

MEDIA EDUCATION EFFECTIVENESS IN PROMOTING AWARENESS OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Climate change is one of the major challenges facing mankind in this era. Global climate change has been attributed to numerous factors. As such, numerous efforts are being made by stakeholders to combat climate change principally through adaptation and mitigation. This paper, therefore, examines media education effectiveness in promoting awareness of climate change in Nigeria. Media education, even though it is largely informal and extracurricular in Nigeria's educational context, can be a powerful tool considering the reach, availability and large audiences of the traditional mass media and the new media (internet, mobile and allied technologies). The paper examines the potency of media education for promoting awareness of climate change in Nigeria due to its capacity to empower citizens to engage in multitude and divergent viewpoints, deconstruction and reconstruction of standpoints, problem solving, and media content creation. The paper recommends the design and implementation of a curriculum for basic education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Media literacy, media education, climate change, mass media,

Introduction

Educational and mass media systems are two very important social channels for the transmission of culture in the society. Their importance stems from the fact that they do reach and influence a large number of people and that could result in behaviour modification. According to Hareb (2008), the contents of educational institutions and mass media form individual beliefs, images, concepts, understanding, and values which in turn influence behaviour, habits, traditions and lifestyles. Because of the importance of the two systems, it is perceived that the integration of education and mass media will provide an important synergy for the educational advancement of society.

According to Varis (2010), media education is a process of learning which could be formal or informal conducted in society, family and media settings. This conceptualisation sees media education as facilitated through media setting which can be achieved at society-wide or family contexts. It also points to the fact that media education can be formal (school-based) or non formal. Even within the school, media education can be facilitated in two ways; it can be treated as a subject matter in its own right or as an educational tool to deliver subject specific contents and aim (Krucsay, 2008). Also, El-Khateeb (2008) defined media education as the process of deploying the mass media for the attainment of educational goals set by government policies.

Media education has moved from various stages to where it is now. Starting from the 1930s, it began to be referred to as audio visual education, screen education, etc. During that period, the motivation for offering media education started from the perceived notion that media audience needs a kind of cultural salvation in such a way that people's heritage, language, and values would be inoculated against all the powerful mass media. In the 1950s, the problematic of media education shifted from cultural salvation to ideological demystification; and in the 1970s to democratization and protection of mass audience (especially minors) from real or perceived harm (defensiveness). However, in subsequent years, these motivations to offer media literacy have changed significantly due to better understanding that showed the inadequacies of earlier motivations. Primarily, these earlier motivations were grounded on the questionable notion that media audiences are inactive or passive. Researches have shown that the audience can indeed be active, sophisticated and even critical. Also, for school media education, teacher-student status is being challenged because the students are in many cases more skilful than the teachers especially in use of modern ICTs. In recent years, media education is grounded on the conviction that people need to take part in the mediatisation process as it is part of their democratic rights (Buckingham, 1998).

It is in recognition of this transformation of media literacy that Tella (1998) categorized media education into traditional and telelogic. Traditional media education, according to the scholar, is concerned with the use of traditional mass media (radio, TV, newspapers, magazines, film, etc) for pedagogic purposes. The latter, on the other hand, lays more emphasis on the educational applications of modern information and communication technologies (MICT), open and distance learning (ODL) and virtual pedagogy. At present, media education is experiencing a period of transition with a lot of its emphases being restructured (Tella, 1998). In this ICT era, media education has no option than to include both the traditional mass media and the interactive media (internet, mobile phones, computer, etc), which are generally converging and hence difficult to isolate. The practice of media

education leads to media literacy – the skills and abilities required for conscious, independent deployment of new communication environment (Tornero,2008). The Office of Communications (OFCOM, 2008) also define media literacy as ability to access, understand and create communication in a variety of context. According to the European Charter of Media Literacy (2006), there are seven areas of competence related to media literacy. These are:

- i. Effective use of media technologies to access, create, store, retrieve and share media content to meet personal and community needs and interest;
- ii. Making informed choices about wide range of media forms and contents from different sources;
- iii. Understanding how and why media content is produced;
- iv. Critically analysing the techniques, languages and conventions used by the media, and the messages they convey;
- v. Creative use of media to express and convey ideas, information and opinion;
- vi. Identifying, avoiding and challenging media content and services that may be unsolicited, offensive or harmful;
- vii. Making effective use of media in the exercise of democratic rights and civil responsibilities;

In Nigeria formal media education is not offered as a subject at primary and secondary school levels. Even in tertiary education level, media education is confined to some core courses in humanities and social sciences. This paper, therefore, examines the potentials of media education in spreading awareness on climate change even though media education is not a subject in our basic education system. This is very important because part of the impact of media education is for people to make effective and critical use and analysis of media to solve real life issues, one of which is climate change. It is to be noted here that the mass media are the principal means through which news on climate change issues are disseminated to the public through reports, interviews, opinions, etc. (Bell,1994; Wilson,1995; Whitmarsh,2009; Ungar,2000). Hence, media contents are very important to the understanding of, and responses to climate change. As research has shown, accurate knowledge of the causes of climate change is the strongest predictor of a person's stated intention to act (Bord, O'Connor, & Fisher 2000). Similarly, in Nigeria also, newspaper reports have been shown to influence the awareness of climate change issues among readers (Bashir, 2012). So, media education can help media audience tremendously in understanding of and responding to (appropriately) climate change messages.

Media education does not only help in climate change awareness and action, but it is to be noted that climate change science and policy is a contested terrain with majority of scientist asserting the reality that climate is indeed changing due to anthropogenic causes, on one hand, and some fringe vocal scientists and their supporters saying climate is not changing or the change is not anthropogenic (Oreskes,2007; Boykoff and Roberts,2007). This latter group is referred to as climate skeptics, contrarians, doubters, deniers, nay sayers, among others. Owing to the divergence of opinion on the extent and causes of climate change, the mass media especially in developed countries reflect this polarization in their coverage of and opinion on climate change. It is reported that some communication outlets (newspapers, magazines, books, websites, pamphlets, radio, TV, etc) are portraying messages that deny the reality of climate change (Boykoff and Boykoff, 2004). In this respect, Cooper (2011) found out that climate change deniers are more effective 'educators' than mainstream scientists because their messages are empowering the audience to question climate change science and are delivered through various forms of media to ensure the spread of their messages. The scholar, therefore, suggests that mainstream scientists should also emulate the climate change deniers in addition to powerful tool of media education. Media education, therefore, has the potential of aiding media users to logically navigate this contested terrain with a view to understanding the reality of climate change and how to cope with its challenges and/or contribute to its reversal. In analyzing the contribution of media education to climate change adaptation awareness, the paper will briefly discuss climate change.

Manifestations of Climate Change

Climate change is defined as climatic changes that are directly or indirectly caused by human activities over and above natural variation (United Nations, 1992). On the other hand, the Inter Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2001) defines it as a statistically significant variation in either the state of climate or its variability persisting for an extended period of time typically a decade or more. According to Kovats, Cambell-Lendrum, McMichael, Woodward and Cox (2001), detection of climate change is difficult because signs of climate change (flood, drought, storm, heat wave, ice melting, etc.) may be thought to be part of normal climate variability and the climate variability is the normal swing of climate across different periods whether the climate is changing or not. The main culprit in this progressive increase in global warming which lead to climate change is the increase in the volume of green house gases (GHG) in the atmosphere at very rapid rates (IPCC,2007; The Lancet Commissions,2009).

Climate change manifests in various forms like flood, drought, storm, heat wave, ice melting, etc. As such, it is likely to have impact on

the lives of people since the climate is varying from the way people are used to for a long time. On the other hand, some regions, due to climate change do experience more adverse effects like decreased agricultural outputs, increased water scarcity (drought), increased climate related mortality and morbidity. Climate change impact show that it is largely negative and deleterious to human beings and other species on earth (IPCC,2001; Smit & Lenhart,1996).

According to World Health Organisation (2003), climate change manifestations (like floods, drought, storm, etc) directly or indirectly interact with pathogenic micro-organisms. The result of this interaction may lead to increase incidences in health-related impacts like temperature related mortality or morbidity; pollution; air and weather-borne diseases; vector and rodent-borne diseases; food and water shortages; mental and nutritious and other health related health effects (WHO,2003). Another area where climate change is causing profound impacts is in agriculture like drought, windstorm or floods which have negative consequences to agricultural production and as such climate change offers a resistance to agriculture (Adebayo, 2010). Brown, Hamill and McLeman (2007) also link climate change and security in Africa. According to them, climate change is a threat to institutional peace in Africa due to its impacts on food, water and energy supply, population movement, natural disasters, etc. (Brown, Hamill and McLeman, 2007).

Two major solutions have been identified to tackle climate change. These are mitigation and adaptation. While mitigation means the reduction of the effect of global warming (and hence climate change) through the reduction of GHGs emission and the use of carbon sequestration (Molina, Zaelke, Sarmac, Andersen, Ramanathane, & Kaniaruf;2009) adaptation is concerned with the extent to which individuals or societies adjust to cope with the impact of climate change. For instance, Fussel and Klein (2003) defined adaptation as all changes that reduce the adverse effect of climate change. IPCC (2001) see adaptation as the adjustment in ecological, social and economic systems in response to actual and anticipated climatic stimuli and their effects which include measures to reduce vulnerabilities as well as take advantage of climate opportunities.

Media Education as an Agent in Creating Awareness of Climate Change in Nigeria

Although media education is not offered across the board in our educational institutions in Nigeria, it has a lot of contribution to make in raising awareness about climate change in the country. Secondly, media education is not an end in itself but a means to an end – the ability to use the media actively in problem solving in various spheres of life. If this is the case, then media education can be tailored towards confronting specific or general societal problems like climate change. As was discussed earlier in this paper, climate change is a global problem with commutation resources being part of the issues (looking at the divergence of ideas on the issue). Therefore, stakeholders on climate change in Nigeria (government agencies, researchers, campaigners, educators, NGOs, CBOs, mass media, communities, families, individuals, etc) will need to deploy media education resources in raising awareness and promoting action on climate change. According to Krucsay (2008), some competencies acquired as a result of media education can be very effective in tackling societal problems like climate change, environment and energy. Such education should be offered across various media, using different forms and strategies.

Media education can provide Nigerians with *multitude and divergent standpoints* on climate change. Large number of Nigerians may not know about the different opinions on basis of climate change science even if they are vulnerable to its impacts, and neither are many likely to know of the activities of climate change ‘deniers’. That is, climate change literacy may be relatively low in the country due to high levels of illiteracy and other socio-economic and demographic factors like poverty, limited media access, fatalism, etc. Media education, if applied to climate change, will educate them on these divergent viewpoints on the issue and its possible solutions. This can equip people with the capacity to *deconstruct and reconstruct the standpoint of others*. When people experience media education, or are media literate, they can easily analyse the various media message they may be exposed to in such a way as to make meaning out of them. The media may be conveying numerous information on climate change issues or in some cases, they can even be silent. Media education can help Nigerians to question the mediated messages on climate change. This is important because conflicting messages are being sent by the media on climate change. It is reported by Boykoff and Boykoff (2004) that the U.S. press in its coverage of global warming/climate change tends to give equal access to “denial discourse”. That is, the US press tries to balance any coverage of climate change between those who accept the reality of climate change and those who deny it. This is with prejudice to the majority of scientists who assert and scientifically establish that anthropogenic global warming/climate is real and occurring. This

tendency of balancing mainstream and denial discourses by the media may not likely be the case in Nigerian media environment. However, some Nigerians can access foreign media including from those countries where such tendencies predominate. The balancing act can bring a lot of confusion or even dissonance on climate change to media audience in Nigeria. When media audiences are adequately enlightened on the issue, they can fine out for themselves why some media organisations still cover climate change in an uncertain ways. Hence, the culture of autonomous knowledge acquisition capacity on climate change will be effectively utilized by media audiences.

Also, media education is concerned with empowering learners to *solve problems*. People do experience climate change-related problems like flooding, droughts, etc and they may not have easily identifiable channels to know how to overcome them. Media education when packaged effectively can serve as an agency for awareness or knowledge on how to solve such real life problems related to climate change.

Media education can also enable media users in Nigeria to *create their own media content* so as to tell their own story about climate change. This will be a counter to the top-down approach to issues in Nigeria where issues are defined only from one side without considering other perspectives. The mass media in Nigeria are known to be elitist in orientation with lot of focus on politics and business. Media literate citizen can challenge elite-dominated media by creating their own media space through community media or interactive small media. Community media (media channels owned and operated by the communities) can be a very powerful tool for communication among the people themselves instead of being mediated by largely urban-based elite media in Nigeria. Although, community broadcast media have not yet been given approval by the Nigerian government, other mediums like print, online and traditional media can still be utilized by the community to tackle issues like climate change. So, media education strategies, when combined with issues like climate change, can raise the level of awareness, and thereby leads to actions, on climate change.

Conclusion

Media education is an important tool to be utilized in educating citizens in topical social issues and problems. As we have observed, it has a lot of potentials in increasing the level of awareness on the issues which will ultimately improve action on the issue. Some of the actions required in tackling climate change (like adaptation) are individual based while others are communal and others are by the government or society as whole. For such actions to be effective there must be credible information to rely on the existing and future scenarios across all sectors of the society as climate change does not discriminate (BNRCC Project, n.d.). However, in Nigeria, media education is not part of basic

education which students learn from the curriculum. Despite this gap, media education has the potential to educate Nigerians on the problem of climate change and its solutions. Therefore, the key stakeholders on media education in Nigeria (educators, media, climate scientists, governments, etc) need to come together to form an appropriate media education strategy to help in raising awareness and action on climate change. Such strategies can be in the form of campaigns, production skill activities, orientation activities, regulatory activities, educational and training activities, civil participation, family activities, etc all tailored climate change education. This paper, therefore, recommend the design implementation of media education curriculum in Nigeria's basic education sector so as to nurture media literate citizens who can effectively apply media education as a lifelong knowledge for problem solving across various facets of life.

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