs 1986, Sonaike 1987). National development, therefore, is a mutual goal. But African leaders, beset by internal and external political pressures which constantly threaten their survival, are ever suspicious of intellectual pressure groups, and are reluctant to delegate responsibility. Added to this, policy decisions, unless closely supervised, often become distorted or railroaded in the process between initiation and implementation (Heath 1984, James 1987). Communicators and their pressure groups must, therefore, win the respect and goodwill of the leadership or run the risk of being silenced. This is no easy task but a way must be found without destroying the integrity of the profession.

African governments, like many of their Third World counterparts, expect and often demand 'advocacy journalism' to support them and tide them over new and often uncharted routes to development. The use of the media for this purpose is neither new in Africa nor in the Western world (Golding 1977, Aggarwala 1987). But even the concept of 'advocacy journalism' needs to be redefined in the context of development journalism, because in this context it tends to relate more to institutions and governments than to issues and causes.

The important task for African journalists and journalism educators is to find the meeting point between advocacy journalism for Third World development, the national communication ethos and the canons of Western journalism which must still be regarded as useful points of reference and departure. The crucial questions, then, are: What specific obligations do journalists have to the national leadership? How best should serious differences of opinion be treated? The literature on media ethics tend to stress codes of conduct as they relate to the public, and to the profession *per se* as it evolved in the North American and European contexts. There is urgent need for a restatement of these principles against the social realities of the African political environment.

### **Journalism education**

One of the strongest criticisms against journalism education in Africa is its utter dependence on Western textbooks and its uncritical adherence to Western journalistic models (McGowan and Smith 1978, Shaw and Grieve 1979, Traber 1987, White 1988). White (p.41) laments the fact that:

The training of journalists and other communication specialists has not always contributed to a new communication ethos because it is often simply a transfer of professional education in Western nations with a very different set of presuppositions. Text-books, reference material, educational methods and communication ethics are often based on a public philosophy that differs from that in a developing country.

Recent attempts to Africanize journalism textbooks have resulted in the



publication of materials in which the shift is, at best, superficial. African examples are used to illustrate Western concepts but the authors have not come to grips with the fundamental behaviors arising from the unique nature of the African cultural milieu, professional values, and the practical day-to-day application of social and political responses within the environment (Murphy and Scotton 1987, Traber 1988).

Traber (1987) recommends a reconceptualization of such determinants of news worthiness as 'timeliness', 'prominence,' and 'news event'; Sonaike (1987) adds 'relevance' and 'objectivity' to the list. He sees 'instrumental information' (information that educates) as a basis for the redefinition. Barry (1983) argues that an African communicator must be trained not merely as a journalist in the Western sense but as a 'development agent or rural communicator'. The inherent danger in limiting development journalism to rural communication is that it presupposes that development needs are restricted to the rural folk. On the contrary, the process of Third World development is one of re-education for all the citizens including professional communicators and other development agents. Part of the problem is that journalists and professional communicators, just like their national leaders, operate as if they have all the answers when, in fact, the very newness of the situation calls for communal exploration of the environment in conjunction with all organized audiences and cultural groups at the various social levels making an input. Professional communicators would then have to function as facilitators of the process, as interpreters and as recorders of the relevant symbols and events.

Programme content has also been criticized especially from the point of view of message quality and message delivery systems. Ascroft and Melkote (1983) ascribe the failure of some development programmes to poor message structure linking channels and teaching strategies, and Ugboajah (1985), to the need for improved programme structure. In a similar vein, Vincent (1983) stresses the importance of artistic quality in drama or other alternative media designed for the education of the masses. Implicit in these calls is the need for communication educators to pay attention to the cognitive, skill-oriented aspects of their training programmes.

The use of traditional media as alternative channels of communication on development projects has also had many advocates (Ugboajah 1985; Wilson 1984, 1987; Nwosu 1987; Awa 1987) The suggestions, however, still need to be further interpreted and made operational so that they can be included in contemporary training programmes.

## **Alternative Formats**

So far, much of our discussion has focussed upon the political aspects of journalism education. We will now turn our attention to the curricular implications for cognitive growth since this intellectual aspect is the

foundation upon which political and ethical dimensions take form.

Because intellectual preparation must be informed by the socio-political environment in which the education system exists, and must at the same time be guided by the ethics of the profession, educators must constantly reassess their curriculum to keep it in tune with the ever changing needs of the discipline. Among the important factors to be considered are the age, maturity and academic background of the students pursuing communication courses, as well as their level of proficiency in the receptive and expressive language skills. In Africa, courses available include short courses, specialist inservice courses of one to two years, three or four year undergraduate degree and higher diploma courses, and graduate courses leading to masters and doctoral degrees.

## **Professionalism as a terminal objective**

The terminal objective of journalism education and practice is the attainment of professional status. But the concept of professionalism, even among the established schools of thought, is a rather elusive one. The dominant global culture of media practices and objectives of the industrialized countries is 'tied to increased training, professional education, association into professional organizations, and an ethos of public service and disinterestedness' (Golding 1977:301). This type of 'professionalism by imitation' is not feasible in Africa where 'journalism was born in anti-colonial protest, baptized in the flood of national propaganda, and matured into politics'. Up till today, the media are still harnessed in support of the liberation struggle in Southern Africa.

Moreover, many of those who used the media in the struggle against the colonial powers became the leaders of the newly independent territories. Some of them started their own press. Ironically, or perhaps predictably, when placed at the helm of their countries' affairs, these leaders view the press with suspicion while, at the same time, giving lip service to the idea of press freedom (Kasoma 1968, Ochs 1986). For example, President Kaunda of Zambia is quoted as saying: 'freedom of the press is based on the right of the people to know and to have access to information. It is not for newsmen to decide what the people are to be informed about' (Kasoma 1986: 104).

This statement reflects the views and actions of most contemporary heads of state who share the belief that governments, not the media, must make the decisions on what people ought to be informed about, and from all indications, this authoritarian attitude is likely to continue. These, then, are the conditions under which Third World journalists have to operate. It is clear, therefore, that the 'African idea' to which Barton referred is much more than an idea; it is the social reality which needs closer examination and which should be allowed to blossom into its own ideology of professionalism. It can no longer be dismissed as sheer



ambivalence. It has grown out of bitter experiences in 'the marketplace and work situations' which, over the years, have conspired to nullify the most heroic attempts at neutrality; because modern communication in Africa like its traditional counterpart is still an integral part of the social and political process.

In an apparent attempt to tackle the problem, Nigeria has in the recent past, appointed a journalist as the Minister of Information. This move should provide the opportunity and the platform for working out a set of professional rules that will meet with the approval of both the journalists and the government. The first hopeful sign in this direction has been the Minister's democratic approach to the formulation of the country's national communication policy.

### **Enabling objectives**

The professional in the African context must be competent in the use of journalism for development purposes, have perfect command of the national language of communication, and of one or more of the indigenous languages.

### **Development communication**

In order to cater to the needs of Africa and the Third World, the regular courses in print and broadcast journalism, and public relations, which form the core of journalism education, should be approached within the context of development communication. In spite of the upsurge in research in this field of inquiry, and the importance attached to it at the national and international levels, however, many of the current communication studies programmes in Africa do not reflect this shift in emphasis. Part of the reason might be attributed to the slow and painful process through which new programmes must pass before they can be included in a department's list of courses. To get around this time lag, some schools might, in fact, be treating the issue as part of the regular courses.

Development communication studies can allow for the exploration of new ways of dealing with autocratic leaders, and the most successful ways of reaching the various publics served by the media. Studies in the use of traditional media would allow for field experiments and participant research into the appropriateness of the various indigenous channels under a variety of conditions. Finally, it will allow for the furnishing of empirical data on the strengths and weaknesses of a number of approaches to the use of indigenous media.

Another area in which practice and research in development communication can be helpful is that of public relations at the grassroots level, for example, protocol when dealing with traditional rulers and

traditional ceremonies; local communication systems in towns and villages; interpersonal variables which contribute to positive and negative responses to development messages. The importance of this kind of information has already been highlighted in the work of researchers such as Obeng-Quaidoo (1987) who found it necessary to abandon the individual interview method of survey research in favour of the group interview.

### **Competence in language use (receptive and expressive communication skills)**

The basic tool of journalism is language, hence the calibre of professional journalists is invariably measured by their facility with the language of communication as manifested through their reports and opinion columns. The pioneers of African journalism were masters in this art. They were, for the most part, experienced men and women, skilled in debate and rhetoric, well-informed teachers, lawyers, respected public figures, all committed to the cause of national independence. They adopted an adversary role and their style ranged from reasoned argument to confrontational diatribe.

On the other hand, journalism today is being learnt in formal classroom settings by students with varying levels of competence in the official language of communication, and whose primary concern is job opportunity. For some, it is the apparent prestige and glamour of the profession.

There is also a considerable shift in the functions of journalists and journalism. While there is still the need to support those fighting for political liberation, there is also the new more positive and more challenging task of economic, social, intellectual and spiritual development within the national borders (James 1987). Education must therefore, prepare contemporary journalists to participate in development activities such as social mobilization, integration, and structural change. To do this successfully, greater emphasis must be placed on the development of language skills, and on the aesthetic and cultural aspects of human interaction.

An examination of the syllabuses of communication schools reveals that much of the language proficiency of journalists is invariably left to general studies programmes and writing skills and allowed to blossom through the writing of news and feature articles for the schools' newspapers or magazines which are issued at predetermined intervals.

Writing is the final stage of a human information processing activity which begins with an initial literal response to incoming visual and auditory stimuli, followed by analysis, interpretation, and critical judgement. Good writing is a result of effective processing of the stimuli followed by a corresponding efficiency in the use of the expressive skills.



This involves not only correct choice of structure, but the use of the appropriate register and tone. In other words, efficiency in the receptive skills of reading and listening is a prerequisite to high level proficiency in writing.

Experience and research have shown that students desperately need these reading and information processing skills. The findings of Unoh (1975) and Obah (1987) underscore the fact that university students employ inefficient reading strategies and read very slowly; they have difficulty comprehending beyond the literal level, in separating facts from opinion, and with identifying details and main idea. Other problem areas are summarizing and vocabulary. More intensive work on these skills within the journalism department itself is needed to reinforce language courses in the general studies programmes.

Maynard (1988:80) supports this view. She argues that journalists need analytical tools to assess information and bridge cultural gaps. They also need to have a sophisticated understanding of cause and effect because this is vital for reporting political news and stories involving blame. She laments the fact that 'new journalists ... are called upon to make subtle and important distinctions about behaviour, to synthesize great bodies of conflicting information, and produce modern allegories — with little preparation to do so.'

The problem is even more acute in African countries where media training is done in a second language. It is extremely important, therefore that 'the skills of weighing information and weaving facts together into a coherent pattern, with appropriate shadings and emphasis' (Maynard 1988:80) become the focus of journalism training.

Good journalists must write well and cherish that ability (Footlink 1988:69). The language of the media has been the subject of research by educators and language scholars, and there is evidence that many reporters have difficulty with language structure, style, register, and tone. The new African journalists cannot afford such lapses especially when dealing with authoritarian leaders. The subtleties of writing must either take a very important place in journalism curriculum or, alternatively, a high level of language proficiency be made a prerequisite for entry into the course.

Maynard highlights the fact that, in the United States, many of the prestigious newspapers and broadcast networks and stations hire the best liberal arts graduates who have the required analytic and writing skills. She suggests that among the reasons for this unfortunate practice is that 'few, if any journalism schools prescribe an intellectual look at the art of story telling ... in its broad, analytic and symbolic sense, as part of their core studies' (p. 79-80). The present focus on the social sciences is important and necessary but it is counterproductive if it is done at the expense of a sound language base.

The new Third World journalism with its emphasis on human

interaction and participation will require of journalists a fairly strong humanities background.

### **Indigenous language and the journalism curriculum**

The multilingual character of African nations makes it imperative for those facilitating the development process to be competent users of one or more of their country's indigenous languages. Journalism schools in Africa should, therefore, make the proficiency in at least one indigenous language a requirement for the award of a degree or higher diploma. In a country such as Nigeria, it would be to students' advantage to have a working knowledge of more than one indigenous language. Through inter-departmental co-operation, it should be possible for students to perfect these skills so that they can utilize them in the production of print and audio materials through the rural press and other such innovations.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

We have highlighted some basic pedagogical issues that must be considered if journalism schools are to make a smooth and systematic transition from the present type of curriculum to one that is more in keeping with the needs of African nations. We have focussed on the need for a new ideology of professionalism to fit in with the African and Third World context of authoritarian leadership and the constant threat to press freedom. We have also made a case for the reassessment of the function of journalism, and for journalists to see themselves as targets as well as facilitators of the development process. Finally, we have recommended a more purposeful approach to development communication, and greater emphasis on the development of the students' receptive and expressive communication skills.

Newly independent states have demonstrated a certain ambivalence in their continuing search for national identity, and in their attempts at indigenization. On the one hand, there has been the tendency to denounce and throw off or (in the case of business and industry) to nationalize everything that is considered imported and imposed; on the other, many of the efforts at indigenization have been little more than superficial modifications of the foreign norms and habits. In the present search for indigenous journalism and broadcast formats, therefore, we should undertake some kind of contrastive analysis to find the common denominators as well as the points of departure between established Western communication environments and indigenous African ones.



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