

Assessing the Best Practices in Media and Communication Training

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Abstract: This article tries to assess how Media and Communication training in Kenya has adapted to the changes in the industry based on a mixed methods study. The article argues that universities are trying to adapt their media and communication curricula to the converged media landscape by adding 'new media' units that try to address the changes in the industry. They have maintained specializations (Broadcast, print, film) but none has a general programme that equips students with skills to work across media. There is a divergent view between practice and academy on the extent. This is because their perspectives on MCS education and not what is on the ground. Therefore, there is need to bridge the gap between the two by constantly engaging in team teaching, workshops, internships and co-productions.

Keywords: Media, communication, training, technology, convergence

Abstrak: Artikel ini mencoba untuk memberikan penilaian tentang bagaimana pelatihan Media dan Komunikasi beradaptasi dengan perubahan di dunia industri di Kenya. Artikel ini menyatakan bahwa perguruan tinggi berusaha untuk mengadaptasikan kurikulum studi media untuk menggabungkan lanskap media dengan menambahkan mata kuliah *new media*. Mereka sudah menyesuaikan minat studi (broadcast, cetak, film), tetapi tidak memiliki program perkuliahan yang membekali keterampilan mahasiswa untuk bekerja di media massa. Sejauh ini, ada pandangan yang berbeda antara dunia kerja dan dunia akademis. Hal ini mungkin disebabkan oleh perspektif mereka tentang studi media dan komunikasi yang tidak didasarkan realitas lapangan. Oleh karenanya, perlu untuk menjembatani kesenjangan dengan terus-menerus terlibat dalam *team teaching*, *workshop*, lokakarya, magang dan co-produksi

Kata Kunci: Media, komunikasi, pelatihan, teknologi, konvergensi

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Introduction

Media convergence has been defined as the coming together of computing, telecommunications, and media in a digital environment (Pavlik and McIntosh, 2004). Media convergence is sometimes used in conjunction with ‘new media’ to help us understand how information and communication technologies have changed the way news and information is gathered, processed, disseminated and archived hence creating a new media and Communication landscape (Lowrey et al. 2005). Media convergence has altered media and communication industry around the world by blurring the lines between the traditional channels of communication (print, radio, TV, film and internet).

Media and Communication curricula were designed to train students to work in ‘mass communication’ fields, and encouraged specializations (newspaper and magazines, Television, Radio or film). Scholars have argued that since media convergence has ‘demassified media’ and blurred the lines that had separated the various channels of mass communication it is imperative that the academy changes its pedagogic methods in sync. The need for media and communication practitioners to be fluent in this language of cross-platform delivery of news and media content is exerting pressure on media and communication studies training institutions to adapt their curricula to cope with this new media landscape (Bhuiyan, 2010).

Journalism and Media studies schools used to believe that a successful career was guaranteed if the student knew a particular medium, and knew it well. Since the early stages of the course, students sought - and still seek – to define their professional preference: radio, TV, newspapers, magazines, press service. Now, however, the current way of organizing the media has shown that students should learn to communicate with a variety of audiences, using in addition to words, images, sounds and, in the near future, smell, taste and virtual reality (Tarcia &Marinho, 2008).

In 2001, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) recommended that academic programs follow the lead of media organizations that cut across media boundaries in their newsrooms (Pavlik et al. 2000). Howard Finberg of the

Poynter institute, in his speech ' *The future of Journalism Education* ', on 4th June 2013, presented the results of a survey of Journalism and Journalism professors and Media professionals about the value of Journalism and other media and Communication related degrees to the practice in USA. The study he quoted found that half of the professionals argued that the media and communication education is not keeping up with industry changes. According to Howard, "this isn't shocking, as there has always been a feeling in the professional ranks that the academy isn't aware what's going on in the "real world." A third of academics who responded to survey also agreed that the academy is not keeping up (Clasussen 2012).

Bhuiyan (2010) cautions that despite the above observations, the academy should be aware that practitioners may unwittingly transfer their professional biases in the curricula. Dupagne & Garrison (2009) concurs with Bhuiyan and points out that the challenge for educators is to decide how to adapt their curricula to the new convergence expectations while taking into account the fluctuating economics of higher education.

It is within this background that this article investigated from the lecturers, students and practitioners if the academy is keeping up with the changes in industry and what should be done for the MCS curricula to be in tune with the "real world" of media and Communication without succumbing to 'industry capture'.

Problem Statement

For many years mass media industry was biased towards autonomous mass communication channels and was synonymous with newspapers, magazines, radio, television and film. Ergo, in this period, Media and Communication academic programmes positioned themselves to train students to work in these autonomous areas. In late 1990s and early 2000 the synergies between technology, media, and information transformed the industry and erased the lines between the communication channels to create a converged media landscape that was biased towards 'demmassified forms' and the original motive for attention to mass media has thus much diminished.

It is within this background that the academy and the industry started to re-evaluate their earlier practices and process in view of making them compatible with this new dispensation. Flores (2010) aptly captures the thrust of the media convergence and media and communication training debate by arguing that, the convergence philosophy and the critics of that philosophy bring into question how media and communication curricula should be designed and delivered. The demands for a new mix of talents and adeptness at multiple skills pose several important questions. Is it better to train media and communication practitioners who will be “specialist” (i.e., those who will exclusively write and report in specific field) or “generalist” (those equipped to produce all possible outputs across media) (Scott Sheerin 2002).

Studies have found that educators are struggling to keep up with the accelerated pace of media convergence and many Media and Communication training institutions are working toward developing curricula that can achieve this goal. Both professionals and educators agree that students should be equipped with an education that prepares them conceptually, as well as giving them the skills required blending together of media formats within a digital environment but there is lack of consensus on how it should be done and who should do it. Salaverria (2011) in *Online Journalism meets the university: ideas for teaching and research*, argues that this new reality “calls for a kind of research and training of its own and that this new variant has compelled teachers to explore new linguistic possibilities, to keep track of continuously evolving technologies, to identify professional profiles and renewed editorial processes. These new changes, therefore, have forced the academy and the industry to review the media and communication curricula. Seelig (2010) observes that in USA at least some form of convergence is present in the majority of programs, whether it is through teaching print and broadcast journalism in the same track, offering new courses, building a multimedia newsroom or hiring new faculty members. This article will try to assess the extent to which media and communication curricula in Kenya are adapting to the converged media landscape.

Research Questions

1. How relevant is Media and Communication training in the converged media environment?
2. What should be taught in Media and Communication Studies in the converged media environment?
3. How should Media and Communication studies be taught in the converged media environment?
4. Who should teach Media and Communication students in the converged media environment?

Literature Review

The media convergence has changed the media and communication industry landscape across the globe. In the '90s and early 20s century convergence became a subject of interest of many scholars who noted that "the integration of older media technologies into new informational/communicational forms and contents (through remediation or absorption) would lead to emergence of new (converged) media technologies and contents as part of the same process (Bolter & Grusin 2000).

In recent years the topic of curriculum convergence has been popular among journalism and mass communication educators. For example in 2001 authors of a white paper for AEJMC recommended that academic programs follow the lead of media organizations that cut across media boundaries in their newsrooms and it appears as (Lowrey et al. 2005) observes many programs are moving from discussion to experimentation. A 2003 study in the US found that about half of a sample of 300 journalism and mass communication programs had made some changes to curriculum to address convergence (Huang et al. 2003). Lowrey (2005) notes that the movement toward convergence is cautious, and this was attested by a 2003 survey of a sample of 46 top-tier journalism programs found that 85% have began to pursue curricula that address media convergence, but most schools still maintain separate tracks for print and broadcast.

As convergence has emerged as a major topic in MCS education, researchers have studied the extent to which programmes have adopted converged curricula and according to Tanner et al. (2012) found out that majority of USA universities MCS programmes have maintained specialized areas (Film production, TV production, Print Media and radio production) while simultaneously emphasizing convergence by adding new media units. There are three approaches to reviewing MCS programmes to conform to converged media and communication practice: blowing up the curriculum by creating entirely new courses that all theory and practice with technology, implementing “pieces” of convergence by integrating new technology into current courses or doing nothing by continuing to teach MCS the ways it has always been taught (Murray, 2008).

MCS training is at cross-roads, because changes in curriculum – whether adding new courses, merging existing courses into one or teaching cross disciplines are challenging because there is no enough time or room to teach technical skills for more than one medium while at the same time practitioners and academicians agree that students should learn a wider variety of skills. Bhuiyan (2010) notes that accredited undergraduate journalism schools cannot require students to take more than the required number of credit hours in other courses in order to enhance their multimedia journalism skills. However, there are journalism schools that offer multimedia curriculum in innovative ways. Castaeda (2003) gives an example of Annenberg School of Communication, which launched a new convergence core curriculum with core subjects spread across three semesters, beginning with news writing, then reporting, and production. Each class in the core area was team taught by three instructors. For example, students took newspaper writing on Monday; television writing on Wednesday; and online writing on Friday. And the schedule was repeated for reporting and production in subsequent semesters. The Annenberg model basically incorporated technology into traditional journalism courses.

Media and Communication educators in Kenya, like other developing nations, are grappling with the challenge incorporating the industry practices in the curriculum. Odunlami (2014), notes that the

speed of the adoption and diffusion of innovations in the contemporary media industry is posing a great challenge to media educators as the newsroom appears to be constantly ahead of the classroom, especially in the developing world. This notwithstanding, something is being done and the concern of MCS curricula in Africa and Kenya in particular is how to ensure an effective blend of academy concerns and mandate with industry needs while at the same time adhering to high education standards and regulations.

It is difficult to provide a journalism and mass communication curriculum that is all things to academy, practitioners and students but at least there should be a balance. We should be asking ourselves: What is it we are preparing the “journalism or mass communication” major to do? Should curriculum kowtow to the media industry so that we are in essence a training ground for the media industry? (Seelig, 2010).

This article was based on a study carried out using mixed-methods research design to assess how media and communication curricula in Kenyan universities have adapted to the converged media industry. A sample of Media and communication curriculums were obtained from websites and analysed, two lecturers from each university sampled interviewed via phone; practitioners interviewed using a structured questionnaire and a survey questionnaire conducted to students taking MCS programmes.

Methodology

Curriculum content analysis

Curriculum information was obtained from the websites of universities offering media and Communication studies programmes. Where the websites did not

give enough information, hard copies of the curriculum information were picked from the universities. Coding categories included; programme structure, teaching methods, instructional materials and assessment method. To ensure the validity of websites information, researchers made phone calls to administrators to verify the information.

Qualitative Interviews

Phone and e-mail based interviews were conducted with selected MCS lecturers, MCS students and media and Communication practitioners (reporters, presenters, editors, TV and film directors, graphic designers and animators). To develop a sample frame for the lecturers, at least two lecturers from a sample of 30 Universities offering MCS programme were picked. Most of MCS lecturers are adjunct (part-time) lecturers, some teaching in as many as four different universities. To avoid interviewing a lecturer twice but in different universities a list of MCS lecturers was drawn. The list was not exhaustive and we got a list of full-time and part-time lecturers teaching core MCS units in the sampled universities. We cross-checked the lists and produced a list of the lecturers not based on the University (ies) they taught but the areas they taught. This was complicated because in some instances a lecturer was slotted for humanities units in one university while in another university they were slotted in MCS core units. We came up with a list of 300 MCS lecturers and we interviewed 150 of these by phone. The 150 interviewed were divided in the following areas; Print media, Radio Production, TV production, Film production, Animation and Multimedia production, Public relations, Graphic design and page layout and Advertising.

We noted that over 50% of MCS lecturers had practiced or were practicing in Media and communication related fields. We used these practitioner/lecturers to recommend senior practitioners in the above areas. We got a list of 50 practitioners, and from these we got a list of 30 who were not doing part-time teaching. We defined a part-time lecturer as any practitioner who taught at least a unit in a semester per year. The interviews started with summary of the study, followed by structured questions which were based on the research questions. At

the end of the interview demographic questions were asked and the interviews ranged between 25-30 minutes.

Content Analysis				Findings
Sno	University	Total Number	Universities Offering MCS Courses	
1.	Chartered Public Universities	22	18	
2.	Public University Constituent Colleges	9	5	
3.	Chartered Private Universities	17	15	
4.	Chartered Private University Constituent Colleges	5	4	
5.	Private Universities with Letter of Interim Authority (LIA)	11	8	
6.	Registered Private Universities	2	0	
Total		66	50	

Table 4 'Kenyan universities'

1. Curricula structure

Kenya has 66 institutions offering degree level education. Over 83% (50 universities) of these offer degree programmes in Media and Communication related courses. The students' enrollment in MCS programmes range from over 2000 in the large universities to 200 in the small ones.

Content Analysis of the MCS curricula indicated that all universities offered specialized degree programmes as opposed to generalized ones. That is, programmes are structured in a way that students take two years foundational units and then specialized (print, broadcast, Public relations, advertising, graphic

design and page layout, Film production and Animation) in the third and fourth year of study. Converged media units (multimedia production, web design, and computer assisted reporting, online journalism), were offered as standalone units and are not mainstreamed in all the units in the programme.

2. MCS trainers Composition

70% of the lecturers teaching MCS programmes are part-time (adjunct) lecturers. It was noted that some trainers taught in as many as four universities. The units the lecturers taught vary from one university to the next. 50% of the MCS trainers, both full-time and part-time have in the past worked or are working in the Media and Communication field.

Lecturers and Practitioner interview results

1. How relevant is Media and Communication studies to the practice?

When asked about the relevant of MCS degree to the practice, 95% of academicians said it was extremely important, slightly more than half, 46% of practitioners said it was very to extremely important.

When questioned about the value of degree when it came to equipping students with skills and abilities relevant to current media and communication practice, 95% of academics said, it was extremely important, 49% of practitioners said it was very to extremely important.

75% of academicians argued MCS degree is extremely important when it comes to getting hired in Media and Communication related fields. Only 30% of practitioners agreed with the same.

When asked if the MCS curricula were keeping up with the changes in the industry, two-thirds of the academicians agreed. 60% of the practitioners indicated that MCS curricula were not keeping up with the industry and most of the graduates have to be retrained to practice effectively in the converged media industry.

2. What should be taught in Media and Communication Studies?

When asked what should be taught, 85 % of the academicians said MCS programmes should be taught using the traditional approach (specializations), 10% argued for a more new media units to be included, 5% said it should concentrate on MCS core units.

60% of the academicians indicated that MCS curricula should not be practice based because of the dynamic nature of the field. The 'central core' of the Media and Communication Studies (MCS) field in their view should not be much affected in the short to medium term by ongoing changes in the practice.

Two-thirds of the practitioners indicated that the curricula should include units that help students to work in converged media and communication environment i.e new media units and practical based units that imparted hands-on skills.

3. How should Media and Communication studies be taught?

On the question whether MCS training should be pure theoretical analyses, completely hands-on skills training or a 'blend of both, 85% of the lecturers argued that a blend of theoretical analyses and hands-on skills training could be the best way and that there should be a variation in the way they should be taught.

80% of practitioners indicated that MCS programmes should teach skills and abilities relevant to the practice in labs and studios and minimal theoretical units. The universities should encourage use of case studies, practical projects and productions in labs and studios.

4. Who should teach Media and Communication studies?

On the question whether who should teach media and Communication 85% of the lecturers argued that only those with post graduate qualification as per Commission of University regulations should be allowed to teach. They argued that practitioners taught only technical skills without broad knowledge and theoretical grounding that enable deep analysis of issues but agreed that lecturers without industry skills and experience cannot teach skill based units effectively. 90% of practitioners argued that

skills and experience and not post-graduate qualification should be used to appoint the trainers. Lecturers without practical experience from the field should not teach MCS hands-on skills based units.

Survey questionnaire

A survey using a questionnaire was carried out on MCS students to determine their views on the quality of MCS programmes, relevance to industry and what they thought should be done to improve them. A total of 360 questionnaires were sent out to the students and 280 of them were filled. This represented 77% response rate. For each statement on the questionnaire, the students gave a rating of 1 – 4 as follows: 1. Strongly Agree; 2. Agree; 3. Disagree and 4. Strongly Disagree. The last question was an open ended question requesting the students to give their views on how the MCS programmes can be improved.

MCS Student Responses

1. When the students were asked whether the MCS programs fulfilled the industry needs, 5% strongly agreed; 15% agreed; 60% Disagreed and 20% of the students strongly disagreed as indicated in chart 4.1 below:

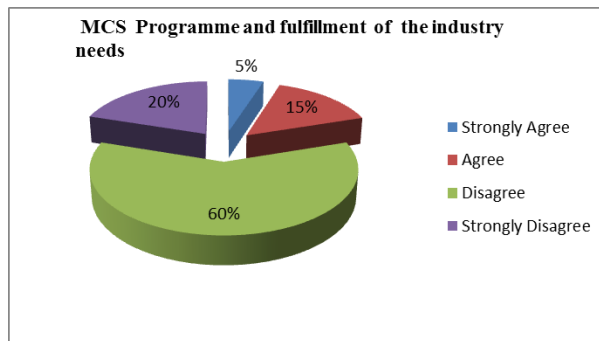
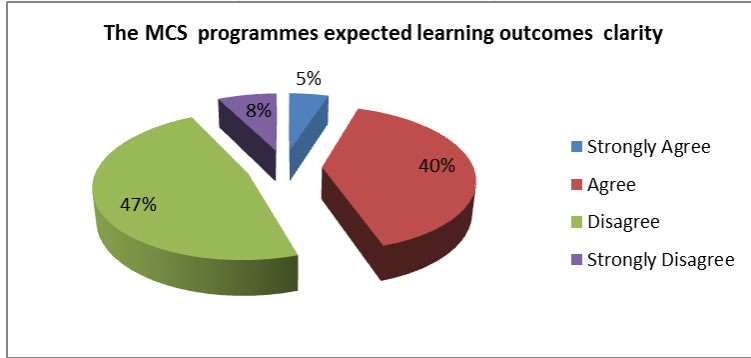


Figure 2 'MCS Programmes and fulfillment of the industry needs'

2. A question was posed on whether the MCS programmes learning outcomes were clear and showed the skills and knowledge that will be acquired at the end of the programme.

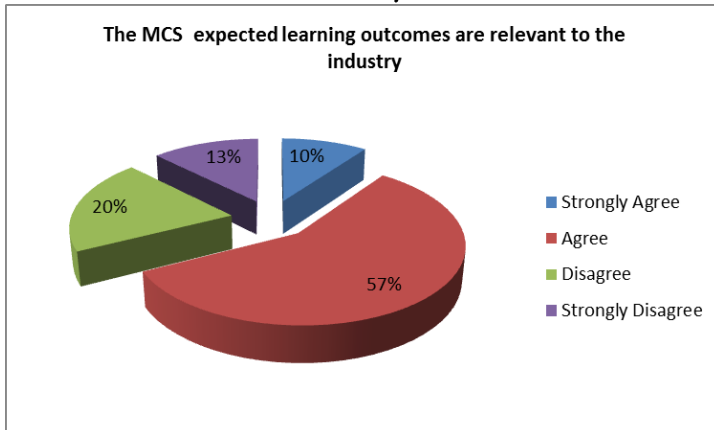
5% strongly disagreed; 40% agreed and 47% disagreed; 8% strongly agreed as indicated in the chart 4.2 below.

Chart 4.2: MCS Programmes expected learning outcomes clarity



- The students were asked whether the expected learning outcomes in their areas of study were relevant to the industry and 10% of them strongly agreed; 57% agreed; 20% disagreed while 13% strongly disagreed as shown in chart 4.3 below.

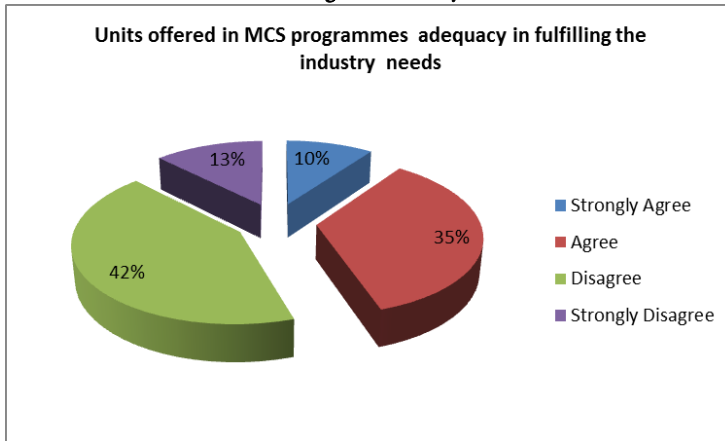
Chart 4.3: MCS Programmes expected learning outcomes relevance to the industry



- The students were asked if the units offered in the MCS programmes were adequate to fulfill their needs and 10% strongly

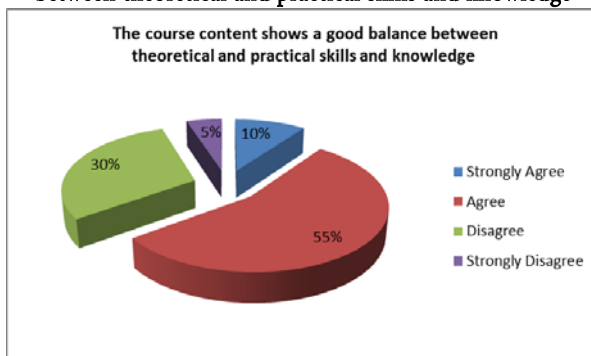
agreed; 35% agreed; 42% disagreed and 13% strongly disagreed as shown in chart 4.4 below.

Chart 4.4: Units offered in MCS programmes adequacy in fulfilling the industry needs



5. When asked if the course content showed a good balance between theoretical and practical skills and knowledge 10% strongly agreed; 55% agreed; 30% disagreed and only 5% strongly disagreed and shown in chart 4.5 below.

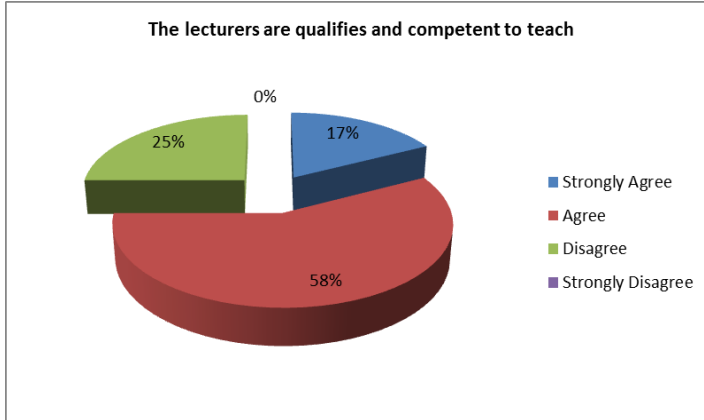
Chart 4.5: The course content shows a good balance between theoretical and practical skills and knowledge



6. Students were asked if the lecturers in their program were qualified and competent to teach and 17% strongly agreed; 57% agreed;

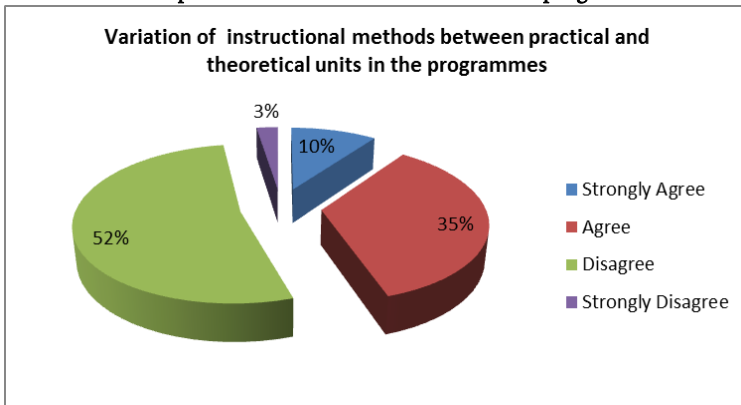
25% disagreed while none of the students strongly disagreed as shown in chart 4.7 below.

Chart 4.7: Lecturers qualification and competence to teach



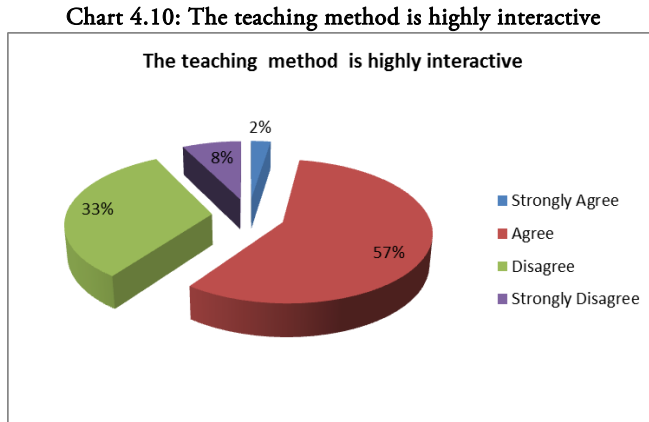
- When asked if the instructional methods varied between the practical and theoretical units, 10% of the students strongly agreed, 35% agreed; 52% disagreed and only 3% strongly disagreed as shown in chart 4.8 below.

Chart 4.8: Variation of instructional methods between practical and theoretical units in the programmes

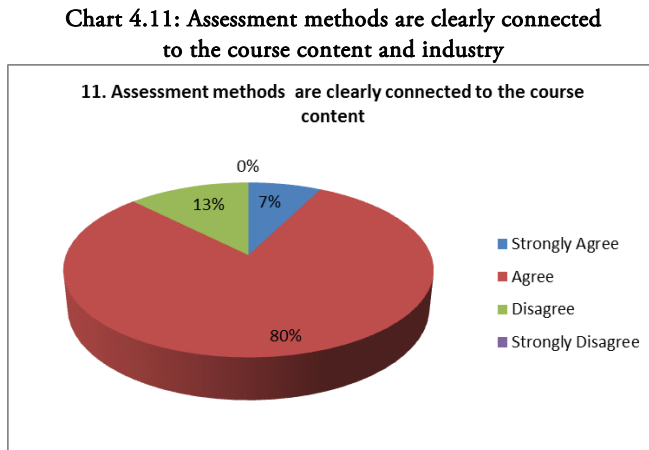


- On whether the teaching methods were highly interactive and reflected industry practice; 2% of the students strongly agreed,

57% agreed, 33% disagreed while 8% strongly agreed as shown in the chart 4.10 below.



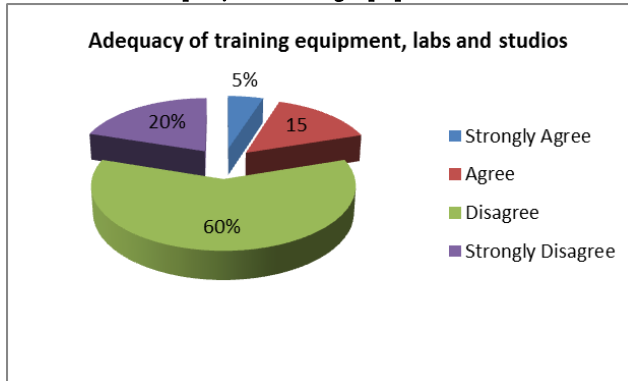
9. On whether the assessment methods were clearly connected to the course content and the industry practice, 7% of the students strongly agreed to that fact with a majority of 80% agreeing and 13% disagreeing. None of the students strongly disagreed to this fact as shown in chart 4.11 below.



10. When asked if the Universities offering MCS programme had adequate training equipment, labs and studio, 5% strongly agreed,

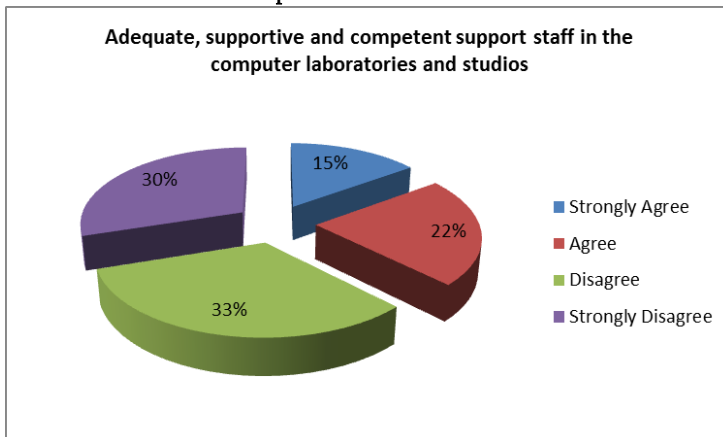
15% agreed, 60% disagreed and 20% strongly disagreeing as indicated in chart 4.12 below.

Chart 4.12: Adequacy of training equipment, labs and studios



11. When asked if the university had adequate, supporting and competent support staff in the labs and studios, 15% of the students strongly agreed, 22% agreed; 33% disagreeing and 30% strongly disagreeing as indicated in chart 4.13 below.

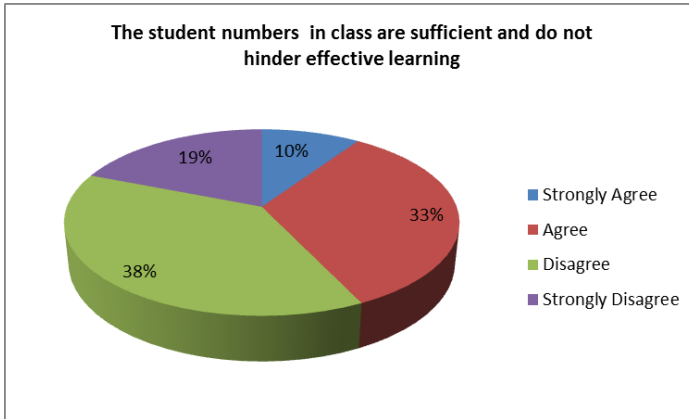
Chart 4.13: Adequate, supportive and competent support staff in the computer laboratories and studios



12. On whether the student numbers in class are sufficient and do not hinder effective learning; 10% of the students strongly agreed;

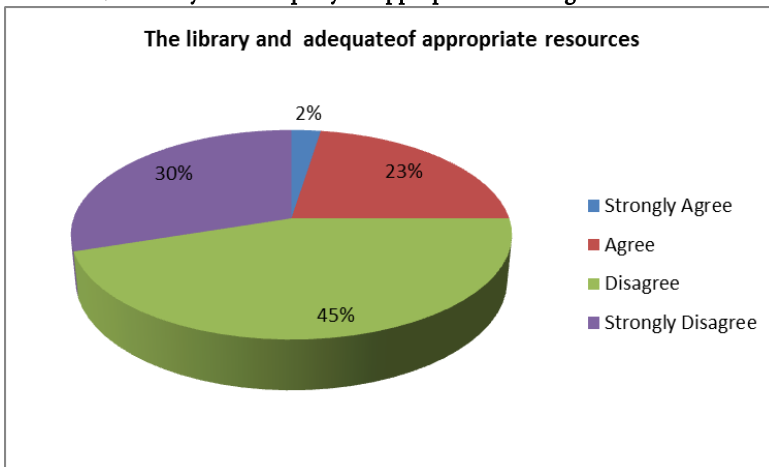
33% agreed; 38% disagreed and 19% strongly disagreed as shown in the chart 4.14 below.

Chart 4.14: The student numbers in class do not hinder effective learning



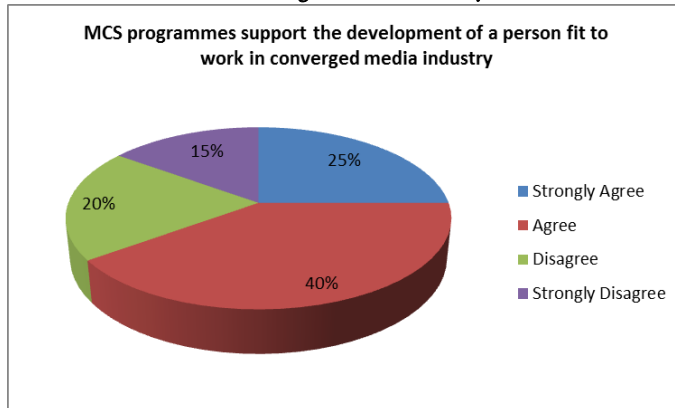
13. On the question whether libraries had adequate and appropriate learning resources 2% of agreed, 23% agreed, 45% disagreed and 30% strongly disagreed as indicated in chart 4.15 below.

Chart 4.15: Library and adequacy of appropriate learning resources



14. On whether the MCS programme supported the development of the person they needed to be in their work life; 25% strongly agreed, 40% agreed; 20% disagreed and 15% strongly disagreed.

Chart 4.16: MCS programmes support the development of a person fit to work in converged media industry



As studies and the findings have suggested, even with media environment, traditional media and communication still in demand though new media skills importance is steadily growing. Therefore the changes in curricula should not be drastic but gradual as it is happening in the industry.

Discussion of the Findings

Findings show that majority of the universities in Kenya are trying to sync their curricula to the converged media industry by introducing 'new media' units, though they have maintained specialized tracks. The contention was in the relevancy of these curricula to the industry. The findings indicated that while more than half of media and communication practitioners say current MCS curricula are not relevant in the converged media job market, 95% of the lecturers argued that they are relevant. Practitioners argued that MCS programmes are graduating students who, to quote one of the editors interviewed, "who don't read, can't write and refuse to think". The practitioners' sentiments were echoed by 80% of the students who felt that the current MCS curricula do not fulfill the industry skills and

knowledge needs. They argued that the curricula had some units that were not relevant to the industry while there were some units not in the curricula but very relevant in the industry.

Half of the practitioners feel that media and Communication training is not keeping up with industry changes leading to a mismatch between the skills and knowledge given to the graduates and what is actually needed in the practice. Practitioners argued that imparting skills relevant for converged media is not as simple as adding a few new media stand-alone units but require mainstreaming new media in the whole MCS programme. The whole media and communication curriculum needs to be integrated by incorporating new media technologies and issues in every unit as was aptly put by one of the practitioner interviewed.

I envision an editing unit incorporating editing in print, graphics, animation, audio, video and online formats. The format of the delivery is not the issue – the conceptual and technical skills of editing content for an audience are.

Both academicians and practitioners agree that the current MCS curricula should be revised to contain a blend of theoretical analyses and hands-on skills training and but do not agree who should teach.

Even though the study was random or even only representative, as Claussen (2012) had observed, let us assume that these responses are more or less what the academy and practitioners think about MCS education in Kenya. It is true that lecturers would tend to think that the MCS pedagogy accomplishes its role while the practitioners give it less credit. This may be attributed to the fact that practitioners with MCS training feel that the programme they went through would have been better or as Claussen (2012) observes weren't good at all. This shows that there is a disconnect between the academy and the class, probably caused by the different perspectives that the two groups view MCS education. There is need to bridge the gap between the two by constantly engaging through workshops, presentations, internships and co-productions. This disconnect is partly explained by McDevitt and Sindorf (2012) who observes, "professional journalism, for its part,

struggles with an erosion of prestige and legitimacy, and is turning to the academy for guidance and support, but the same profession is also seeking leverage to influence curricula” (pp.112).

The divergent responses given by practitioners and lecturers is a clear indication of the gap that exists between practitioners and educators concerning aspects of media and communication training. Wenger and Owens (2012) advises that the gap between what curriculum offers and industry demand make a case for more research to determine skills necessary and how they should be imparted.

Conclusion

The article concludes that Universities understand the need for MCS curricula that will impart students with skills and knowledge relevant for converged media industry but due to financial constraints, faculty skills and knowledge, too many students, inadequate training equipment, labs and studios, low to nonexistent admission standards, the process has been slow. MCS universities have integrated some aspects of converged media into their curricula but the practitioners’ feels this is not enough and more need to be done. Close collaboration between academy and practice should be fostered. Team teaching was one approach that was suggested as a remedy to bridge the MCS education perspective gap between practitioners and lecturers.

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