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Confronting the challenges of Journalism Education in Rwanda in the context of educational reforms

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Abstract

Policy reforms aimed at improving access to and equity in tertiary education have meant that university classes are not only larger, but more diverse in terms of students' competencies and experiences. Despite the increase in the size and diversity of student populations in universities, the financial, technological and human resources have not expanded at a similar rate, leaving academic programs struggling to improve the quality of educational experience, whilst teaching more students with less resources. This is particularly difficult in practice-based disciplines such as medicine, nursing and journalism, where coaching models and small-class learning experiences are seen as being the most effective way of nurturing work-ready graduates. Teaching journalism under these conditions is particularly problematic because of the dynamic changes being experienced across the media industries as a result of technological change and the changing media ecosystem.

This article uses the University of Rwanda as a case study to examine the impact of tertiary education reforms on journalism education practices. Drawing on the 'Practical Theory of Journalism Education' and the 'Educational Change Model' perspectives, this paper calls for judicious implementation of educational reforms. It argues that by phasing the introduction of reforms, universities can better manage the change process in order to maintain quality educational experiences. However, this alone cannot ensure quality journalism education outcomes. Universities need to foster innovative teaching practices and approaches to learning in order to sustain quality when teaching large and diverse classes.

Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the findings illuminate how journalism education in Rwanda has changed its original orientation and pedagogy to include strategic initiatives, teaching innovations and expanded opportunities for students in response to policy reforms aimed at promoting an all-inclusive education sector.

Relever les défis de l'enseignement du journalisme au Rwanda dans le contexte des réformes de l'éducation

Résumé

L'expansion mondiale, la restructuration et le financement de l'enseignement supérieur qui a débuté il y a plusieurs années en Afrique de l'Est et ailleurs dans le monde ont fait que les classes sont non seulement plus grandes, mais aussi variées en termes de compétences et d'innovations des étudiants. Malgré l'augmentation de la taille et de la diversité de la population étudiante, les ressources pédagogiques, notamment les ressourcés humaines et techniques, sont restées les mêmes. Dans l'enseignement du journalisme, où les méthodes de encadrement ou coaching et l'attention particulière portée aux étudiants sont aussi cruciales que leur accès aux TIC et à d'autres ressources de formation, la tâche est plus ardue. Cet article utilise l'Université du Rwanda comme cas d'étude pour examiner l'impact de ces développements sur l'enseignement du journalisme. Les perspectives «Théorie pratique de l'enseignement du journalisme» et «Modèle de changement dans l'éducation» sont utilisées pour plaider en faveur d'une éducation au journalisme appropriée et du bon sens dans l'introduction et la mise en œuvre de programmes de réforme de l'éducation. À travers des entretiens approfondis et des discussions de groupe, les résultats montrent comment l'enseignement du journalisme au Rwanda a modifié son orientation et sa pédagogie d'origine afin d'inclure des innovations et des opportunités permettant de faire face aux défis existants.

Introduction

Digitalisation, globalisation and the changing economic circumstances of media, locally and globally, combined with the increasing penetration of mobile technologies, are forcing educational institutions to rethink the way they teach in order to prepare competent multi-skilled journalists and communicators. These forces are occurring in parallel with the global expansion and restructuring of tertiary education, locally and globally, which have resulted in larger and more diverse classes. The demand for university education is putting pressure on them to find new and additional funding sources. Currently, universities around the world are highly dependent on fees generated from undergraduate education – particularly those from private students. Despite the increase in demand and diversity of student populations, teaching resources – human, technological and financial – have remained the same.

The impact of these changes is felt most acutely in practice-based disciplines such as journalism education, where individualised coaching techniques and practical training in technologies are essential if universities are to foster work-ready graduates. In addition to preparing students for commercial and private media environments, journalism education programmes have primarily been geared at expanding technology training and reorienting sequence and media emphasis tracks in both the industry and media educational institutions (Gasher 2005; Skjerdal & Ngugi 2007; Mensing 2010). With this reality, media training institutions are increasingly unprepared to cope with these dilemmas – particularly the mass admission of students, with little regard to merit (Skjerdal 2011), which is

argued to "strengthen the dominance of the economic agenda over the social, political and cultural traditional ones" (Carpenter 2015:2). Given the crucial need to train professionals in the areas of print, broadcast, online and electronic journalism and communication, these challenges make the task at hand somewhat precarious. Lowered teaching standards mean lowered student capacity both during their studies and after graduation. As teachers struggle to balance the growth of student numbers and dwindling resources, levels of professionalism in the media sector are steadily being compromised.

Whilst this research acknowledges the reality that large classes and inadequate resources are common, yet unavoidable, in a capitalist global market, this paper seeks to demonstrate the need for innovative teaching techniques to stem a growing crisis of confidence in journalism training institutions in educating future professionals for the industry. Using the University of Rwanda's (UR) School of Journalism and Communication (SJC) as a case study, this research interrogates the challenges facing journalism education in light of the educational reforms in Rwanda, and how educators and students are leveraging the meagre resources and collaborative networks from the industry in order to maintain quality learning outcomes.

The reforms in Rwanda's educational sector are presented in the following section. This will be followed by a brief background to the University of Rwanda's School of Journalism and Communication. This study is informed by theoretical frameworks, which inform approaches to implementing policy reform and adapting the journalism curriculum in response to the changing media and education environments to ensure work-ready graduates. Research methods and results are presented thereafter.

Educational reforms in Rwanda that are relevant to this study

Rwanda's Vision 2020 envisages a knowledge-based society, with education positioned as a key driver to the country's sustainable social and economic transformation – where all citizens are empowered to realise their full potential. Developing capable human resources through education and training is considered critical to sustainable poverty eradication efforts (MINEDUC 2003, 2016). The essential role of education and training in Rwanda is "To give all Rwandese people […] the necessary skills and values to be good citizens; and to improve the quality of human life through the formal and informal systems at all levels" (MINEDUC 2003:4).

This vision has led to the development of a strategic plan on inclusive and special needs education. The reforms in the educational sector began in 2008 and relate to all levels of education including primary, secondly, high schools and tertiary institutions. At the lower levels, educational reforms were designed to help all Rwandan children access education. The reform for pupils to study in shifts, for example, enabled the creation of space for the rising number of enrolments, where demand exceeded the country's infrastructural capacity (Times Reporter 2009).

It has been argued that restructuring and privatisation approaches in education, particularly in the developing world, have offered only temporary relief and have compromised the equity and quality of education (Day 2013). This paper focuses on four key educational reforms at the university level, which have had a marked impact on journalism education, to identify ways to overcome challenges and preserve quality journalism education. They are:

1. the 2008 language policy that replaced French with English as an official medium of communication in Rwanda;
2. the introduction of a modular system at the university level, where course units in the various subjects, were restructured into modules – with emphasis on student-centred learning;
3. enrolment developments that saw classes expand from tens to hundreds of students, and
4. the 2013 restructuring of tertiary institutions that facilitated a merger of all public institutions into one university, the University of Rwanda. The merger sought to consolidate and manage teaching resources for effective teaching and research (UR 2013).

As this study demonstrates later, these reforms, trends of expansion and restructuring severely affected the SJC. For instance, the drastic language policy presented an obstacle to effective learning and teaching since students and instructors were not adequately prepared for the new medium of communication.

Before these reforms, journalism and communication classes at the then National University of Rwanda were smaller, with prospective students being subjected to a rigorous entrance exam. The massified education system ushered in larger class sizes. For example, journalism classes have expanded from 11 students in the 2008/2009 academic year to a current average of around 100 students. While this seemingly demonstrates the popularity and increased interest in the journalism domain, the ability to continue to deliver quality learning outcomes with limited resources and changing contexts (such as language, numbers, socio-cultural factors, etc.) will determine the extent to which the objectives of the educational reforms succeed in terms of training professional journalists.

Journalism education has particular national significance because of the infamous role it played in promoting hate and division leading up to, and during, the 1994 Rwandan Genocide. Accordingly, Rwanda places great importance on the proper training of journalists. Journalism education reforms in Rwanda have been a subject on many stakeholders' agendas – with deliberate efforts to reform and position media as 'instruments of peace-building and sustainable development' in a clear break from the hate media evident before and during the 1994 genocide. Institutions charged with media capacity building (e.g. the Media High Council, media schools and media-based NGOs) have constantly been challenged to urgently model other developed media systems through appropriate capacity building strategies. This is envisaged to position the media at the fore of Rwanda's transformation into the knowledge-based economy and in fostering and consolidating peace and reconciliation gains made so far.

Post-genocide Rwanda has inspired discourse about journalism education and practice, with debate centred on reforms that cultivate a professional media that aligns with the aspirations of socio-economic and cultural transformation of the country. In this regard, education reforms are viewed as empowering Rwandans to extricate themselves from the yoke of the country's dark past, and to promote hope and forward-thinking in safeguarding Rwandan values and future. This, in a way, is paralleled by South Africa's post-apartheid media education reforms which endeavoured to Africanise journalism education to impart an informed and a critical mindset that is removed from western-centric models of education (Banda, Bukes-Amiss, Bosch, Mano, McLean & Stengel 2007).

Given the significance attributed to journalism education in Rwanda, it is important to understand how the aforementioned tertiary education reforms might affect the quality and impact of university education in terms of graduating quality professionals. This will be done through a case study of School of Journalism and Communication at the University of Rwanda.

Background to the SJC

The SJC was established in 1996 under the then National University of Rwanda. It is the only public media training institution in Rwanda (five others are private) offering journalism and communication education at degree level. Prior to the 1994 Rwandan Genocide against the Tutsis, there was no formal journalism education or systematic training for journalists. Most journalists were trained on the job while others attended NGO-sponsored media skills development workshops. Very few journalists managed to secure scholarships to study abroad.

Since its original curriculum was deemed very theoretical, it was revised in 2000 to include more practical journalism and communication content. Significant restructuring of the SJC curriculum was carried out in 2008 when all course units were restructured into modules.

The relocation of the School to Kigali in 2011 facilitated more student enrolment and enabled closer ties with the industry – with more internships opportunities and guest speakers who were occasionally invited to SJC to share their industry experiences and to offer practical hands-on training. Enterprising students could also juggle studying and working or volunteering in the media houses, thereby building crucial work experience before graduation. By the time of the UR merger in 2013, the SJC had a student population of about 250 students spread across the four-year programme, with an average class of 60 students, and a lecturer-student ratio of about 1:30. Since the merger, the student intakes (in first year) have increased from 80 to 140 students by 2017/18 academic year, when this study was conducted.

Whilst the UR merger sought to consolidate and manage teaching resources for effective teaching and research (UR 2013), the rise in student population has constrained both technological and human training resources.

Journalism education is equipment-intensive and requires individualised attention for learners to master practical and professional skills related to news reporting and writing, radio and TV production, and online journalism. Accordingly, inadequate access to educational resources will most likely affect the educational outcomes. The mismatch between training resources and student population continues to impede quality journalism education at the UR.

Furthermore, the existing skills gap amongst the lecturers not only deters students from proper learning but compromises the lecturers' chances to specialise and deepen their experiences in teaching specific subjects. Recent studies (see for example MHC 2014; TI-Rwanda, 2016) reveal a decline in journalistic performance, something attributed to poor formative training. Despite the prevailing circumstances at the SJC, the school's current capacity to teach journalism can be argued to be more promising when compared to other media training institutions in Rwanda. With a radio

station (*Radio Salus*) and a school newspaper (*Kaminuza Star*), there are high chances for students to gain some hands-on experience.

As argued below, challenges can be overcome by phasing the implementation of policies to minimise disruption and adapting innovative teaching techniques to overcome resource deficits and to suit larger classes.

The 'Practical Theory of Journalism Education' and the 'Educational Change Model'

The need for proper journalism education and systematic implementation of educational reforms are better understood in relation to both the 'Practical Theory of Journalism Education' and the 'Educational Change Model'.

Coined by John Herbert (1998), the 'Practical Theory of Journalism Education' attributes media's "credibility and power" to proper journalism education. Herbert (1998:142) argued that "the way journalists are educated and trained" will influence media's credibility in the public eye, and therefore its power. Consequently, he proposed a 'Practical Theory of Journalism education' that provides the core skills of writing and production of news media texts.

In this framework, a practical journalist is multi-skilled to perform all tasks related to journalism and, by extension, media communication (Gasher 2005; Kovach & Senstiel 2007). Media education, therefore, should produce well-educated and skilled journalists for the future. It should introduce students to news writing and reporting, and to the way journalism fits within society. Herbert (1998:138) further contends that practical journalism, "enlarges knowledge of news events and their implications at local, national and international levels". The framework mandates journalism educators to prepare journalists who understand "the social fabric within which they operate and have the capacity to solve existing social, economic and political problems" (Herbert 1998:139).

The 'Educational Change Model' proposes that reform programmes should be gradually introduced in three phases including "the initiation phase, the development phase and the consolidated phase" because the implementation of "educational reform often takes longer than expected or typically allowed for in schedules" (Pendergast, Main, Barton, Kanasa, Geelan & Dowden 2015:6, 11). Pendergast *et al.* (2015) argue that "the time periods associated with each of the three phases are indicative only and can be accelerated through the alignment of enablers". In this study's context, inadequate teaching resources, among other factors, can inhibit the progress and success of educational reform processes.

Viewed together, these theories advocate for a strong institutional will and commitment in order to realise the expected journalism training outcomes and effectiveness of educational reforms. They also underscore the need for continuous innovations to counter the existing challenges posed by inadequate resources, marketisation of educational services, reduced budgets and poor administration, among other things, that are likely to hinder the attainment of media education goals (Carpenter 2015) and to impact on sustainably, equity and quality of education (Kingdon *et al.* 2014) in general. A few examples of best practices elsewhere (e.g. in Ethiopia and South Africa) demonstrate that creativity in teaching future professionals goes a long way. At Rhodes University in South Africa,

for example, the use of isiXhosa language in journalism education and practice grounded students in the isiXhosa orthography in a way that blends well with the use of the language in their future careers (Banda *et al*. 2007).

Methods

This study adopted a predominantly qualitative approach comprising documents review and analysis, focus group discussions (FGDs) and individual in-depth interviews. The field work was carried out between 2017 and 2018 at the UR Nyarugenge and Gikondo campuses, respectively. It was approached from three levels: the first level sought to understand the tenets, bases and justification for the educational reforms in Rwanda. This involved a review of literature and policy documents that facilitated the reform – selected from the period between 2007 (when the reforms began) and 2013, when the UR was established. The documents were accessed online.

The second and third levels targeted lecturers and students at the UR, SJC. Seven lecturers were individually interviewed, while six FGDs were held with students from third- and fourth-year classes where practical courses are mainly taught. The students were randomly recruited with the help of student class representatives. Owing to their potential to uncover "people's life experiences, everyday engagements and behaviour" (Silverman 2005:6), qualitative methods were considered appropriate for this investigation.

Ethical considerations

The study was conducted with approval from both the UR Academic Research Committee and the then Dean of the SJC, who authorised access to students. The student representative recruited, at random, only willing participants. To obtain the lecturers' consent a staff meeting was held in which the study objectives were presented and only those who taught practical modules agreed to participate. The fact that one of the authors is a staff member eased the process. In the following presentation of findings, names of respondents are withheld due to ethical reasons – and attribution is enabled through codes: L1, L2, L3, L4, L5, L6 and L7, connoting lecturers 1 to 7. Data from the 6 FGDs is also accredited by the use of FGD3-1, FGD3-2 and FGD3-3 connoting the three FGDs held with third-year students; and FGD4-1, FGD4-2 and FGD4-3, connoting the three FGDs held with fourth-year students.

Results

The study results are presented, interpreted and discussed concurrently under three thematic areas that address the core concerns of the study including: the current state of the SJC; lecturers' and students' experiences; and the existing efforts, opportunities and innovations for journalism educators and students to meet their various academic obligations.

A brief descriptive review of the current SJC

As observed earlier in this article, education reforms in Rwanda generally aimed at a rapid expansion of the education sector to attain equity and quality of education. Whilst the reforms have realised some targeted objectives, the findings of this study show that they have also altered, in a fundamental way, the manner in which traditional professional journalism education is conducted at the UR.

The reforms have created a situation described by one lecturer as "daunting" (L5). In reference to the 2008 curriculum restructuring, where numerous practical components and course units relevant to journalism were disregarded, this respondent argued that the exercise was rushed and did not give reviewers time to consult with other media educational models. While the modular system reduces the lecturer-student contact hours and emphasises that students direct their learning, it has been criticised for ignoring different learning environments. In the Rwandan context, for example, the abrupt language switch left many teachers and students struggling to comprehend English (L1, L2, L4 and L5), at the expense of teaching and learning the core subjects.

The haste by which English, as a medium of instruction, and the modular system of teaching and learning were introduced at the UR, disregards the 'Educational Change Module' which advocates for adequate time for the various stakeholders to negotiate the change (Pendergast *et al.* 2015). In this case, university students, who went through high schools with low-quality English teaching, found themselves in a precarious situation, often struggling to cope. Literature has shown how rural schools in developing areas are unable to engage with education functionaries due to the grossly unequal power relations between poor rural community schoolteachers and highly paid teachers in urban areas, even within the civil service (Day 2013).

The urgency in implementing educational reforms in Rwanda, however, was facilitated by global changes in educational consumption dynamics, and the need to have an all-inclusive education sector and to revitalise the education system as a whole (MINEDUC 2016). In journalism education, the advent of new technologies and increased media competition that require multi-skilled professionals were disregarded.

The rise in student population in the journalism and communication programme has constrained the training resources. Currently, one or two instructors are assigned to teach a writing, TV or radio production classes of between 120-140 students (first and second years), with limited production facilities (less than 50 sound computers and a handful of cameras).

While reacting to the shortage of qualified and experienced journalism trainers, one respondent described some lecturers as just "gambling to teach what they are allocated since they are not necessarily specialised in the subject" (L7). As the 'Practical Journalism Education' theory informs us, a dynamic media industry is one with highly skilled journalists – with "competency in the technical and practical skills [...] greater accuracy, greater creativity, more honest [and] more ethical" (Herbert 1998:142-143). Without the necessary skills and resources to teach practical journalism at the SJC, this theorising remains improbable. As SJC teachers struggle to maintain standards, they face difficulties coping with the increasing student population. Students' appreciation of the value of their financial

contributions, and their more dedicated fee-paying, could improve the limited training facilities and attention from trainers.

Lecturers' and Students' Experiences

This section provides narratives of SJC lecturers' and students' experiences with the new educational reforms. A necessary part of imparting journalism skills to students, according to the 'Practical Theory of Journalism Education', is to familiarise them with the theories that inform the practice, and turn those theories into tangible projects through practical application (Herbert 1998). With an increase in student population over the years, shrinking funding and a static staff population, education of journalists at the SJC has been challenging for both lecturers and students.

In the opinion of one lecturer, teaching experiences have shifted considerably over the years: "We have gone from teaching around 20 students to 100 plus over these years. Gone is the one-on-one approach that we teachers once enjoyed" (L4). In addition to mass lectures, students' assignments are executed in groups ranging between five and 12 members, depending on the size of a particular class – even in writing and reporting classes. Other methods of assessments have included multiple-choice assessment and oral-group presentations. This makes "class management and grading easier" (L1). While these approaches provide a relief in dealing with large classes, they are often merely "painkillers to a tumour" (L2) and standards might gradually suffer for lack of individualised attention to specific practical needs or challenges of each student. As another respondent argued, these strategies are not "bullet-proof" options because some students hide behind the group, hindering efforts to know their capabilities (L4).

A lecturer who taught a first-year writing class of 120 students, described the experience thus:

> Despite the need for individualised assessment in practical classes, it is hard to successfully implement it. In one of my writing classes, students had to individually write a news story lead and a focus statement. The idea was to assess language and sentence construction capabilities. I found that the students' comprehension of English was highly lacking. (L3)

Another news reporting and writing instructor testified that the biggest percentage of time spent while teaching first-year students is "mainly spent on teaching elements of writing in English, including grammar, composition, spelling, etc." (L2), and this, for many lecturers, is a "diversion from 'our' principal responsibilities" (L5), to doing what "other teachers in high school should be concerned with" (L6).

The UR has made some efforts to address language issues. First, all first-year students admitted into the various programmes undergo an English proficiency test to determine their level of competence and to identify gaps. Students who fail the test will then take a compulsory English course in concurrence with other courses under their respective fields of study. Second, RU has, since the 2016/2017 academic year, introduced compulsory credit-bearing English classes for all students in all programmes – running for three years. Prior to this, English classes were support modules and bore no credits. One language improvement innovation adopted by some journalism lecturers is to liaise

with English teachers to pinpoint specific challenges they should focus on in their classes. Some SJC lecturers, however, are of the view that language competence needs to be developed at the more formative levels (primary and secondary school) before students are admitted to university (L1, L5 and L7).

The effectiveness of education reforms, even in the most developed nations, have at their core the imperative to improve student learning outcomes (Pendergast *et al.* 2015), but as we have already argued here, the radical shift to English as the language of instruction and learning presented clear challenges from the outset. In accordance with the 'Education Change Model', we argue that the policy required gradual and sustained preparatory efforts before its full integration into the education system, particularly for programmes like journalism, where graduates are expected to immediately demonstrate their language competencies to communicate.

Further conversations with SJC faculty members revealed other challenges affecting them as well as students in fulfilling their academic obligations. For example, respondents L1, L2 and L6 expressed their misgivings about their inability to reach out to all students to understand their "personal learning needs" (L1) and to know how students evaluate them. Similarly, the students feel short-changed for not getting due attention from their mentors. In one of the FGDs, a student elucidated thus:

> I spent the entire semester without talking to the lecturer though I had so many questions to ask. After a class session, many students would approach her to consult. She was obviously very tired from talking for two hours to so many 'noisy' students – sweating from the heat coming from the projector which was placed very close to where she was standing, she only responded to very few students. (FGD3-1)

In the above scenario, more than 100 students could barely fit in a lecture room designed for 70 students. In addition to the necessity of practical hands-on training in journalism (Gasher 2005), inadequate training resources such as computers, audio recorders and cameras, inhibit effective teaching, particularly in overpopulated studios or computer laboratories. Although common in other programmes, this situation particularly constrains journalism education. During an FGD, a student attested thus:

> We need to learn how to use TV cameras and radio recorders to produce news, but learning resources are not for all of us. In my group for example, we are ten and share one computer and one camera, yet some colleagues personalise them […]. Even the Internet is not always accessible when we need it. (FGD3-3)

Another fourth-year student, who had participated in a practical class that introduced students to Adobe Premiere video editing software, described a situation where 10 to 12 students had sat behind one desktop and it became "so hard to follow the instructions because only one student was able to use the mouse at a time" (FGD4-3). His colleague described the situation more explicitly:

> I simply sat behind my group and just looked at the screen while waiting for the class to end. I had the urge to tell the instructor to give us notes and then, may be, later we would teach ourselves these skills. (FGD4-1)

For instructors, it is "practically impossible to go around a class of 140 students to help individual students" (L3). Traditionally, classes at SJC are co-taught by a minimum of two lecturers and maximum of three. Even then, the growing student population in journalism classes continue to compromise the crucial "coaching methods pedagogy", as instructors, no matter how many in a particular class, can no longer pay close attention to individual students, hence, the "desirable coaching method is not applied anymore" (L6). These experiences represent a paradox for the learners' professional capacities beyond their school days, as the situation deters them from applying the skills of gathering and reporting news, and from developing their own creative skills. While lecturers acknowledge that teaching resources will never be enough, even in developed nations, they advocate for educational institutions to appreciate the important role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in journalism education "which relies on up-to-date equipment" (L3), and to invest in ICTs and Internet connectivity in order to produce relevant human resource across all sectors (L6).

Consistently, Kingdon *et al.* (2014:48), noted that "massification of higher education should ensure the progression of equity and quality, a process that requires raising sufficient resources for each student". Other scholars (such as Mensing 2010; Pavilik 2013, and Hernandez 2019), have pointed to the need for journalism schools to install appropriate ICT infrastructure to facilitate both teaching and students' independent learning. From experiential learning points of view, they argue that with minimum resources at the institutional level, there is a lot to learn and self-teach on the online platforms. Though large journalism classes are a global phenomenon and inevitable in Rwanda, owing to the field's increasing popularity, an SJC faculty member (L5) advocated for a corresponding increment of resources, as well as innovations in teaching to achieve quality. This will "guarantee" their readiness to adopt and to help students learn (L5). He added, "Our success, and that of our students, will depend on how well we adapt our teaching and devotion to students' understanding, the content we are imparting upon them and, the number of students admitted into the programme" (L5).

SJC lecturers also believe that selection of candidates for admission should be tightened to include only those who meet certain criteria for admission in a journalism and communication programme. The media industry in Rwanda is still too small to employ all graduates produced by the various media training institutions, and this makes it even more crucial to produce the best who can be relevant in other public and private sectors in need of skilled communicators. In this case, journalism and communication training curricula should constantly be revised to tailor them to the most urgent needs of the industry and/or employers.

The quality of academic staff at the SJC is another contentious issue. While some lecturers have first degrees in media and/or communication studies, others are grounded in fields such as history, geography, finance, political science and management. Their entrance into journalism education was through diplomas or, for many, short certificate courses or brief stints as reporters. Of the nine lecturers, only three held doctorates by the time of this research – and only one of these was relevant to media and communication. This represents a gap between the available resources and the required skills to produce competent journalists. The qualification of journalism teachers has been debated in developing countries with some arguing that one does not need a degree to teach journalism (Pavilik 2013). However, as the field develops, professionalism has been attached to higher education qualifications (Josephi 2009).

Efforts, opportunities and innovations at the SJC

Gloomy as the situation at SJC may seem, there have been appreciable efforts to improve the state of affairs and to ensure the school's continuity in its crucial role of training future journalists. In the area of technology, the UR has developed a strategic ICT plan that is expected to ensure learners and lecturers have full Internet connectivity at all learning points – libraries, lecture halls and recreation spaces at all its campuses.

Externally, the school has received technical and capacity building support from UNESCO, which developed *Radio Salus* and training studios to provide hands-on experience for students. UNESCO further equipped the school with video cameras and audio recorders for practical courses. In 2012, the European Union equipped the school with radio and TV studios and computers for a relatively large group of students, while the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX), through the Rwanda Initiatives Project (see discussion on this below), also donated eight iMac computers. For a University that relied on shrinking institutional budgets and government funding, these interventions came in handy for the SJC. Apart from the irregular technical maintenance of these resources, some students have developed hands-on experience that has prepared them for the industry.

Donor assistance has been considered key in developing infrastructure for most journalism schools in the developing world (Banda *et al.* 2007). A snapshot of a number of schools in Africa, Asia and Latin America show considerable media development contribution by institutions like UNESCO, USAID, UNDP, Deutsche Welle Akademie, and other national and international NGOs. Scholars have considered the downside of donor dependence as donor fatigue, demonstrated by a gradual reduction and eventual withdrawal of assistance to focus on more pressing global problems (Mensing 2010; Goodman 2016). In Rwanda, some journalism lecturers fear that without a sustained technical skills transfer from the donors (e.g. for technical maintenance of journalism infrastructure), "the equipment might soon be in disuse […] leading to wastage of donor funds" (L5). Under the current collaboration between the SJC and Fojo Media Institute of Sweden (see next section), this challenge is gradually being addressed by training local staff on how to manage the technical facilities.

Addressing the shortage and capacity deficiency of lecturers

Over the years, the shortage of lecturers and the skills-gap challenges have been addressed through donor-funded capacity building projects. The focus here is on two particular projects that have significantly contributed to the academic and research activities at SJC, namely the Rwanda Initiative (RI) project and the Fojo-SJC Capacity Building project. The Rwanda Initiative was launched in January 2006 as a partnership between the School of Journalism and Communication at the National University of Rwanda, and the School of Journalism and Communication of Carleton University, Canada. The project initially brought experienced journalists from Canada and, at times, university professors to Rwanda to teach journalism and communication. The programme grew to include a media internship exchange program where dozens of Rwandan and Canadian journalism students and practitioners worked in newsrooms and media outlets in Canada and Rwanda, respectively. The programme ended in 2011, but its impact, according one SJC senior faculty member, "lingers on through the 'dynamic journalists' we have today, who went through the SJC at the time, or had attended RI Pitch labs" (L7).

The Fojo-SJC Capacity building project is a four-year programme with an overall mandate of strengthening and developing staff and students' capacities to increase their academic and research potentials. So far, the project supported the review of the curriculum to include more practical components. It has brought journalism practitioners (volunteers) from Sweden, Kenya and Uganda to co-teach with local staff on the programme. The project also funds academic staff to attend and present research papers at national and international research conferences. In 2017, it supported the SJC to convene the annual conference for the East African Communication Association in Rwanda. A partnership between the media industry and the SJC has also been enabled through a project component that facilitates media practitioners and teachers to provide technical and supervisory support to students both at the school and during their internship in the field. Inviting practitioners to co-teach with academics is a long-held tradition amongst most journalism schools globally. It is hailed as beneficial to faculty members, as they learn up-to-date field skills, and to practitioners, as they appreciate the pedagogic skills for preparing future professionals (Karlsreiter & Daminova 2010).

Co-teaching at the SJC continues to bridge the practical skills gaps among local trainers (TI-Rwanda 2016). Although students had initial challenges of understanding 'English' as taught by the Swedish volunteers, "they have gradually [become] accustomed" to it (L2). Besides the Swedish volunteers, the SJC works closely with the industry by engaging renowned practitioners as guest speakers on topical issues and by involving them in curricula reviews (e.g. during the 2015 comprehensive curriculum revision), partnerships on internship placements, and targeted industry trainings. In 2017, SJC signed a partnership with *The New Times* (the leading English daily in Rwanda) to offer editorial advisory on the school's newspaper. Other partnerships are in the pipeline with the broadcast and online media e.g. the *Rwanda broadcasting Agency* and *Igihe.com*, which have a national appeal in news circulation. The gains from these collaborations have been "God-sent" as one SJC faculty member quipped (L3).

While donor support in developing nations is instrumental in bridging educational gaps, there are concerns related to the sustainability or continuity of the local activities after the programme (Kingdon *et al*. 2014), as well as "tension between Western and African approaches to journalism in both theory and practice [...], the way journalism ought to be taught [...], some competing preferences in journalism and communication and in different views with regard to the contextual vs. fundamental dimensions of journalism theory" (Skjerdal 2011: 26). To improve foreign co-teaching, it is argued that combination of domestic and foreigners should aim to build a team of locally made trainers who can effectively transfer journalism pedagogical approaches drawn from experienced experts. While local trainers may be preferable for language reasons, blending with foreign instructors universalises the programme and students get a global experience (Deuze 2006).

The 'smartphone' and 'extended internships' models

Although having some technical resources has not adequately addressed the burgeoning student numbers, this has necessitated a rethink on alternative models of teaching media production classes. For example, in collaboration with the Swedish journalist volunteers, leveraging technology such as 'smart' cellular phones in practical classes has created,

> […] more innovative and flexible ways of using the converged technologies to make our classes more productive, effective and participatory. In fact, integrating smartphones in our teaching has helped us to deal with the scarcity of resources in teaching courses like Radio and TV production and online journalism. With a number of students owning smartphones, it is easy to assign them tasks. (L3)

SJC students and their instructors of practical courses give credit to the cellular phone innovation in the scarcity of resources. Students can now mount smartphones on selfie sticks, gather information from the field and transfer it to their computers for further processing. As students deepen their audio and video production skills, they are introduced to the limited professional broadcast production equipment. While a smartphone does not bear all the features of a professional video camera, such as zoom lenses, they provide swift approaches to gather information for broadcast texts within resource-constrained contexts:

> The trick is to teach students techniques that can help them to get the best out of a cell phone. For example, I advise students to go closer if they need closer shots, to capitalise on stationed shots rather than panning shots. I also emphasise the use of external microphones to get proper sound. Small microphones from China are affordable. (L3)

While the 'Bring Your Own Device' concept is harnessed here to forestall institutional challenges of acquiring more expensive equipment such as video cameras, the downside of using smartphones for production has been acknowledged: despite the ubiquity of these devices, not all students can afford one with media production features. Furthermore, most media houses still require students to demonstrate skills in actual production with the 'traditional' tools such as video cameras. On the ethical side, since mobile journalism is safe for complicated contexts, stories abound about the chances of misuse through unauthorised (disguised) recording. But as Hernandez (2019) argues, this should form part of teaching on ethical use of new technologies in journalism practice. Harnessing the power of smartphones to produce news stories is now commonplace in many journalism schools globally, and several journalism schools (e.g. in South Africa) have gradually adopted the mobile phone in teaching online journalism by leveraging the digital culture of most students (de Beer, Pitcher & Jones 2009; Odunlami 2014).

One SJC faculty member remarked that since the introduction of the cell phone model, "teaching is much more fun" (L2) and the majority of students complete the broadcast modules with impressive production skills. It also mitigates other issues; for example, with the absence of technicians, it is lecturers who have had to manage the task of dispensing equipment to students for field activities, and collecting it back. One lecturer described this process as "tedious" since it involved charging the batteries for hours – often beyond working hours – "in preparation for field work" (L4).

The use of mobile phones to teach journalism at the SJC aligns well with Rwanda's vision of an ICT-enabled education sector. In its 2016 ICT policy in education, Rwanda views new media technology as a crucial enabler of knowledge creation and diversity of learning for both students and trainers. The policy envisions the harnessing of the innovative and cost-effective potential of technology to build the capacities of the learners. In line with SJC's Smart Rwanda vision, new media technology is considered key in realising the vision of smart schools, where technology is envisaged to drive all teaching and learning activities (MINEDUC 2016). Despite this, the need for professional equipment

cannot be suppressed in preparing future multi-skilled professional journalists who can effortlessly, confidently and favourably compete in the industry. As L1, L4 and L5 argue, professional journalistic values still lie in professional pedagogy, hence professional equipment for journalism training should not entirely be replaced with cell phones or similar gadgets.

Other innovations to improve journalism education at the SJC include extended internships for students to acquire and/or strengthen their skills after completion of the four-year programme. The programme structure requires students to undergo industrial training at any media or communication institution in Rwanda for 30 days during their third and fourth years, respectively (a total of 60 days). Under the extended internship scheme, the school assists finalists to obtain internship placements at institutions (within Rwanda and outside the country) over an extended period for them to polish their journalistic and communication skills on the job. The school's newspapers (online and hardcopy) and the university radio station have also provided platforms for extended internships – for students of journalism and those at other UR faculties.

While acknowledging the above innovations to respond to the present resource constraints and growing student populations, this study is cognisant of two crucial facts. Firstly, that every profession has challenges and, secondly, professionalism begins with good training. Within this theorisation, we wish to advocate for a journalism education approach underpinned by leveraging available resources and networks, regardless of student numbers. Lecturers need constant self and pedagogical evaluation – to reconstruct their understanding of the practice of teaching, particularly teaching the hands-on application of journalism and communication. A respondent put this more explicitly: "The only way us (educators) can have a positive impact on journalism and communication education in Rwanda, is to have a thorough analysis of both our challenges and our methods, and always look for better ways of doing our job" (L3).

Certainly, the best model is not just a matter of finding better techniques than lecturing, because there is no single, successful method of teaching (Kingdon *et al*. 2014). The best model, we argue, should involve a complex resolution between teachers and the system of the institution they serve. Journalism educators will have to adjust their pedagogical approaches to suit the subject matter, available resources, students and their individual strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, as evident in literature, there are best-practice teaching models that can be borrowed and contextualised in a situation like SJC's. While the institutional challenges of equipping SJC with needed resources are being addressed, working with industry stakeholders has been seen to act as an appropriate stopgap.

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the implications of educational reforms in Rwanda on journalism education, with the SJC at the UR as a single case study. We mainly focussed on three reforms, including the shift from French to English as a language of instruction, the introduction of modular system at the university level and the enrolment developments that saw classes expand from tens to hundreds of students. We have thus interrogated how both teachers and students are negotiating the present resource-constrained environment, underpinned by a mismatch between available resources and the growing student population. The findings reveal that current educational reforms are yet to fully realise the development of capacity required for the industry as initially envisaged. Although the

reforms seem initially well-conceived, implementing them in domains like journalism presents clear challenges. With massification of education in Rwanda (as elsewhere) dictated by commercialisation, it is advisable to manage the delicate balance between this 'tech-heavy' field and individualised attention to quality media production. From stakeholder accounts, the lack of adequate individualised, practical orientation is a sure recipe for lowered professionalism in the industry. While lecturers have continued to invent training approaches that would bridge some of these practical skills gaps, they advise that increasing student numbers need to match technical and staff resources in the long run. However, it is possible that the institution may not be entirely able to achieve this feat due to other competing resource interests.

While journalism education at the SJC has remained part of the broader academic reforms at the UR, the innovative efforts to address the teaching and learning challenges are one step in realising the reform objectives. The deployment of smartphones in teaching has improved the teaching of practical broadcast production classes, and has equipped many students with basic production skills – an achievement which was previously unattainable. The remodelling in the use of the various school projects, such as the school newspaper and the radio station, as well as the extended internships for students, have also helped to strengthen students' journalistic and communication skills. In a classical sense, this case study is a small attempt to shed light into how innovative styles of journalistic teaching can be, and have been, used to circumvent the inadequacies of otherwise well-meaning educational reforms.

The theoretical orientations of this research, that is, the 'Practical Theory of Journalism Education' and the 'Educational Change Model' mandates journalism educators to prepare journalists who understand the existing social, economic and political problems in the society within which they operate, and who have the potential to solve them. Media's well documented credibility and power is attributed to proper journalism education (Herbert 1998). Historically, abuse of this power in countries such as Rwanda and Kenya, resulted in grave consequences including the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the 2007/2008 post-election violence. In conclusion, we wish to argue that media educators in the 'global South', as well as other resource-constrained contexts, in which a lack of proper journalism education plays a huge role in the circulation of misinformation, need to embrace the reality that the goal of journalism education is to serve journalism, by helping to shape its future in all the forms it is likely to assume (Mensing 2010; Pavlik 2013). They should strengthen, among other values, ethics and accurate news reporting in journalism. In the current climate, with the threat of 'fake news' becoming increasingly worrisome, this is of pressing importance across many contexts (for example, the circulation of outdated and decontextualized images during the recent xenophobic/criminal attacks in South Africa, and the imagery of Amazon fires and firefighting).

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