Simon Vurayai
An Authentic Assessment of Media Studies in Zimbabwean Higher Education

RESUMEN

Los Estudios de Medios constituyen un ámbito dinámico y diverso de interés académico, con relevancia social y cultural. Dado su creciente presencia en el ámbito académico, las organizaciones de medios y la sociedad civil, persiste una curiosidad innata en los grupos de interés mediáticos respecto a la eficacia de su implementación curricular, la difusión de sus disciplinas y la configuración de futuras incursiones profesionales en la industria. Este estudio evaluó la implementación de los Estudios de Medios en la educación superior de Zimbabue. El Modelo de Contexto, Insumo, Proceso y Producto (CIPP) de evaluación curricular se encargó como base del estudio. El estudio señaló desafíos en la implementación de los Estudios de Medios, como la comprensión insuficiente de los mismos; la falta de recursos humanos e infraestructurales; una estrategia de implementación deficiente; y el entorno político. El estudio formuló recomendaciones que incluyen la descolonización del currículo de Estudios de Medios, el fortalecimiento de las alianzas a largo plazo entre la industria y la academia en materia de financiación, prácticas profesionales, desarrollo de proyectos mediáticos innovadores, la provisión de infraestructura tecnológica de vanguardia y el desarrollo de habilidades para docentes y estudiantes.

Abstract: The Media Studies constitutes a dynamic and diverse sphere of academic curiosity, of societal and cultural significance. Given its emerging status across academia, media organizations, and civil society, there persists an innate curiosity in media interest groups regarding the efficacy of their curricular implementation, the dissemination of their disciplines, and the shaping of future professional forays into the industry. This study evaluated the implementation of Media studies in Zimbabwean Higher education. The Context, Input, Process, and Product (CIPP) Model of curriculum evaluation was commissioned as the bedrock

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of the study. The study noted challenges in the implementation of media studies such as inadequate understanding of media studies; inadequate human and infrastructural resourcing; poor implementation strategy; and the political environment. The study proffered recommendations that include decolonising the Media studies curriculum, enhancing long-term industry-academia partnerships regarding funding, internships, development of innovative media projects, the provision of state-of-the-art technological infrastructure and skill development for lecturers and students

Key words: Higher education; Media studies, CIPP model, curriculum evaluation, Curriculum implementation.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore some challenges and opportunities in implementing Media Studies in Zimbabwean higher education. Important lessons from international experience which could inform the course of Media Studies in Zimbabwe are considered. Also discussed are some relevant concerns regarding Zimbabwean society and the current position of Media Studies with regard to national policy making. Media Studies can make a substantial contribution to the development of a democratic Zimbabwe (Chirume, Teer-Tomaselli, & Chirume, 2019). However, in several respects this contribution may be more likely to be realized after independence than before (Muchena, 2013a). Media Studies constitutes a dynamic and diverse sphere of academic curiosity, of societal and cultural significance (Higdon, & Butler, 2024). Given its emerging status across academia, media organizations, and civil society, there persists an innate curiosity in media interest groups regarding the efficacy of their curricular implementation, the dissemination of their disciplines, and the shaping of future professional forays into the industry. Hence, there is a personal interest in scrutinizing the academic routines of the ongoing.

A two-pronged approach is taken, first by outlining the Zimbabwean situation with regard to democracy, public debate, and Media Studies, and then considering the role of education in providing conditions conducive to benefitting from Media Studies. Zimbabwe, like most countries in the world, is dominated by commercial mass media. These have either been ignored or seen solely as a tool of colonialism (Muchena, 2013a). However, such media play a significant role in public debate in Zimbabwe, both before and after independence . Even before independence efforts have been made to provide non-colonial educational Broadcasting and alternative print media specifically for black people that are designed to encourage teaching/learning. These efforts need to be strengthened and expanded after independence (Tshabangu, & Salawu, 2024) in order to provide the basis for a more participatory democracy and for benefitting from the educational potential of commercial mass media.

2. Background of Media Studies in Zimbabwean Higher Education

The historical and contextual background of Media Studies in Zimbabwean higher education is explored. Higher education institutions offer a wide variety of programs and qualifications, which speak to the educational needs of Zimbabwean students and prospective students. These include professional, vocational, and academic programs in most fields, including the social sciences, humanities, business studies, and technological fields. At the forefront of a schism in the higher education sector are the institutions' media studies programs, including journalism. The history of these programs and their concomitant socio-political context are discussed, with a view to enabling a better understanding of the specific challenges and opportunities that pertain to them. Global debates on social pluralism, globalization, and democratization impacted heavily on developing countries (e.g. Zimbabwe) at independence, leading to the establishment of institutions catering to the media studies needs of citizens in the nascent democracies (Alfandika & Akpojivi, 2020). Zimbabwe, one of the countries that emerged from the colonial subjugation and domination of African countries by Europe and, subsequently, the U.S.A. became independent of the settler colonial regime on April 18, 1980. Independent governments in Africa and countries emerging from the former East European bloc sought to democratize the polity, the economy, and the media (Muchena, 2013a). In Zimbabwe, this took the form of, firstly, striving for social pluralism in the postcolonial period. Such pluralism was not only essential for democracy, but also for the social amelioration of previously disadvantaged (Mpofu & Moyo, 2017) and marginalized socio-economically by colonial rule, and politically by settler colonialism. Public policies were also informed by the realization of the inadequacies of centralized government in resolving socio-economic problems of the polity (Ndlovu, 2015) it was hoped that diversification of the economy through privatization of publicly controlled enterprises would bring about growth and prosperity, coupled with the fundamental shift in focus from being free and independent–nationalist import substitution producers for the local market–to being free and independent deregulated and bilaterally-multilaterally trade dependency in the classical sense.

3. Theoretical Frameworks for Media Studies in Higher Education

There are a variety of theoretical frameworks relevant to the evaluation of Media Studies in Higher Education and the CIPP was utilised in this study. The CIPP model is a conceptual framework for evaluation that stands for Context, Input, Process, and Product (Aryana, Burhanudin, Fauziya, & Wagiran, 2022). The Evaluation Model known as CIPP was developed in the early 1970s through the collective efforts of a group devoted to educational development and evaluation engaged in ongoing projects in educational evaluation and assessment, curriculum and program development, teacher education and professional development, and state and local educational planning and policymaking (Jibril & Bagceci, 2024). Among the founders are two notable figures, Thelma A. Ainsworth and Daniel L. Stufflebeam, whose names have been closely linked with the work and growth of the CIPP model (Kafle, 2023).

The CIPP model of evaluation is widely implemented in various realms, including education, by various professionals in diverse contexts. The factors of context, input, process, and product are simply four different ways of looking at the same world using different lenses (Stufflebeam, 2004). The CIPP model offers a comprehensive framework for evaluating the adequacy of any program or system. It proves particularly relevant and ideal for evaluating new, ongoing, or older academic programs at educational institutions. This approach emphasizes the curriculum, its evaluation, the stakeholders involved in the process, the characteristics of media, and defining terms like evaluation, model, and the CIPP model of curriculum evaluation (Kim & Lim, 2021). Consequently, the goal is to provide an analytical study of the CIPP model of curriculum evaluation, exploring its fundamental concepts, parameters, and techniques, with an intent to pursue further research exploring the intersections between curricular implementation and its evaluation process.

The four contexts of the CIPP model of evaluation support one another. They interact with each other so that even if the evaluation process is concerned chiefly with one, the other three are also evaluated to some extent. The CIPP model in Media studies evaluation can guide the evaluators to better comprehend the contexts, inputs, processes, and products of the educational evaluation situation so as to make good decisions, take good actions, and obtain desirable outcomes (Rejina & Baral, (2023). The CIPP model emphasizes open inquiry for providing good information to promote the thoughtfulness of stakeholders, rather than simple feedback for making decisions. Hence, the CIPP evaluation effort is often aimed at the various stakeholders instead of the decision-makers in Media Studies. Each of the four evaluations is supposed to contribute different information needed to facilitate the evaluation effort, and different inquiries are provided as a guide.

4. Curriculum Design and Development

Central to the successful implementation of Media Studies are the design and development of the curriculum, as well as the relevant teaching materials (Chibuwe & Muromo, 2023). From the CIPP Model in can be inferred that the support of local academic institutions like universities and colleges is therefore critical in the reorientation of and provision of new Media Studies curricula. There is currently no Media curriculum at any level of the formal education system in Zimbabwe. This, nevertheless, allows for creativity during the design and development of new Media Studies curricula and teaching materials. The curricula need to be developed from a local context suitable for the local environment (Mavhunga, 2006; Rasi, Ruokamo & Maasilta, 2017). For example, curricula should be developed at diploma and certificate levels, in addition to the existing degree curricula, so that there are progression routes into and beyond the degree level. Initial research conducted on the currently available print-text writing in policies and curricula indicates that they are designed and developed from a Western perspective (Chibuwe & Muromo, 2023) with little or no reference to the local realities and contexts. Like other subjects, the newly designed Media Studies curricula should take into consideration the local contexts and realities. A library collection on the local context (local cultural and societal

dynamics), especially at the level of higher education, is required for reference in the design and development of the new Media Studies curricula (Rasi et al, 2017).

5. Incorporating Local Contexts and Realities

The design of the curriculum for new courses in Media Studies for Zimbabwe and Southern Africa cannot be conceptualised outside local conditions, situations, current realities and contexts as implied in the CIPP model. There is no doubt that there is value in looking at what others in the same field have done, are doing and would like to do. However, when it comes to shaping ethos, philosophies, ideologies, and concepts of 'education' and pedagogies for Zimbabwe and other Southern African countries, the emphasis should be on local contexts and realities (Mpofu, 2022). Critical attention should be centred on pervasive local concerns in terms of climate, political repression, corruption, violence, social injustice, impoverishment, crises, deprivation, and exploitation in numerous forms such as cultural, sexual, racial, gender, economic, political, educational, information and communication, to name but the most conspicuous of macro-concerns that shape local contexts (Mavhunga, 2006). In recognition of these concerns, attention to indigenous knowledge systems teachers' and teacher educators' knowledges and perceptions of Local Knowledge is essential (Shizha, 2007). The curriculum should embrace indigenous knowledge and be sensitive to local cosmologies and cultural beliefs (Mpofu, 2022). To practice inclusiveness, attention should be paid to the representation of local epistemologies, ontologies, ethics, aesthetics, spiritualities and ideas.

6. Faculty Training and Development

In many countries where Media Studies has been firmly institutionalized, lack of adequately trained faculty members constitutes a major obstacle in institutionalizing the discipline in higher education (Chibuwe & Salawu, 2020). The majority of academic staff members in newly established Media Studies units in Zimbabwean universities have no prior exposure to either media and communication issues or media education training (Tandi, Mawere, & Mukwazhe, 2023). However, inability to implement and sustain projects that improve the academic qualifications of staff through training, on-the-job mentoring, workshops and conferences, as well as curriculum development initiatives that tap on a pool of international media education specialists constitutes a significant limitation in addressing the training and development needs of academics.

7. Addressing Skills Gaps and Professional Development Needs

In Zimbabwe, the need to train and develop faculty members in newly introduced areas of Media Studies is apparent and acute, especially with regard to disciplines such as journalism studies, advertising and publicity studies, media and society studies and cultural studies (Muchena, 2013b; Modise, 2016). Currently, no provision is made within Zimbabwean institutions of higher learning for the training of media studies educators (Tandi, et al, 2023). Furthermore, institutions of higher learning in

Zimbabwe have generally tended to recruit faculty members from non-media studies disciplines such as social sciences or humanities to teach and/or educate students in areas like journalism (Muchena, 2013b), media and society studies, communication, advertising and public relations. Such faculty members lack the requisite knowledge and expertise to effectively nurture the next generation of media professionals. The lack in the number of educators trained in the discipline of Media Studies accentuates the need to commit financial and corporate resources towards an ongoing training and development of faculty members involved in the teaching of media studies (Stynska & Karpenko, 2021). The training of educators will culminate in the birth of an indigenous expertise in the field of Media Studies to address the skills gap within the sector with regard to media technology application and development.

8. Infrastructure and Resource Constraints

Access to technology and media equipment remains a challenge for many institutions of higher learning across Africa, Zimbabwe included. Equipment such as projectors, cameras, and editing software, sit on shelves because personnel cannot operate them (Mukomana, 2019). The 1:1000 internet bandwidth proposed by POTRAZ in 2008 remains a dream. Libraries with scanty equipment cannot deliver a contemporary media education, it is difficult to engage in teaching and research with inadequate books and physical resources (Mudzivo & Chigwada, 2022). Hence, relevant universities must train personnel who can own, use, and domesticate appropriate technologies.

9. Access to Technology and Media Equipment

Access to technology and media equipment has been identified as a specific challenge in the Zimbabwean higher education landscape. Without access to technology, it is impossible to achieve education, a concern which should be addressed in both the areas of reality and envisioned development in the future (Tandi, et al, 2023). Historically, universities and colleges received government funding to maintain large libraries. However, access to technology and media equipment is now more potent than the provision of textbooks (Chigwada & Mudzivo, 2020). Zimbabwe struggles with very limited access to computers and technology-enabled education. Computers that are accessed are often not functioning and readily accessible to students (Ncube, 2020). Not only is access to technology limited, but there are also few computers per city. Critical components of mass education, such as electric and affordable printing, are also lacking in Zimbabwe (Mukomana, 2019).

10. Student Engagement and Participation

One main area of concern targets student involvement and engagement in the new Media Studies program, with emphasis on viewing active participation as a starting point for meaningful learning experiences (Goldman, 2019). This demand stems from the recognition that the mass media is of crucial significance

in the day-to-day lives of young people, as well as in the changing educational and economic contexts in which they find themselves (Seto & Hasanah, 2024). Evidence is presented that some of the key aspects of a new understanding of literacy, media literacy in particular, are present in the curriculum intention announcements, with corresponding exploratory engagement to develop them (Beatty, 2019). Such issues promote important reflections on the nature of media studies as a developing field of scholarship. Issues of concern focus chiefly around how to support student involvement and active participation in this field of study, and how to encourage exploration and understanding of new literacy practices. The necessity to continue with exploration and research, but in a more collaborative fashion.

11. Encouraging Critical Thinking and Active Learning

The approach to Media Studies courses presented is based on a desire to foster critical engagement with both the representational forms of the media and the social conditions and knowledges from which they arise. This engagement is considered necessary for the encouragement of critical thinking, active learning and interest in the subject (Kumari, 2024; Russell & Mootoo, 2017). To this end, two approaches are important, the first relating to the pedagogical setting of a Media Studies class, the second concerning co-curricular activities funded by a university innovative grant to supplement the taught courses. It is also hoped to furnish a vivid sense of the pleasures, pitfalls and positions from which Media Studies may be approached, detained and contested (Song, 2017). These courses are with students who are all taking Media Studies for the first time, and who in many respects are initially unprepared to engage critically with the media and their study. Given this context, a set of pedagogical strategies to develop critical engagement with these articulations of the contestations of race, class and gender within multicultural society are necessary.

12. Industry Partnerships and Internships

To gain and strengthen relevance, Media Studies in Zimbabwean higher education should establish partnerships with industry stakeholders (Mwelwa & Mawela, 2021). Internships expose students to the realities of industry, which can shape their view of related studies and the emphasis of skills they would require after graduation. Institutions in Zimbabwe can enhance their program information dissemination through an alumni base that is sought after by agencies, stakeholders, and academics. To achieve globalization, Media Studies departments must be proactive and solicit opportunities from organizations and stakeholders based on their suitability and specialization.

13. Enhancing Practical Skills and Industry Relevance

Furthermore, establishing partnerships with media industry organisations presents a significant opportunity for enhancing practical skills in media studies.

Media schools should not only invite media practitioners for guest lectures or industry exposure but can actively partner with media industry entities to create classes, firms or institutions featuring a compound of academic and non-academic staff. Such industrial media organisations could offer local media insights, supervise projects for schools and students, and use the media schools' research skills, among additional benefits (Smith-Sitton, 2021. These partnerships would implicitly require schools to align the academic curriculum with the needs and trends of the media industry to get their projects accepted (Yusof et al., 2017). Research reports would be offered annually, providing the industry with analyses on local media trends, and share the findings publically; meanwhile, students could translate and post notices regarding the validity of the project through the media school's website and activate related media platforms.

14. Gender and Diversity Issues in Media Studies

The Zimbabwean Media Studies community must address gender and diversity issues. Gender disparities exist in universities but do not appear to exist among Media Studies programs. With the emergence of new social identities, Media Studies programs must expand beyond the mainstream focus on race, gender, and class. Deeply embedded values of gender and diversity continue within some programs but are not tackled by others. As more new programs emerge, it becomes vital to note whether issues of gender and diversity to be examined.

15. Addressing Gender Disparities and Promoting Inclusivity

One distinctive characteristic of Zimbabwe's Media Studies context is the disparity of gender representation among its academics. Zimbabwe has a clear gender imbalance in its Media Studies academic community across colleges and universities. Any Media Studies programme should therefore identify strategies for preventing and closing the gender gap and for creating educational space that acknowledges, respects and celebrates difference. A gender lens should be integrated in substantive curricula across the degrees in Media Studies, not solely in lectures on Media and Gender or in Media Studies elective courses. To avoid tokenism in addressing gender and diversity issues, substantial recognised activities possibly in partnerships between colleges and universities across the region (World Bank. (2024), should prefigure any modifications to Media Studies curricula.

In addition to gender parity, broader or different notions of inclusivity, such as class, ethnicity, geography, sexuality etc., should be recognised in the Media Studies context and curriculum (Friesem, 2018). Another vital characteristic of Zimbabwe Media Studies context is a relative lack of female scholars and researchers. Colleges and universities should therefore devise ways for including more women in agency positions within Media Studies by creating a supportive professional environment. Given the vital need for developing women scholars, other issues of inclusivity such as social class, ethnicity (Mpofu, 2019), and geographic location should also be abstracted, formulated and addressed in concrete policies.

16. Encouraging Scholarly Contributions and Local Research Initiatives

Building upon an evaluation of the challenges and opportunities in the areas of research and publication, local initiatives can be encouraged to stimulate scholarly contributions and knowledge production to broaden the scope of Media Studies by exploring local experiences, customs, and practices. It is also a requirement for demonstrating a credible base of scholarly contributions to the discipline (Abrahams, Burke & Mouton, 2010). However, there is a general lack of local research and publication in the area of Media Studies in Zimbabwean higher education. Local conditions are not adequately explored and contextualized through scholarly contribution in the discourse of the discipline. It is hoped that research promotes scholarly contributions and advances the discourse and knowledge of Media Studies (Mukomana, 2019).

17. Policy and Regulatory Frameworks

The media environment is undergoing rapid changes globally, and Zimbabwe is no exception. As the new millennium dawned, Zimbabwe found itself at the crossroads of sustainable development and new media trends and technologies (Yorodani, Chiridza, & Muchena, 2017). These trends and technologies are expected to impact the nature, modes of dissemination, and reception of media messages. Consequently, there is an urgent need to conduct a comprehensive media environmental assessment on the part of policymakers, media practitioners, and educators in Zimbabwe (Mano & Mano, 2015).

In terms of policy and regulatory frameworks, media studies programs are by and large implemented and monitored by the respective universities and regulatory agencies. Furthermore, all universities were found to have a media studies program aligned with national policies. There was, however, a wide variation, with State Universities such as the University of Zimbabwe and the National University of Science and Technology being found to have more rigorous implementation and monitoring mechanisms as they operate off the same national policy framework (Petrausch, 2005). Studies also confirmed opportunities for international collaboration, the exchange of staff and students, the fostering of ties between southern African institutes of higher education, and partnerships involving European universities and training organisations working in the media field. International collaboration and partnerships offer numerous benefits, including the potential for joint research projects, curriculum development, curriculum evaluation, and resource sharing.

18. Promoting Global Perspectives and Knowledge Sharing

Zimbabwean universities, especially since their inception, have been wary of engaging with global universities in general and western universities in particular. While the Zimbabwean government, particularly since the advent of the government of national unity in 2009, has been aggressively courting foreign investment into the country, there seems to exist a reluctance from Zimbabwean universities to

forge global partnerships with universities outside the southern African region. This stands in stark contrast to the efforts being taken by universities in the global south, including those in Africa, to pursue a policy of global engagement with foreign universities (Petrausch, 2005). While Zimbabwean universities have been involved in various initiatives promoting engagement with southern African universities, there seems to be no concerted effort to engage with universities in the global north. Greater engagement with global universities, especially the top ranked ones, would provide significant opportunities for knowledge and experience sharing, which would enhance the quality of education, research and institutional governance at Zimbabwean universities. As campuses in Africa strive to be part of the greater world of scholars, they have a history of struggle against exclusion and silence in academic and media spheres. It can be contended that commercialisation of education churns out graduates who embrace western values at the expense of indigenous African values (Chibuwe & Muromo, 2023). This trend shapes both theoretical and pedagogical approaches to media studies in higher education in Africa and consequently affects the deployment of knowledges on the continent.

19. Conclusion and Recommendations

As elucidated in the discussion, challenges can be considered in four broad categories: inadequate understanding of media studies; inadequate human and infrastructural resourcing; poor implementation strategy; and the political environment. Appreciation of the merits and demerits of media studies sparked intense and sustained debates in meeting the aspirations of and attaining the vision envisioned by Zimbabwe's higher education and training policy. It is an avenue for media literacy, to raise the level and quality of public discourse, and to cultivate a new generation of responsibly critical and discerning media consumers, content creators, producers, and policy makers. Apparently media studies in Zimbabwean higher education is not adequately backed with the requisite financial, human, and infrastructural resources (Mukomana, 2019). Academic programs, specializations, and departments have mushroomed around the Zimbabwean colleges and universities offering BA, MA/MSc, MPhil, and PhD degrees in media studies, media communication, media sociology, and other variations of media disciplines. As diverse historical, socio-cultural, economic, and political conditions determine the shape of Media Studies within each country or institution, courses and curricula offered vary widely. In the Zimbabwean contexts, the rise of media education in higher education has been complex and contradictory (Tandi, et al, 2023). Pioneering initiatives were stymied by repressive political regimes, awarding of scholarships and fellowships to Northern educational institutions, and an emphasis on training over education. Wiser policy decisions and a political climate more amenable to democratic governance triggered further interest in media education.

In the past two decades, schools of media, media studies programs, and departments of communication have multiplied in Zimbabwe. Many institutions in the global North have also invested in institutional partnerships and collaborative programs that render possible the influx and employment of Northern-centric models

of pedagogy, journalism, democratic governance, and mass communication in these schools and programs. Such models have resulted in illuminating ethnocentric biases in governance, media education, and journalistic practices (Zengeni, 2020), but they have also contributed to the growing corporate media landscape in Zimbabwe, the 'freeing' of students from culturally relevant contextual frameworks, and challenging the role of schools and departments of media in democratization and nation-building.

The question of engaging media studies in Africa and Zimbabwe in particular cannot proceed solely in naivety, artistically, empirically, and conceptually condoning dominant, Western-designed, gendered, raced, and classed compounds and pasts. There is need to decolonise the Media curriculum so as to afford more space for local language, content, culture and experiences. The academic staff needs rigor in training, networking, research, and collaboration to improve the implementation of Media studies. Adequate funding and investment in infrastructure and equipment and technological prerequisites in Media studies need to be improved in line with the current demands of the discipline. It is hoped that these recommendations will be beneficial to the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, the regional universities, and the International Network of Universities offering Media Studies courses. To harness these opportunities, it is paramount that several, if not all, of the measures suggested above be put in place quickly and efficiently. The stakes are high, but there are rewards to be reaped. One can only hope that all the players understand the implications, and will rise to the occasion and collectively overcome the challenges.

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