

Chapter 8

Mainstreaming Gender in Postgraduate Journalism and Communication Programmes in Ghana

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Abstract

Gender representation in journalism and communication is crucial because it shapes how media reflects and constructs society. Extant literature on newsrooms and professional journalism indicate that women are under-represented in terms of numbers and the types of stories they cover. This ‘problem’ of representation within the profession of journalism itself has implications for the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and the framing of women and limits the public’s understanding of women’s issues. Journalism and communication educational institutions play a vital role in shaping the next generation of practitioners, who will take up roles in media organisations and be tasked with the issues of balanced gender reporting and representation. This document analysis examines the existence (or lack) of gendered perspectives, theories, ideologies, and gendered experiential learning opportunities within the postgraduate curricula in media and journalism in Ghana. Although the study establishes the availability of distinct gender courses, their integration is limited. The findings highlight the need to mainstream gender perspectives throughout postgraduate communication and journalism education to better equip future media

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and communication practitioners to challenge stereotypes and present balanced coverage of women's issues within Ghanaian media.

Keywords: Gender mainstreaming; gender representation; journalism education; communication education; postgraduate education; Ghana

Introduction

Academic discourse on gender and the media is not novel. The United Nations (UN) World Conference on Women held in Mexico City in 1975 identified the media as a site for action and a key component in shaping and challenging gender narratives. The UN delegates committed to looking more closely at the status quo of the roles and representations of women in their own countries. In Ghana, Kate Abbam's, a women's magazine publisher at the time, raised the issue of women's status in media organisations in 1975 (Gadzekpo, 2016). Abbam observed that only two of the 71 female employees at the state-owned Ghana Broadcasting Corporation held decision-making roles with most women occupying lower-level positions, making their presence in middle or upper management rare (Abbam, 1975). While significant progress has been made in improving women's status and representation in the media since the 1970s, these issues remain a topic of discussion both nationally and globally because of the inequalities that still exist.

The Global Media Monitoring Project (Macharia, 2021; Macharia et al., 2010), in over two reports, has consistently observed that women, as compared to men, have less opportunity to have their voice heard in the news, and their views are least heard in politics, government, the economy, and business. The 2020 report also indicates that stories in global media are more likely to reinforce than challenge gender stereotypes. More than half of the empowering stories on women were written by women reporters, even though women comprise only about a third of journalists (GMMP, 2020). These findings validate feminist strategies to improve the status of women within media organisations as well as news media discourses (Ross & Padovani, 2016).

Journalism and communication educational institutions are strategic stakeholders in the quest for gender representation because on their campuses, both male and female journalists acquire the requisite skills and training for their careers within the media industry. Yet, despite decades of efforts to bring gender parity to the profession, there remains a disproportionately large ratio of men to women in the journalism profession, and in undergraduate journalism and mass communication programme enrolment (and finally newsrooms), women still form the minority (Huang et al., 2006; York, 2017). The situation is no different in Ghana, where Yeboah-Banin et al. (2020), in a report on the Status of Women in the Ghanaian Media, showed that women exit the media industry early due to low wages and family commitments and that women are underrepresented in executive-level positions within media organisations. This study presumes that a multipronged approach is necessary for challenging and improving the status of women in the media – both in terms of the organisational levels they occupy and the ways they

are represented in the media (Prince et al., 2020). The institutions of higher education that train communication practitioners and journalists are critical sites for the interrogation of the concerns about the status and representation of women. This chapter argues for curricular reform that mainstreams and prioritises gender theories, ideologies and gendered experiential learning opportunities as part of the graduate school programmes of journalism and communications. Scholars like Gadzekpo (2009), Ward and Grower (2020), and Heyder et al. (2021) have emphasised the need for current research to revisit and re-examine long-standing issues while also exploring the new opportunities and challenges that have emerged with the evolution of the media which has resulted in a more active and engaged society. To this end, this chapter focuses on the course descriptions for the journalism and communication studies programmes on the websites of two of the first institutions of higher education to be accredited to teach Journalism and Communication studies, namely the Department of Journalism at the University of Media, Arts and Communication and the Institute of Journalism (UniMAC-GIJ), and the Department of Communication Studies (DCS) at the University of Ghana.

Aims and Significance

The study aimed to examine the extent to which the current MA programmes in these two premiere training institutions for journalists and communicators prepared their students for gender-balanced reporting. By examining the definite ways in which gender is infused into the journalism curricula, whether through the inclusion of dedicated courses on gender and journalism, the integration of gendered angles into other courses, or the use of gender-neutral language and examples throughout the course descriptions, the study sought to respond to the question, ‘how do MA programmes in journalism and communication in Ghana prepare students to represent and report on gender issues fairly and accurately?’ While this study does not offer an exhaustive examination of gender mainstreaming within all Ghanaian communication and journalism curricula, by focusing on UniMac-GIJ and the DCS, where postgraduate communication, journalism, and allied programmes are taught, the study contributes to scholarship on gender mainstreaming as a tool for balanced representation of women by acknowledging the role and contribution of a gender-responsive curriculum. The focus on graduate courses in communication and journalism reflects that graduate-level programmes in journalism and communication studies typically draw an enrolment of experienced professionals who have returned to classrooms for a graduate degree for diverse reasons and are thus more likely to go back to their communication or journalism careers upon completion of their degrees. The two institutions also have private universities that are affiliated with them for the purpose of accreditation to teach and award media and communication degrees; the DCS, however, runs only graduate-level programmes.

Literature Review

The media plays an important part in shaping how the public views and understands the roles of women and men; its influence helps shape attitudes and

perceptions of the general population (Diedong & Tuurosang, 2018), and when it comes to the subject of gender, the media has a long and troubling history of reinforcing stereotypes about masculinity and femininity. In the early 19th century, journalism was considered an unsuitable profession for women, who were expected to remain within domestic spaces (Tuchman, 1996). In the mid-19th century, white, middle-class women in the United States and the United Kingdom began working in newsrooms, focusing on writing 'women's stories' that catered to the expanding female readership (Chambers et al., 2004, p. 38). Women continue to be underrepresented as reporters and generally in the newsroom across the globe. The GMMP (2020) report suggests that women are only the subjects of roughly 25% of all news reporting globally, and when they are featured, their stories are often framed by persistent gender stereotypes. This underscores the critical need for journalism curricula to incorporate training on gender-sensitive reporting. Yeboah-Banin et al. (2020) note that women make up at least 40% of the people who work in the media. Their study found evidence of such persistent systemic inequalities that disadvantage women in media as their disproportional assignment of 'soft news' and social beats, unequal pay, discrimination in promotion opportunities, and the scarcity of women who occupy positions in the upper echelons of media organisations with decision-making positions. Sexual harassment was also common in Ghanaian newsrooms, with less than half of the organisations under study having policies to address the issues of gender-based violence in the workplace. These findings indicate that although there has been some improvement in the status of women in Ghanaian media, old challenges hinder women from realising their full potential in the media space. They further indicate that

on the one hand, there is now a significant presence of young women in Ghanaian newsrooms who are more likely to work on beats traditionally considered the preserve of males. On the other hand, women's presence in top management and boardrooms remains abysmal. While some progress has been made to improve women's workplace conditions (e.g., maternity leave without risk of job loss), newsrooms are still quite inhospitable to women as they lack baby/child-friendly spaces to help them better manage their multiple roles. (Yeboah-Banin et al., 2020, p. 20)

In short, this Ghanaian study confirms Toff and Palmer's (2019) assertion that women's voices are less heard when it comes to discussing news topics, especially in areas like politics, government, the economy, and business. Thus, women's perspectives tend to be underrepresented in these important conversations. Likewise, the GMMP (2020) also shows that stories are more likely to reinforce than to challenge stereotypes in many regions of the world, except for Africa, where stories are equally likely to do so.

Other feminist scholars (North, 2010; Santos et al., 2018) have noted that more than half of the empowering stories on women were written by women reporters, even though women make up only a third of journalists. Blumell and

Mulupi (2024) argued that limited learning opportunities about gender issues and newsroom culture in university journalism courses help maintain the systemic gender inequality in the industry and the gendered stereotypes within the media. Appiah-Adjei (2021) elsewhere has argued that the growth of journalism education warrants an assessment to provide a clear picture of whether the courses taught have implications on how news is crafted and reported. Media and journalism schools can address the societal need for balanced gender representation in media by implementing gender-responsive syllabi.

Gender Mainstreaming in MA Journalism Programmes

The concept of gender mainstreaming has been defined by various scholars and professionals, at the heart of gender mainstreaming is ensuring that any action like new laws, policies, or programmes considers how its impact will affect both women and men. It is thus a strategy designed to ensure that the perspectives and needs of both genders are included in the planning, execution, and evaluation of policies and initiatives. The goal of gender mainstreaming is to create equal benefits for everyone in society such that no one is left behind and inequalities are reduced or eliminated in all of society (Peterson & Jordansson, 2021; UN Women, 2022). Thus, the primary aim of gender mainstreaming is to promote gender equality. According to Unterhalter and North (2010), the concept evolved in the 1980s, driven by the efforts of women's groups during the UN Decade for Women (1976–1985). They highlight that gender mainstreaming emerged not only as a policy aimed at gender equality but also as a strategic approach to shaping policy development. As a result, gender mainstreaming can be seen both as a goal in itself and a means to achieve broader objectives. Although the policy was officially recognised at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, its practice had already been in place for over a decade (Geertsema-Sligh, 2014).

Gender mainstreaming has attracted both praise and condemnation. Chief among these criticisms is doubt about whether gender mainstreaming is effective in challenging and overturning patriarchal structures and replacing them with gender-balanced decision-making (Olsson & Sørensen, 2020). The UNESCO (2012) Report on Gender-Sensitive Indicators concludes that gender balance in education is crucial for media and journalism schools and universities and urges communication schools, training institutes, and NGOs to strive to address such critical areas of concern by focusing education and training on strategic objectives. From these policy and strategic standpoints, it is reasonable to argue that journalism programmes that prepare students to take up roles in an industry rife with gendered issues should mainstream gender in the programme of study because, as Morna and Shilongo (2004, p. 133) argue, 'improvement in media training [...] will lead to improvement in the biased and stereotypical gendered representations that exist within the media space'. Morna and Shilongo further argue that such improvements can include integrating gender awareness training into all types and aspects of media training. A study by Made (2010) in Southern Africa examined 25 institutions and discovered that only a handful had policies aimed at promoting gender equality. The focus on gender issues varied

significantly depending on the individual instructors' knowledge and awareness. Gender-related topics were largely absent from course materials, student assessments, and faculty members' work.

Gender mainstreaming is an approach that requires all media and journalism educators to include gendered perspectives in journalism instruction. [Geertsema-Sligh \(2014\)](#) researched the impact of gender mainstreaming in journalism education and argued that well-rounded journalism education is essential for the next generation of journalists and a critical part of tackling gender bias and the many challenges women face in the media. [Dralega et al. \(2016, p. 12\)](#) found 'minimal, unclear and uncoordinated gender mainstreaming activities within most departmental policies, curricula, assessment and research' in Uganda, Rwanda, and Ethiopia, but this situation is not limited to Sub-Saharan Africa. For example, [Geertsema-Sligh et al. \(2020, p. 25\)](#) reporting on various national studies on mainstreaming gender in journalism curriculum indicate that only a quarter of Spanish universities that offer journalism studies included a subject with a gender perspective, and availability reflected the particular interests in gender issues of the faculty member teaching the course. In Australia there was 'no journalism programme offered a unit that specifically addressed the portrayal of women in the media, or the gendered production of news in gendered newsroom cultures'. A study from 2010 found that whether or not gender was covered in media and journalism programmes often depended on the personal interests of individual teachers. This meant that gender issues were often left out of the classroom ([Made, 2010](#)). These findings, along with other research, suggest a need to make gender a more central part of media education at every level. This is important if we want to see more women in media and journalism and ensure that their voices are heard. As [Martin and Fisher-Ari \(2021\)](#) observed, a curriculum that analyses gender imbalances in media can equip students with the critical skills needed to identify and challenge underrepresentation. This chapter specifically focuses the application of these gender mainstreaming strategies within communication and journalism education. Here, gender mainstreaming is understood as the strategic integration of gender perspectives into postgraduate communication and journalism programmes. I posit that this can be achieved through two methods, the incorporation of a gender lens across all existing courses or the inclusion of dedicated courses that explicitly address the dynamics of gender in media content production and distribution.

Method

This study adopted a qualitative content analysis (QCA) approach to investigate whether the communication of gender and related issues is taught in journalism and communication postgraduate programmes at UniMAC-GIJ and the GCS. An examination of the published course descriptions of the MA degree programmes of these top postgraduate communication and journalism schools was conducted to identify the presence of gender communication in their curricula and the approaches to teaching these issues. A critical analytical method was used for the subjective interpretation of the contents of qualitative data in a systematic

and context-dependent manner (Mayring, 2014), and QCA has become popular among researchers from different disciplines (Selvi, 2019). Hsieh and Shannon (2005) outlined three distinct approaches to QCA, each varying in its use of inductive reasoning. Conventional content analysis involves developing coding categories directly from the raw data through an inductive process. Directed content analysis begins with an existing theory or research findings that guides the initial coding process and summative content analysis that counts specific words or content features and then moves beyond counting to a deeper analysis of latent meanings and themes through close reading.

This study applied the summative QCA approach because the ultimate aim was to explore how words are used in a more open and inductive way. Krippendorff (2018) explains how content analysis techniques enable valid inferences from data to their context and are thus good techniques for contextual and text-based variables. These strengths of QCA informed its employment in this study to collect data from the graduate curriculum of the three selected journalism schools in Ghana and assess the extent to which gender is mainstreamed within their respective curricula.

An Overview of the Selected Universities

Many gender and communication scholars alike have presented arguments for integration of gender perspectives into media and journalism education and practice to foster representative, critical, ethical, just, and balanced journalism. Dralega et al. (2016) established that while resource constraints are the attributed cause for the lack of gender mainstreaming, other prevailing factors include the absence of clear policy guidance and the 'know-how' to efficiently implement meaningful gender mainstreaming attempts as well as apathy among some staff towards the implementation of existing policies. The findings demonstrated an attitude of dismissiveness to the significance of gender mainstreaming in journalism curriculum that poses concerns about how journalism practice is perpetuating the hegemony of patriarchy. North (2009) argues that an investigation of the extent to which gender issues are transparent in university journalism courses is needed to address gendered newsrooms. Three questions therefore remain: 'if we do not teach them, how will they know? And if they do know, how will they practise?' The recent GMMP (2020) report presents perhaps the most compelling argument for the need for journalism education reform informed by how journalists are trained and prepared for their work.

UniMAC-GIJ, previously known as the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ), was founded in 1959 during the era of Kwame Nkrumah to train journalists and foster a generation of professionals committed to Africa's liberation and development. In 1974, the National Redemption Council (NRC) officially recognised the institute through Legislative Instrument NRCD 275. Later, in 2006, Parliament passed the Ghana Institute of Journalism Act (Act 717), which elevated GIJ to a tertiary institution, empowering it to award degrees, diplomas, and certificates accredited by the National Accreditation Board. In 2020, under the University of Media, Arts and Communication Act (Act 1059), GIJ was merged with the National Film

and Television Institute (founded in 1978) and the Ghana Institute of Languages (established in 1961) to form UniMAC, a unified public university. UniMAC-GIJ's School of Graduate Studies and Research manages postgraduate programmes across its faculties, offering four master's degrees in Public Relations, Development Communication, Journalism, and Media Management (UNIMAC-GIJ, 2023).

The DCS at the University of Ghana has a long-standing commitment to enhancing journalism and mass communication. Founded in 1972 as the School of Communications Studies, its mission was to improve media practice and deepen the public's understanding of communication. Initially, it offered a graduate diploma, serving both media professionals and the broader community. The school's name has changed over time, first in 1974 to the School of Journalism and Mass Communication and then in 1985 to the School of Communication Studies, reflecting a broader array of media-related courses. In 1998, the graduate diploma programme was upgraded to a master's programme, and currently, the institution offers both Master of Arts and Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy degrees. Its vision is to be a leading institution in training media professionals, academics, and researchers, advancing media practice through education and contributing valuable research that benefits the public and the media industry (University of Ghana, n.d.).

Findings

The various strategies considered in the literature for gender mainstreaming in media and related environments situate this study within the broader context of improving gender representation in journalism: increasing the number of women in management positions in media organisations (Adjin-Tettey & Braimah, 2023; Guo & Fang, 2023), altering newsroom culture (Byerly et al. 2023; Shor et al., 2015), addressing media ownership issues (Blumell & Mulupi, 2024), and re-evaluating gatekeeping practices (York, 2017). While these approaches are valuable, this chapter argues for the mainstreaming of gender issues within media and journalism curricula as a foundational step towards achieving gender equity in media representation. Three key findings from the QCA of the graduate school handbooks of the MA in Communication offered by SCS and the MA-level courses in Communication and Journalism offered at UniMAC-GIJ as part of the MA programmes in Public Relations, Development Communication, Journalism, and Media Management support this argument. These findings on the nature of gender mainstreaming within the curriculum, the uncritical presentation of gender roles and stereotypes, and the limited intersectional perspectives are presented and discussed below.

Nature of Gender Mainstreaming Within the Curriculum

Courses Dedicated to Teaching Gender

Thematic analysis of data from the QCA revealed a limited integration of gender into communication and journalism training in the postgraduate courses of the schools under study. One course, 'Gender and Communication', focuses on gendered issues within the media in the MA programme in Communications

Studies at the SCS and covers topics like gender communication, sensitive reporting, and the status of women in the Ghanaian media. What is more, this course is an elective. Although efforts at mainstreaming gender within the postgraduate programme were limited, the University of Ghana launched a gender policy in 2022 that aimed at mainstreaming gender in all university policies and procedures to create a gender-equitable environment ([University of Ghana, 2024](#)). Additionally, all first-year undergraduate students take a compulsory gender course offered by the Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy. While this initiative does not directly target postgraduate communication and journalism students, it is an indication of mainstreaming efforts within the larger campus community.

At UniMAC-GIJ, of the four MA programmes offered by the School of Graduate Studies and Research (comprising regular, sandwich, and evening cohorts), there is also only one course, 'Gender, Representation and Development', that focuses on gender issues within media. It is also an elective. This means that journalism students can graduate from their programme of study at either institution without any training to orient them to gender perspectives in the media and communication landscape within which they will be working. At UniMAC-GIJ, there were also indications of attempts to mainstream gender in undergraduate courses: a fourth-year course (level 400) on 'Gender and Development' is mandatory for students specialising in Public Relations. Although these efforts are not directly targeted at postgraduate journalism and communication students, it is a strong indication of mainstreaming efforts within the university. Thus, at both these premier Ghanaian institutions, the postgraduate programmes in communication and journalism offer only a single, specialised, standalone gender course as an elective, and this [[Peterson and Jordansson, 2021](#)] note can potentially limit the impact and effectiveness of training gender-sensitive journalists and communication practitioners.

Limited Integration of Gender Perspectives in the Curriculum

Gender was not integrated into the core journalism courses offered in either schools' MA in Communication or associated programmes. At UniMAC-GIJ, the gender perspective was not for journalism per se, but rather an incorporation of gender into development-communication approaches. This inherently limits the scope and approach because its specific goal is to

provide students with the opportunity to think about gender and its representations with development, and to critically understand the changing gender representations in relation to development. ([North, 2010](#))

In other words, gender is studied as a component of development communication rather than as a component of journalism and communication education in this course.

The Gender and Communication course offered by the DCS attempts to integrate gender into its broader communication mandate by focusing on 'the theoretical implications of the status and representation of gender in the media' (University of Ghana, n.d.). The course investigates the role of the media in

assigning gendered roles through stereotyping, (the cultivation of) imagery, and the perpetuation of discrimination between the sexes and discusses the forms of anti-discriminatory reporting. This course is an elective, however, and because students decide whether to sign up limits its reach and accessibility and renders it superficial and peripheral in the MA programme.

Uncritical Presentation of Gender Roles and Stereotypes

While the language used in the MA programmes at both institutions was gender-neutral and avoided perpetuating stereotypes, a critical analysis of course content reveals a lack of comprehensive integration of gender issues. This omission hinders the programmes' ability to challenge harmful gender narratives in the media (Yang, 2016). The MA in Communication Studies at the DCS offers some exceptions, where courses like 'Advanced Print Journalism' and 'Media, Culture and Society' incorporated gender within their content to a limited extent. Indeed, the Advanced Print Journalism course description includes among its aims to equip students with skills for 'covering major beats such as gender issues' (University of Ghana, n.d.). The 'Media, Culture and Society' course explores 'media representational practices' with a gender perspective (University of Ghana, n.d.). These examples suggest a limited and uncritical presentation of gender in the curriculum that contradicts Byerly et al.'s (2023) suggestion that a more systematic approach to gender mainstreaming in journalism curriculum is necessary for a deeper engagement with dismantling old and harmful narratives.

Limited Intersectional Perspectives

Another clear gap was identified: lack of intersectionality in the two gender-oriented courses, namely 'Gender and Communication' (SCS) and 'Gender, Representation and Development'. Both courses largely focused on gender perspectives and issues in isolation from other social identities and without consideration of how gender intersects with, for example, status or religion, and shapes media coverage of women in communities.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings indicate considerable gaps and opportunities for improvement in mainstreaming gender within the graduate degree programmes in journalism and communication in Ghana. This confirms Heckman and Homan's (2020) and Geertsema-Sligh et al.'s (2020) assertions that gender courses are still missing in many African mass media schools and departments and that gender/women's studies departments must be created. This is crucial because Sub-Saharan African educational institutions need to equip future generations of media and communication practitioners to be more critical creators and consumers of media to promote an equitable and inclusive media environment.

A gendered, responsive curriculum plays an important role in providing the missing links in balanced representation and improving the status of women in

the media. Critical media studies and communication training must take note of and endeavour to remedy these old concerns by defining and articulating gendered perspectives – either by integrating gendered perspectives into the core communication and journalism courses or offering dedicated, core courses on gender. Regardless of the approach, the most critical issue is to reflect seriously on gendered issues in the media and how postgraduate education, which is the nexus of journalism practice and theory, can position itself to redress some of these challenges. Leemann et al. (2010) have argued that to address gender concerns meaningfully in the educational sector, institutional constraints must be confronted and the curricula and research agendas in schools and departments must be revised to encourage better collaboration between academics and non-academics. UniMAC-GIJ is already making efforts. For example, on 27 October 2023, its faculty organised an all-lecturers workshop on *Creating a Gender Sensitive, Non-discriminatory and Inclusive Curriculum, Classroom and Work Environment* funded by the UNESCO Excellence in Journalism Education in Africa Project Grant (UniMAC-GIJ, 2023).

Kitta and Cardona-Moltó (2022) argue that mainstreaming gender in journalism education involves integrating gender perspectives, theories, and experiential learning opportunities throughout the entire curriculum. This approach, they argue, ensures continuous and deliberate exposure to gender issues and better prepare students to challenge and address gender biases in their professional careers. This study not only supports these scholarly positions but also recommends further studies on the process of mainstreaming and the specific topics that need to be mainstreamed within the Ghanaian context. Orienting students to deal with gendered issues and inequality is an important component of journalistic training that should not be overlooked. The currently superficial inclusion of gender in the MA journalism programmes flags that more work and effort need to be invested in designing gender and inequality courses that will form part of the foundational courses in postgraduate-level journalism programmes.

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