

# AN APPROACH TO MEDIA EDUCATION IN AFRICA

## UNA APROXIMACIÓN A LA EDUCACIÓN EN MEDIOS EN ÁFRICA

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**Abstract:** In this paper we make an approach to media education in Africa. The called Media Literacy is a social, academic and cultural movement, with special development in certain countries in Latin America and a wide presence in Europe and, to a lesser extent, in other countries. In 1979 Unesco expressly referred to the importance of knowing by society the implications which correspond to the media, due to the importance in many different areas of daily life of citizens. More than three decades later, the aspirations of a suitable media education are extended to the new platforms of media, with the Internet leading, and keep on being of interest as mainstay of civic participation and democratic advance. All of all, no forgetting the significant role played worldwide by the communication for development and communication for social change.

**Keywords:** Education; media; international; Africa.

**Resumen:** En este artículo se hace una aproximación a la educación en medios en África. La llamada *Media Literacy* es un movimiento social, académico y cultural con especial desarrollo en determinados países de América Latina y una amplia presencia en Europa y, en menor medida, en otros continentes. La Unesco se refirió expresamente en 1979 a la importancia de conocer por parte de la sociedad cuantas implicaciones corresponden a los medios de comunicación, por su trascendencia en los más diferentes ámbitos del día a día de los ciudadanos. Más de tres decenios después, las aspiraciones de una adecuada educación mediática se amplían a las nuevas plataformas de medios, con Internet a la cabeza, y siguen siendo motivo de interés como pilar de participación cívica y profundización democrática. Todo ello sin olvidar el papel que le corresponde en todas las latitudes respecto a la comunicación para el desarrollo y a la comunicación para el cambio social. **Palabras clave:** Educación, medios de comunicación, internacional, África.

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## **1. Introduction. Some terminological considerations about communication and education**

The most relevant and supranational institutions have dealt with the issue we tackle in this text. This is the case of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco), which in 1979 established that the term "Educommunication" or Media Education refers to all forms of studying, learning and teaching, at all levels, and in all circumstances, the history, creation, use and evaluation of media as practical and technical arts. As the place of media in society, their social impact, the consequences of mediated communication, participation, changes that occur in the ways of perception and the role of creative work and the access to media communication.

In a 1982 statement, the institution itself expressed clearly by considering that instead of condemning or approving the undisputed power of media, it is obliged to accept as an established fact their considerable impact and spread throughout the world and to recognize at the same time that the media are an important element of culture in the contemporary world. And then it was made sure not to underestimate the role of communication and media in the development process, and the role of these in relation to the promotion of active participation by citizens in society. And it was called for political and educational systems alike that they must assume their obligations to promote among citizens a critical understanding of communication phenomena.

The international organization also referred to advances in technology and public collective communication improvements, that accountable educators do not ignore; rather strive to help students to understand and perceive the significance of the consequences involved especially in the rapid growth of two-way communication that favors access to a more individualized information. Four lines of action were proposed at that time to make education more effective, with the inescapable phenomenon of communication at sight (Masterman, 1993: 286).

- ▶ 1. Organize and support integrated programs of education on media from pre-school to university and adult education in order to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable the creation of a critical knowledge and therefore increased competition among users of electronic and print media. Ideally, these programs will range from content analysis of the media to the use of the tools for expression of creativity, without neglecting the use of available communication channels based on an active participation.
  
- ▶ 2. Develop training courses for educators and different types of leaders and mediators, aimed at improving their knowledge and understanding of

media so as to get them used with appropriate teaching methods that take into account the knowledge of the media, still fragmentary, which already has the majority of students.

- ▶3. To stimulate research and development activities concerning education on media in disciplines such as Psychology and Communication Sciences.
- ▶4. To support and strengthen the measures taken or envisaged by Unesco in order to encourage international cooperation in the field of education on the media.

There are plenty of close or historical examples which show the need for a critical reading of media information and consideration of the credibility of the media or what is attributed to them. As a mere example, consider some of the times when a canard, an absolutely false rumor becomes indisputable news, because someone says that a friend or family member has seen it on television, or he or she tells as if he had witnessed. Even if no one has known directly that program, that information, very few dare to doubt it is real. It is not that the visual representation, that the popular domain "news" is partially false: it is that it does not exist. It has built a "reality", in this case not by the media, but by appealing to them, which sometimes are forced to deny that there is such. The setup is exposed, but perhaps not always and for all recipients and victims of such inventions, which sometimes affect privacy, honor or such values. Corrections and denials always have less force.

Three and a half decades after those considerations made by Unesco, with the consolidation and dominance of the Internet and technological realities, social and economic issues involved, the need already mentioned not only remains but also increases its importance due to the new stage of development of global communication.

We believe, therefore, of interest to deal with this tour of the functions and goals of Education Communication concerning the various places that will be analyzed. WE will take into consideration the situation in Africa in this area, which is an unavoidable opportunity to the civic practice of the media (Banda, 2009) .

As Paulo Freire claimed (1996: 130): "Popular and democratic education, as we see it today and announced yesterday, rejecting distorting dichotomies, aims at the understanding of facts and reality in the complexity of their relationships. The critic training involves information necessarily. It concerns us all, not only the information or training, but the relationship between them, to achieve the critical moment in which information is transformed into training".

There is no unanimity among authors when referring to the continuing efforts to understand and use the media from a social perspective. Similar expressions are used as "edukommunikation" or media education; media education, media literacy and digital literacy, among others. The concept of information literacy is equivalent to that used in the field of library and information science in the search for user education in documentary libraries and institutions, in this case.

It is appropriate to know the vision of David Buckingham (2005: 21) on the question of terminology: "Media education is the process of teaching and learning about media; media literacy is the result of the knowledge and skills acquired by students". On education and communication are also noteworthy the contributions from Potter (2011) and Sierra Caballero (2000, 2005).

Some people clearly distinguish between media education from formal and informal education and the concern for the media, especially the publicly owned television worldwide, by providing quality content for training and cultural enrichment of the population, especially children and youth. However, such situations are not so far in terms of their primary objectives: to provide a public service to guarantee social and democratic improvement.

Beyond conceptual details or nuances, and despite not identifying fully comparable realities, it can not be denied the importance of media education presented in relation to areas such as communication for development and social change communication.

## **2. Reference to media education in some geographical areas**

In the case of Europe, media education has a long and extensive background and, unlike Latin American efforts has generally been linked to the development of plans and programs of study and has been a fundamental part of the debate on the pedagogical transformation of school (Orozco and Charles, 1990: 99).

The first experiments on media education were developed in the early sixties, upon consolidation of communication in every economically advanced countries, "while it is in the eighties when universal eclosion occurs, the crucial period in the development of programs in most countries of virtually every continent, even though much more timidly in regions considered less developed" (Aguaded, 1999).

Several countries of the old continent have carried out very valuable experiences in this field as well as in the work of academic production about media education, with names like Len Masterman, from the British sphere. In France they have developed, for example, ambitious projects to work with film in the classroom. In this particular field, France has a noticeable wealth of experience over the years. Education through film was also the aim of the education program initiated by the great Russian filmmaker Serge Eisenstein.

Besides the United Kingdom and France, Nordic countries such as Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark have had experiences of interest in this field. But also Germany, Belgium, Switzerland and Russia.

It is clear that public television has been the engine of educational television in Europe. Nowadays are not good moments for public service media, as the Greek case attests, where even all traces of national public television are in danger. A clearly regressive and harmful situation for all citizens and the health of the present depleted western democracies.

In Spain, as in other countries in different continents, education experiences of communication have been made and are made in the field of formal education and, to a lesser extent, in media spaces.

At this moment, it can be considered that the fact that there is a growing academic research and the resulting book production, both internationally and in Spain, contributes to institutional and professional awareness about the validity of ongoing experiences and the advisability of continuing in that line of training from school on collective public communication in new information technologies.

And the reflection of the growing importance of media education has been seen in the curricula of most Faculties of Information and Communication of Spain, which provide some subjects, usually optional, dedicated to this field. It is also the case of the Faculties of Educational Sciences and Teacher Training Schools, with compulsory subjects more focused in new technologies, but also covering the role of media in contemporary society and their potentialities as educational resource for teaching and learning material.

In the Spanish case there has been training plans and institutional projects in which, in the opinion of Agustín García Matilla, technologies and media have primacy on an overview of communicative character. In a sense, technology is inseparable from the contents, so technology should not prevail over the latter, but both dimensions should find an appropriate symbiosis.

Among some of the state education initiatives in communication implemented in Spain are the promotion, during the eighties and nineties of the last century, of programs to introduce newspapers in the classroom (Press-School Program, 1985-1990); the use of new technologies and computing (Athena and Alhambra, etc.) or the use audiovisual media for didactic purposes (Mercury Program, Zahara XXI, etc.).

The academic research usually refers with emphasis to the triad of Athena and Mercury projects and program-School Press. The specific objectives of these experiences are indicative of the evident nature in media education that underlies them (Torregrosa, 2006).

In today's schools the situation is not that ideal because of insufficient attention paid to this field, such as the prevalence of partial and limited approaches, therefore impossible to be implemented. It is unacceptable that the statements included in educational legislation shall not be accompanied with sufficient resources to allow their implementation. Training in the use of new technological tools is necessary, but it must go further: to provide experiences based on overviews of the complex phenomenon of communication, analysis of methodologies and knowledge of the media, to provide resources and adequate teacher training plans, as many authors claim and as it seems reasonable to propose.

Latin America represents one of the largest geographical areas that have carried out greatest and continued efforts of media education, despite the obvious differences that can be observed in the respective countries, depending, often, on the political and economic situation of the moment.

In Latin America, the initiatives have been numerous and generally have enjoyed great popular acceptance. Many of them have been clearly linked to the idea of communication and education for development and social change, encouraged by critics of dependency theories of the sixties and seventies. Barranquero (2007: 116) has pointed out how reflection on communication and development education were born in the United States in the late fifties from the work of Rogers, Lerner and Schramm. The main criticism would be born precisely in Latin America, "in a historical context, the seventies, very fertile for ideas of dependency and liberation. Authors such as Paulo Freire, Luis Ramiro Beltrán, Orlando Fals Borda and Juan Díaz Bordenave, and a host of experiences of popular and alternative communication (radio-forums, radio schools, community radio stations, etc.), led the dominant initial perspective to complex budgets, favoring the participation, dialogue, the endogeneity of social change or the democratizing function of communication". As it was during the 80's the reference document in relation to the issue of the imbalance of information flows and access to global communication, in a sense, is still today the MacBride Report (1980).

United States and Canada, Australia and Japan are some of the other geopolitical areas which have developed and continue to promote outstanding media education activities.

Despite the preponderance both in Latin America and Europe, over the last thirty or forty years, "in many different parts of the world, there has been the development of a movement, initially, but which has gradually been taking full momentum and strength, which has sought to address the problems of the complex relationships of children and youth with the media and the need to plan and design an education for the knowledge of these new languages", all in the context of a society that is increasingly media driven (Aguaded, 1999).

### 3. Africa on the goal of Media Education

#### 3.1 Communication and press freedom in African countries

In the case of Spain, although the list of specialist authors in Communication and Africa is not too long nowadays, it can be checked the growing interest in the study from recent work of authors such as Castel and Sendín (2009), Sendín and Castel (2010), Mancinas and Zurbano in Franco and García (2011), or Castel and Bajo (2013), among others, some of whom have many years of research in this area.

So it has to do with the African media education, the works of Spanish literature are virtually nonexistent. It is not the case of publications produced by other authors such as Banda (2009), Saleh (2009, 2012) or Yao (2012). Among the Anglo-Saxon's production is worth mentioning the publications of Banda (2008) or Wasserman (2006, 2011). African traditional education in relation to the situation that the school offers nowadays in sub-Saharan Africa is one of the issues that various researchers have also focused on from the national and international specialists.

Fackson Banda calls for the existence of a "neo-colonial dependency" of African media education, to continue "within the constraints of Western epistemology and ontology" (Banda, 2009: 167).

The political dependency is only the most obvious form of dependency: there are many others such as the economic dependence and cultural, which are often linked to the first, but is not necessarily always the case. In the latter area, the culture, which is part of communication, it can exert more or less novel forms of neocolonialism and imperialism extremely serious for the countries and the people.

Since the differences are outstandingly on several grounds as ethnicity, linguistic, economic, political, religious and social life among the people of Africa, we can not speak globally without incurring in Western stereotypes. If it is done in this work, it is only for reasons of academic exposure and with reference to other areas such as Europe and Latin America. For that reason, the considerations included in this text are centered especially in sub-Saharan Africa, with some references to the north of the continent.

Even if Africa's progress is occurring, it is not happening evenly throughout the continent, besides the World Bank statement on the economy of sub-Saharan Africa, which is growing at rates of 4.8 percent, which, according to the agency's analysis, suggests a bright future based especially on its mineral wealth, particularly in oil, according to data collected by Fontana (2013: 79).

To what refers to the development of the media sector from an African perspective, we should emphasize the remarks made by Sendín (2010: 13):

"Until the sixties the media are a distinctly colonial product, like their contents. After independence and until the eighties the media change its colonial character to those of the new post-colonial governments, based on national liberation movements, expression of the new amalgam of army and personal power of the head of state in the context of the appearance of unique political parties". The same research indicates that from the eighties a major transformation occurs due to the gradual disappearance of the government monopoly on information. The independent press, community and commercial radio and television, have now their place to occupy the new space (Sendín, 2010).

To ascertain the present situation and the future possibilities of media education in the African context, it is also necessary to map freedom of the press in the continent. So does Yao (2012: 153) from the data of 2012 report on press freedom issued by Reporters Without Borders (RSF in the Spanish and French abbreviation), which documents that African countries are becoming more numerous in the list of models of press freedom. Specifically, nine of them, compared to the previous seven, are among the fifty states with the highest score of the world rankings from 2011 to 2012. The first African country ranked is Cape Verde, in ninth place, with its "governance model" in which journalists are "totally free". Meanwhile, Namibia is in the twentieth place, twenty-fifth Mali and Ghana in the forty-first. These countries are "traditionally engines of the continent in terms of respect of journalists", according to Jean-Arsène Yao (2012), who underline the remarkable progress of Niger (number twenty-nine on the list), advancing seventy-five places only in a year and in this way it makes the greatest global progression to allow the press there to be "free" and benefiting from a "favorable legislation", according to RSF study. Yao noted that South Sudan, "young nation facing many challenges, enters the classification in an acceptable place (111), considering it comes from one of the bottom placed countries: Sudan (170)".

However, the biggest drops occur also in Africa:

- ▶ Djibouti, little dictatorship in the Horn of Africa, loses 49 places, to be situated in 159.
- ▶ Malawi loses 67 and goes to 146.
- ▶ Uganda fell 43 places to 139.



- ▶ Côte d'Ivoire also fell 41 positions (159).
- ▶ Finally, Eritrea closes the placings with the number 197.

### 3.2 The African media education

Once exposed in broad outline the current situation of press freedom in African countries, we refer to the situation of media education. Referring to the Middle East and North Africa, Ibrahim Saleh asks (2009: 121): "How can media freedom support liberty and identity?, how can the vertical hierarchy of news become in a network of news horizontal communication?, how can it be developed a better understanding of the complexities of the media in the region for a greater civic engagement?". The author believes that confronting desires with reality, often gives rise to the "vicious circle of the oxymoron". It should be noted that the text of Saleh is written before the Arab Spring of 2011, in which youth and technology were key factors of social mobilization and social hopes.

Saleh himself (2012) studied the objectives and tools that media education presents in the South African case. He recognizes the enormous effort recently developed by the South African government for the expansion of the role of media education, with the goal of providing equal and quality access to the entire population, but particularly to disadvantaged groups. In this same line, MIL Unesco curriculum of media literacy "defines the competencies and skills that are required to teach citizens to interact with media and information systems effectively, to develop critical thinking and skills to learn to socialize and become active citizens. However, these proposals are directly affected by the limited budgets and the lack of qualified teachers; training of trainers and the non-presence of media and information literacy in the curriculum "(Saleh, 2012: 37).

In the South African case, the audiovisual education starts from the aesthetic and academic roots of international trends in this field, with key mentors as the British Film Institute and the European School of Cultural Studies. Despite this heritage there is an imbalanced toward South Africa that arose from its strong influence due to the political struggle to dismantle apartheid and the opposition movement channeled through some media outlets (Criticos, 1996: 449).

Several authors emphasize the technological factor as especially determinant in Africa as regards media education, with the verification of the importance of Internet both in this matter as in the role of the Net to combat clamps and censorship so often imposed on the press anywhere in the world.

As Castel and Bajo Erro highlight (2013: 91), "the emergence of social networks and Web 2.0 in the African scene is an important modification in the schemes of both social and political participation as in the range of instru-

ments to mobilize. It is true that the Internet penetration in most of the continent is still too low for the analysis of the impact of these communication technologies. In the same sense, novelty can create a temptation to magnify their role".

The authors analyze the specific situation of Senegal, Ghana and Angola in the field of information technology and communication, noting also the strength of mobile phones in most of the African countries.

Other experts have noted the significance of radio broadcasts in general in the rural setting of many nations on the continent. Particularly, the role of community radio for development purposes in Africa (Alumuku and White, 2006). However, the academic literature also warns that the power of radio has been used both in the interest of peace and in favor of hate, with very known cases as serious as the role played by the private radio station Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTL) in Rwanda's genocide in 1994 (Sendín, 2010; Yao, 2012).

Regarding the global situation that media education in Africa offers today, Fackson Banda (2009: 168) considers that there is a feature of triple nature. Part of its identity is due to the colonial interpenetration; it is in keeping with the character of postcolonial African society (it appears the postcolonial state mark of national unity and media curriculum development); and finally African media education is associated with the era of globalization, visible since the nineties. Professor Banda also warns that "neoliberal interpretation of media education has meant a greater emphasis on technical skills at the expense of critical engagement, which has had implications for the position and role of the citizen in the African state".

Banda himself, while analyzing the case of radio listening clubs in Malawi and Zambia, reports that African media educators have "little or no resources to generate native knowledge. When any knowledge is produced, it must be legitimized by Western institutions through funding, peer review and other similar academic validation processes. Although progress has been made in terms of the totality of knowledge production, distribution and consumption, Africa does not seem to have achieved economic self-sufficiency levels that are required to maintain its own independence and epistemic and ontological identity on the world stage".

Given these shortcomings, we should move towards a model of media education for citizenship that allows "a postcolonial emancipation of the liberal philosophical constraints that seem to enslave African media education". It is a model that highlights "a critical-paradigmatic pedagogy" presided over by a number of main skills such as the following (Banda, 2009: 179):

- ▶ Analyze the correlation between media, democracy and development critically.
- ▶ Develop an emancipated vision of journalism.
- ▶ Foster active citizens.
- ▶ Strengthen a viable institutional infrastructure of democracy.
- ▶ Promote an informed support to human rights.

Finally, we shall not forget to point out that a fully-fledged communication education carried out anywhere should be able to look to other regions and countries, in order to eradicate topics and long-established, stereotyped and prejudiced visions, that the media representations go through so many times, something very remarkable in the case of information and news related to Africa and African people, as it has been highlighted by numerous specialists. It is certainly indispensable to renew narratives that are free at least of that unfair and prejudicial burden.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Media education accumulates decades of efforts by teachers, journalists and citizens as a tool to improve media competence and critical thinking of students and the whole of any society that claims to be free and autonomous.

All continents have experienced, to a greater or lesser extent, initiatives in the field of theory and applied media education. The evident fact that the media education does not always cover in all countries the same goals and the same realities, should not deter us of its potential and justification, even nor to forget the present reality that there is an international recognition of its major social function, especially as it has to do with the media, and television in particular, along with the new role through the Internet. What is clear, whatever it is the geographic area being studied, is that –as Victoria Camps requests (2009)– media education must go beyond the school.

In the global context, the African media education has significant possibilities which have been used, with notable differences among countries, depending on many factors, like real press freedom or the lack of it. However, African media education also carries problems arising from such determining factors as its colonial past, and the excessive influence of Western philosophy and vision, a conception predominantly mercantilist and utilitarian, values promoted by

large international media corporations. Against this, it is necessary to claim a space of action marked by indigenous knowledge generation. Only thus it can be achieved a sufficient level of independence and identity.

Until these goals are reached, collective action should be promoted: as the African proverb says, "many small people, in small places, doing small things, can change the world".

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