

Graduate Attributes and Employability in Journalism and Mass Communication: The Perspective of University of Dar es Salaam graduates and selected employers

*Eno Akpabio, Charles Irigo & Sussane Mbise*⁸

Abstract

There exist ambivalence in the literature and among scholars about employability and graduate attributes across theoretical and practical courses offered by higher educational institutions, hence this study set itself the task of tracking SJMC graduates to find out if the offerings at the University of Dar es Salaam have assisted them in terms of employability as well as finding out from selected employers about graduate attributes that the former bring to bear on the work environment. Using systematic sampling supplemented with snowball sampling based on the poor response rate of the former, the study found out that the graduates were largely satisfied even though they had a number of areas that they felt should be improved upon. Employers, on the other hand, even though they also had largely positive attitudes wanted more practical courses; a sentiment also expressed by

⁸ Eno Akpabio, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Dar es Salaam.

Eno Akpabio is now at the Department of Information and Communication Studies, University of Namibia.

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Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Eno Akpabio, Department of Information and Communication Studies, University of Namibia. Email: epakpabio@unam.na

the graduates. Graduates were also not satisfied with the level of currency of the offerings, hence the study calls for urgent curriculum review involving various stakeholders to better tailor course offerings to the demands of the marketplace.

The history of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication (SJMC) dates back to 1975 when it was established by the government as Tanzania School of Journalism (TSJ) offering a two-year Diploma in Journalism. The TSJ soon metamorphosed into the Institute of Journalism and Mass Communication (IJMC). IJMC was incorporated into the University of Dar es Salaam in the 1999/2000 session and produced the first set of graduates in 2003. Due to structural changes at the University of Dar es Salaam, the institute took on the status of a school on July 21, 2009 (SJMC draft five year rolling plan 2010/11-2014/15). Over the years, the school's offering has expanded to embrace BA degrees in Journalism, Mass Communication and Public Relations and Advertising as well as Postgraduate Diploma and Masters in Mass Communication.

In all these years of producing graduates, no graduate destination survey has ever been carried out to determine if the Certificates, Diplomas and Degrees are meeting the needs of industry and adequately prepare recipients for the world of media and communication work. This lack of a destination survey has also meant that a yawning gap exists in justification of new programmes and review of existing programmes. While this study was designed to fill this gap it also makes an important contribution to the literature on employability and graduate attributes from the perspective of journalism and mass communication.

The study therefore sought answers about sectors where SJMC graduates are found, probed information on ease of getting employment, median entry level salaries as well as determining if their training was an adequate preparation for the challenges of the work environment. The SJMC programme presently covers a broad area, but are the graduates able to hold their own in print journalism, radio, TV, online media, social media, development communication, advertising, public relations, mass communication, web design etc.? Another concern is determining whether employers of labour in the sector are satisfied with the skills that graduates bring to bear on their various functions. This is because one of the ways of measuring the quality of higher education is the career success of those graduating from such institutions (Cai, 2012).

More so, as the world we live in has morphed from complicated to complex (Edelman, 2011). Hence, Bates and Phelan (2002, pp 121-122) argue that today's work environment is now "characterized by many complex, tactical, and strategic tasks that require the assimilation of increasing amounts of new knowledge, personal thinking/application/problem-solving abilities, and high workloads with extremely variable content" hence employers require workers who are adaptable and flexible. They want them to be able

to learn new technologies, to develop innovative techniques, to cross-function in work teams, to troubleshoot, to work independently, and to assume the leadership role in front-line positions. Typically, organizations characterize the successful employee as one who embodies the characteristics of motivation, ambition, dedication, and willingness to accept challenges (p. 122).

Particularly in the area of media and communication, things are moving at a dizzying pace. People no longer rely on traditional news sources but are the media themselves through sharing their views in online media and platforms (Thenevot, 2007). Public relations professionals now measure output, outcome, outtakes and engagement to reflect the impact of social media on the practice (Stacks & Bowen, 2013). Advertising practitioners are expected to upskill in order to remain relevant (Robbs, 2010). All in all, the need to keep abreast of developments is even more pressing given the state of flux in the media and communication field (Lowry, 2008; Putnis, Axford, Watson & Blood, 2002) hence the justification for this study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Do the courses offered at SJMC adequately prepare graduates for the sectors in which they are employed?
- What constitutes the attitude of employers of SJMC graduates to their skill sets?
- In which sectors of the media and communication industry are graduates of SJMC found?
- How soon after graduation do SJMC products get employed?

LITERATURE REVIEW

There seems to be a huge concern in the higher education sector about graduate attributes and employability. Barrow, Behr, Deacy, McHardy and Tempest (2012) note that the higher

education sector is increasingly called upon to produce employable graduates and they argue that non-occupational courses can also embed this skill for a better learning and teaching experience. Governments and other stakeholders have also waded in with calls for greater accountability and evaluation of higher education, graduate employability and employee competency (Bates & Phelan, 2002; Thornham & O'Sullivan, 2004; Treleaven & Voola, 2008; Wimhurst & Allard, 2007).

Employability references the ability of graduates to find work, retain such jobs and change jobs when they want to (Cai, 2012) and is sometimes conflated with graduate attributes. The latter, which is also referred to as key skills, generic attributes, key competencies, transferable skills, employability skills, and soft skills are abilities that make graduates more likely to be employed and make a success of their careers (Cai, 2012; Treleaven & Voola, 2008). Scholars pinpoint these to include critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, ability to solve problems, independent thought, ethical practice, communication, creativity, integrity, teamwork abilities and lifelong learning (Treleaven & Voola, 2008, pp. 160-161).

Employability skills are also referred to as workplace literacy and is the ability to respond to the demands of the work environment, on-the-job performance, learning on the job and applying that learning to tasks (Bates & Phelan, 2002). The skills have been identified as reading writing, mathematics, listening and higher order thinking (Bates & Phelan, 2002). There is some level of consensus around the view that these skills should cut across all disciplines and not just professional programmes (Treleaven & Voola, 2008). But how does these play out from the perspective of employees and graduates?

Some tensions between practical and theoretical degrees remain. Chinese employers of labour, for instance, feel that higher education in their country is less practical and too focused on examination and theories (Cai, 2012). Barrow et al (2012) quote a British Academy report which notes that graduates with a non-specific occupation degree are able to find employment in a wide array of fields than those with professional degrees. In contrast, Chinese employers had a negative view of graduates from polytechnics (Cia, 2012).

Interestingly, when it comes to media and communication, employers are very vocal about the curriculum not preparing graduates for employability (Folkerts, Hamilton & Lemann, n.d.; Thornham & O'Sullivan, 2004). Such disdain takes very negative forms; for example, an editor who refused to hire university graduates exclaimed: "of all horned cattle, deliver me from the college graduate" (Folkerts, Hamilton & Lemann, n.d., p. 7). Another senior media employer uttered the following scathing commentary:

Those who will become senior executives and producers are drawn from the ranks of the "real disciplines", he suggested, particularly those in the arts and humanities; they will have acquired the essential breadth of creative and analytical skills in the course of their traditional degree. Those who will become craft workers, on the other hand, should have received "real training" (Thornham & O'Sullivan, 2004, p. 20).

In other words, real training should be in a vocational institution, not a university.

The Indian scenario is somewhat similar with only a small proportion of management graduates being regarded as suitable for employment while the rest are described as "mere

degree holders” (Gupta & Tomar, 2008, p. 13). In addition “only a tenth of all generalists graduating out of Indian institutions are industry-ready” (Gupta & Tomar, 2008, p. 13). Generally, business and management graduates are said to possess both employability skills and business knowledge which make them quite attractive to employers of labour (Wilton, 2011).

To graduates of BSc Environmental Protection and BSc Heritage Conservation from Bournemouth University, the most useful skills, in their view, were “oral and written communication, team working, personal organization and self-motivation” while the least useful were “health and safety awareness, numerical reasoning, business awareness and technical specialist skills” (Shah, Pell & Brooke, 2004, p. 19). Records and Archives Management graduates felt that the curriculum was satisfactory but longed for more practical courses, industrial attachment as well more information technology contents (Noko & Ngulube, 2013). While for graduates of Library and Information studies, cataloguing and classification as well as experiential learning were flagged as being very important (Shongwe & Ocholla, 2011). Lowry (2008), for instance, discovered that for entry level advertising/marketing positions, skills required were analytical, computer, creativity, detail-orientation, entrepreneurial, interpersonal, organizational, teamwork and writing abilities.

Bennett (2009) investigated the career expectations of performing arts students and noted a disconnect between the curricula, students career expectations and professional practice. The Australian study of media and communication programme also focused on relevance as well as adding value for both graduates and employers (Putnis, Axford, Watson and Blood, 2002). The U.S annual national destination survey of Journalism and mass communication graduates 2010, amongst

others, found out that graduates indicated that at the end of their studies they possessed skills such as writing and editing for the web, still photography for the web, ability to adapt to the digital environment as well as use social media professionally (Becker, Viad, Kazragis, Toledo and Desnoes, 2011). Half of the respondents for the US study identified gaps in the curriculum to include web skills of various types.

These challenges negatively impact both the graduates and employers of labour. A majority of BSc Environmental Protection and BSc Heritage Conservation graduates of Bournemouth University (81%) had experienced unemployment in the first six months after graduation with slightly above average (56%) indicating that their jobs were relevant to their qualifications (Shah, Pell & Brooke, 2004). About a third of those surveyed (27%) indicated that their first job was not at the level of their qualification and about two-thirds (65%) saying that their present careers were graduate-level positions with a median salary of £ 16,000 (Shah, Pell & Brooke, 2004). Salaries have remained flat for five years running according to respondents in the US (Becker, Viad, Kazragis, Toledo & Desnoes, 2011). In China, it is employers that complain that graduates expect to be paid much more than they can afford (Cia, 2012).

Various attempts are being made to address the issues identified and flagged above. One approach is involving prospective employees in course design and delivery as well as work placement that bears a striking resemblance to where graduates will eventually end up (Brown, 2007). With an eye on employability, the Chinese government announced that "it will promote cooperation between industry associations and universities in order to professionalize education, familiarize students with industry and employment requirements, as well

as effect a better match between graduate demand and supply” (Fladrich, 2006, p. 207).

This becomes of great importance as employers take into consideration work experience in their hiring practices (Cai, 2012). An HR director underlined the importance of this requirement by stating that this is precisely why they do not attend “any campus recruitment activities” (p. 26). This posture informed uptake of voluntary work by graduates in order to break through the “no experience, no job” barrier (Shah, Pell & Brooke, 2004, p. 14).

There exist ambivalence in the literature and among scholars about employability and graduate attributes across theoretical and practical courses offered by higher educational institutions but a recurring decimal is that a lot more can be done to improve the quality of through put. This is precisely where the present study comes in given that no such study has been carried out on SJMC offerings to identify positives and negatives as well as assist in charting the way forward in terms of curriculum review, new programmes and a better match between graduate attributes and the demands of the work environment. The study’s findings thus makes a contribution to employability and graduate attributes from a practical rather than a theoretical degree perspective given the sentiment that journalism and mass communication is best housed in vocational institutions rather than in universities (Thornham & O’Sullivan, 2004).

RESEARCH DESIGN

Triangulation which involves the use of qualitative and quantitative methods was used for this study. Survey research, especially the descriptive variety which involves documenting current conditions (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006) was utilized to

obtain views of respondents on the adequacy of the SJMC syllabi, ease of obtaining employment and median entry – level salaries. Intensive interviews were conducted with employers of SJMC graduates to gauge their assessment of the adequacy of training provided by the school.

The survey instrument was critiqued by a professor of education and former Director of Tanzanian School of Journalism. She suggested a number of changes which were incorporated in the final questionnaire along with concerns raised by the institution's graduates during the piloting of the instrument.

With an average graduation rate of 100 per year, the study population comes to 900 over a nine year period. Using the graduation lists, the study instrument was emailed to sampled respondents with a covering letter. With the availability of an adequate sampling frame, systematic sampling was used to pick 200 respondents constituting 22.2 per cent of the study population. However, some of the contact information supplied to the institution were dated hence to make up the sample, snowball sampling was adopted. Intensive interviews with employers were also conducted to obtain their assessment of the skill sets that SJMC graduates bring to the table and how this has impacted their performance as well as contributed to the achievement of organizational objectives.

A consent form was e-mailed/distributed along with the study instrument describing the study and seeking consent of respondents. A research permit authorizing the gathering of data was also obtained from the office of the Vice Chancellor, University of Dar es Salaam.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Respondents and Interviewees

One hundred and sixty five copies of the study questionnaire were retrieved accounting for a return rate of 83%.

There were more females than male respondents; while the majority of the respondents were from the 2004 cohort. Most obtained second class (Upper Division) class of degree, had BA (Mass Communication) degrees, were on permanent and pensionable employment contracts and earned between Tzs 5 and 15 million annually (see Table 1).

Table 1

Demographic Attributes of SJMC Graduates

No	Demographic Attributes	Indices	Number	Percentage
1	Gender	Female	89	53.9
		Male	70	42.4
2	Year of Graduation	2003	1	0.6
		2004	30	18.2
		2005	27	16.4
		2006	25	15.2
		2007	25	15.2
		2008	32	19.4
		2009	23	13.9
		2010	163	98.8
		2011	1	0.6
		2012	30	18.2
3	Class of Degree	First Class	5	3.0
		Second Class (Upper Division)	118	71.5
		Second Class (Lower Division)	35	21.2
4	Programme Of Study while at SJMC	BA Journalism	34	20.6
		BA Mass communication	66	40.0
		BA Public Relations and Advertising	59	35.8
5	Employment Status	Permanent and pensionable	76	46.1
		Contract	48	29.1
		Freelance	7	4.2
		Permanent	3	1.8
		Self employed	1	.6
		Contract and Pensionable	2	1.2
		None of the above	1	.6

6	Annual Salary	Below TZS 5M	55	33.3
		TZS 6-15M	55	33.3
		TZS 16-25	11	6.7
		TZS 26-35M	6	3.6
		TZS 36M and above	2	1.2

Interviews were conducted with employers of labour. Five key informants agreed to participate in the study. These were a CEO of a Media and Communication Consultancy, head of a public broadcaster, Director, News and Current Affairs of a broadcast station, principal in a vocational education and training (VET) institution as well as correspondent of a foreign radio station.

Employability of SJMC Graduates

A clear majority of respondents indicated that the courses on offer in SJMC prepared them for paid employment (See Table 2).

Table 2

Type of Employment SJMC Courses Best Prepared Graduates for

Type of Employment	No. of Respondents	%
Paid employment	114	69.1
Self-employment	22	13.3
Paid employment & self-employment	17	10.3
None	8	4.8
Others	2	1.2

The study also sought information about the employment status of SJMC graduates. Graduates obtained employment after graduation with a slight majority getting placements between one to six months after their degree

programmes. Most graduates got public relations and advertising positions, followed by news/editorials. Worth noting was the strong showing of “translation and reporting” as well as “advocacy” within the “other” positions category. Most respondents self-reported that their qualification was the main consideration in their present employment positions. Most reported medical aid as the predominant benefit they enjoy (See Tables 3-7).

Table 3

Job Offers to Respondents after Graduation

Job Offers	No. of Respondents	%
Yes	133	80.6
No	30	18.2

Table 4

How soon Respondents got employed after Graduation

Time Frame for getting Employed	No. of Respondents	%
1-6 months	87	52.7
7-12 months	25	15.2
1-2 years	19	11.5
2-4 years	6	3.6

Table 5

Sectors where Graduates are employed

Sectors	No. of Respondents	%
News/Editorial	43	26.1
Advertising	29	17.6
Public Relations	60	36.4
Development Communication	27	16.4
Writing, Editing and Designing for the Web	14	8.5
Telecommunication	14	8.5
Broadcasting	17	10.3
Speech Writing	16	9.7
Research	34	20.6
Others	63	38.1
	Translation & Reporting 21 (12.7%)	
	Advocacy 21 (12.7%)	

Table 8

Factors that Informed their Choice of Sector

Factors	No. of Respondents	%
Chance	25	15.2
Experience	26	15.8
Connections	9	5.5
Qualification	98	59.4

Table 7

Graduates' Job Benefits

Job Benefits	No. of Respondents	%
Medical	111	67.3
Life Insurance	15	9.1
Disability	24	14.5
Maternity	53	32.1
Child care	40	24.2
Retirement	64	38.8

Most of the interviewees were impressed by the performance of SJMC graduates. The head of a public broadcaster drove the point home by making before and after comparisons of the corporation's employees:

Generally, what I can say is they are performing to the best of their capabilities. And you can see the difference in those who worked with us then moved to the college [SJMC] and then they came back. You see a difference in their performance before and after. So we are seeing the importance of sending others who have not graduated college to get that kind of education.

The CEO of the Media and Communication Consultancy also toed this line, noting that students who have some exposure to journalism before proceeding to obtain higher qualifications appreciate and turn out to be better journalists than those who get admission to SJMC straight from secondary school. He was also of the view that students who combine schooling with work also turn out to be better journalists than those who simply focused only on getting their degrees:

I think those people become more solid than freshers. And even in the School of Journalism, most of those who have excelled; if you take a look at their background, they either worked as part timers or just as volunteers in newsrooms. [So] after joining the school; firstly, they had their names already and they were learning but in a more practical way than those who were learning theoretically. So, of course, they excel.

The foreign correspondent was particularly impressed by the hard work and professionalism of SJMC graduates in his establishment. He felt that they made important contributions to

story ideas and post mortems - where areas requiring improvements were flagged and followed through.

To the Director News and Current Affairs, SJMC and its antecedent - Tanzania School of Journalism (TSJ) - have provided the human capital that staff the Tanzanian media and communication landscape. As a corporation that employs the bulk of SJMC graduates, he noted that those with Advanced Diplomas have impressed him the most noting that “they are the real journalists because they were trained as a trade.” The degree holders from SJMC, he felt still needed some in-service training to be able to perform optimally.

The foreign correspondent was also of the view that the graduates added value to the advertising component of their function. The public relation (PR) graduates were also holding their own going by the views of head of the VET institution. This interviewee rated the performance of the institution’s public relations officer as “good”, noting that he possesses “generic competence that facilitates proper realization/undertaking of his duties”. The principal singled out the PR officer’s excellent skills in managing the institution’s publications for commendation.

GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES OF SJMC GRADUATES

In terms of graduate attributes, a slight majority of respondents preferred class presentations over other instructional methods like lecture, class seminars and problem/project-based learning (See Table 8). More graduates expressed neutrality on the adequacy of the practical courses in the SJMC syllabi; a subtle sign of displeasure more so as they clearly indicated that the theoretical component was fine (See Tables 9 and 10).

Table 8

Graduates' Preferred Method of Course Delivery

Preferred Method of Course Delivery	Yes	No
Lecture	64 (38.8%)	100 (60.6%)
Class Seminars	78 (47.3%)	85 (51.5%)
Class Presentations	93 (56.4%)	70 (42.4%)
Problem/Project-based learning	53 (32.1%)	111 (67.3%)

Table 9

Respondents' Level of Agreement on the Adequacy of SJMC's Practical Courses

Level of Agreement	No. of Respondents	%
Strongly Agree	8	4.8
Agree	48	29.1
Neutral	71	43.0
Disagree	14	8.5
Strongly Disagree	10	6.1

Table 10

Respondents' Level of Agreement on the Adequacy of SJMC's Theoretical Courses

Level of Agreement	No. of Respondents	%
Strongly Agree	42	25.5
Agree	70	42.4
Neutral	31	18.8
Disagree	4	2.4
Strongly Disagree	1	.6

SJMC graduates felt that the training they received has not kept pace with developments in the field and neither have the facilities and software they were exposed to adequately prepared them for their present responsibilities (See Tables 11-

14). A slight majority felt that the practical training component of the syllabi adequately prepared them for their present responsibilities (See Table 15) even though they also felt it was inadequate (See Table 16).

Table 11

Respondents' Level of Agreement on their Training being an Adequate Preparation for their Present Responsibilities

Level of Agreement	No. of Respondents	%
Strongly Agree	20	12.1
Agree	56	33.9
Neutral	59	35.8
Disagree	10	6.1
Strongly Disagree	3	1.8

Table 12

Respondents' Level of Agreement on SJMC's Training Keeping Pace with Developments in the Field

Level of Agreement	No. of Respondents	%
Strongly Agree	8	4.8
Agree	43	26.1
Neutral	67	40.6
Disagree	22	13.3
Strongly Disagree	3	1.8

Table 13

Respondents' Level of Agreement on Adequacy of Facilities

Level of Agreement	No. of Respondents	%
Strongly Agree	10	6.1
Agree	44	26.7
Neutral	61	37.0
Disagree	26	15.8
Strongly Disagree	5	3.0

Table 14

Respondents' Level of Agreement on Software Exposure Adequately preparing them for their Present Responsibilities

Level of Agreement	No. of Respondents	%
Strongly Agree	6	3.6
Agree	28	17.0
Neutral	56	33.9
Disagree	27	16.4
Strongly Disagree	27	16.4

Table 15

Respondents' Level of Agreement on Practical Training adding no Value

Level of Agreement	No. of Respondents	%
Strongly Agree	6	3.6
Agree	6	3.6
Neutral	18	10.9
Disagree	58	35.2
Strongly Disagree	61	37.0

Table 16

Respondents' Level of Agreement on the inadequacy of Practical Training

Level of Agreement	No. of Respondents	%
Strongly Agree	19	11.5
Agree	42	25.5
Neutral	46	27.9
Disagree	31	18.8
Strongly Disagree	12	7.3

The graduates felt that the SJMC offerings did not properly prepare them for job interviews (Table 17). In terms of skills acquired at SJMC, written and oral communication came out tops, followed by electronic media, public relations and advertising, print and user-generated electronic content

respectively (Table 18). As a consequence they were “somewhat satisfied” overall with SJMC (See Table 19).

Table 17

Respondents’ Level of Agreement on SJMC Courses not properly preparing them for Job Interviews

Level of Agreement	No. of Respondents	%
Strongly Agree	5	3.0
Agree	30	18.2
Neutral	52	31.5
Disagree	41	24.8
Strongly Disagree	22	13.3

Table 18

Respondents’ Overall Level of Satisfaction with SJMC

Level of Satisfaction	No. of Respondents	%
Very satisfied	24	14.5
Somewhat satisfied	136	82.4
Unsatisfied	1	.6
Extremely unsatisfied	1	.6

Table 19

Skills Acquired at SJMC

Skills	No. of Respondents	%
Print media	122	73.9
Electronic media	100	60.6
User generated electronic media	32	19.4
Public Relations and Advertising Skills	110	66.7
Oral and written communication skills	139	84.2
Others		

The foreign correspondent was also impressed with SJMC’s radio and TV studios which provide practical training to students in radio and TV operations. But he wished for more exposure into what are the burning issues and what constitutes news. Elaborating, he felt that there should be investigative reports as well as capacity building so that reporters can discriminate between the truth and falsehood thus keeping the citizenry informed and empowered. These sentiments were also echoed by other interviewees. One of the interviewees called for more analytical approach and interviewing skills which would serve to elevate public discourse while another felt that this would assist students compete in the marketplace and add tremendous value to the media and communication landscape. While commending the teamwork abilities and professionalism that SJMC graduates bring to the table, the foreign correspondent noted that since the focus of his organization was international, this outlook was lacking but that the graduates learnt and adapted quickly to the demands of this particular media operation.

The media and communication consultant acknowledged that the training facilities at SJMC that include radio and TV stations

and a student newspaper was a step in the right direction, but he decried the practice of not tying these to the syllabus:

So I think the problem is the curriculum. I think that something is not exactly right. Something has to be done, to merge the two. You need to have the theory but you need to have the practical side of it. Merge the two and get something better out of it. And I don't think it can be done by volunteerism. If you allow students to make a decision what they want and what they don't want - TV studio, going into a radio studio...

He was of the view that gaining experience in a media environment would assist the students understand the workings of media houses, internalize the discipline and culture so much so that they would realize that it is not a 9 to 5 job. And that this is the recipe for success.

A largely positive picture emerges from the graduates' survey and interviews with employees about the throughput from SJMC. Graduates and employees agree that the courses on offer did prepare them well for the world of work. This is also in line with the findings of the 2012 annual US survey (Becker, Vlad, Simpson & Kalpa, 2012). However, the preference for class presentation is in line with received wisdom that "calls for active, hands-on, collaborative and inquiry-based forms of teaching and learning" (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2007, p. 11).

The large number of neutral response (40%) on the score of SJMC's offerings keeping pace with developments in the industry is a cause for concern given the dizzying pace of

developments in the journalism and mass communication field (Lowry, 2008; Putnis, Axford, Watson & Blood, 2002; Stacks & Bowen, 2013; Robbs, 2010; Thenevot, 2007) as well as the world of work (Bates & Phelan, 2002; Edelman, 2011). An urgent review of the curriculum taking into account the views of employers and other stakeholders is required if the offerings are to remain relevant (Brown, 2007; Fladrich, 2006).

That some of the SJMC graduates were employed in sectors that are not traditional to the fields or as a result of chance also has support in the literature. Shah, Pell and Brooke (2004) found out that 56% of BSc Environmental Protection and BSc Heritage Conservation graduates of Bournemouth University were employed in fields that were relevant to their course of study. But contrary to their findings of a majority (81%) experiencing unemployment in the first months after leaving school, a slight majority of SJMC graduates (52%) got employed in the first six months.

In line with the literature (Gupta & Tomar, 2008; Noko & Ngulube, 2013; Shongwe & Ocholla, 2011; Thornham & O'Sullivan, 2004), graduates and employees also had a long list of areas requiring attention: linking of TV and radio studios to courses, more practical courses and internships, more student-centred learning activities. The disconnect between practical and theoretical courses was also highlighted by Hunter and Nel (2011) and this requires redress if the programmes are to add value to graduates and industry (Putnis, Axford, Watson & Blood, 2002).

Some of the employers commended the skill sets the graduates brought to bear on their functions such as being adaptable and quick learners in addition to media and communication specific abilities; areas flagged in the graduates attributes and employability literature (Bates & Phelan, 2002; Cai, 2012;

Treleaven & Voola, 2008). The interviewees also mentioned that on-the-job training was needed in some cases to better SJMC graduates' abilities. This is in line with the findings of the Bournemouth University's Bachelor of Science programme in Environmental Protection and Heritage Conservation in which graduates reported undergoing further study/training to improve their career prospects (Shah, Pell & Brooke, 2004).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While the interviewees were largely satisfied with the skill sets the graduates possess, they felt that the practical component of the course offerings needed to be worked on. This was also a concern that the graduates flagged given the unduly high number of neutral responses on the score of SJMC offerings properly preparing them for the world of work and their "somewhat satisfied" overall with SJMC course offerings.

The sentiments expressed by the interviewees also raises the debate about journalism and mass communication qualifying as a craft or an academic discipline. Granted that most of the criticisms are usually directed at journalism education (Folkerts, Hamilton & Lemann, n.d.; Thornham & O'Sullivan, 2004) and SJMC offerings transcend this to embrace public relations and advertising, the comparisons to the bygone era when training was treated as a vocation in the then Tanzania School of Journalism, which was a precursor to SJMC, speaks to a longing for the good old days.

Like any other study, this also has some limitations. The recourse to snowball sampling due to the poor response rate from the systematic sampling procedure means that it is not advisable to generalize the findings to all SJMC graduates. Some of the neutral findings, particularly on the variable of

offerings keeping pace with developments in industry requires further interrogation. Other scholars may wish to take a more qualitative approach to get more details on this and other variables. All in all, and in line with the literature, these findings indicate that journalism and mass communication programmes have an important role to play in supplying a critical mass of skilled personnel for the media and communication industry in Tanzania.

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