

SELECTED INTRICACIES BETWEEN COMMUNICATION EDUCATION AND PRACTICE IN TWO NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates media/ communication/ journalism students' sense of significance towards media/ communications education and practice/ specialisation. Besides examining students' feelings towards those practicing in core media/ communication/ journalism areas without media/ communication education, the study also looks at possible problems inherent in media and communications education in Nigeria. The Mathematical Theory provides the abstraction/ logical frame. Via the survey research method, 80 students each from Benue State University and Adekunle Ajasin University [Central and South-Western Nigeria respectively] were respectively sampled. Findings show that unspecialised/ non-streamlined curriculum, serious infrastructural inadequacy, lack of up-to-date equipment/ facilities for engaging practical lessons is harmful to efficient professional media/ communication education standards/ practice. The study concludes there is need for specialisation oriented curriculum and standardised/ professional and highly regulated conventional media/ communication/ journalism practice wherein the type of education received should/ would be accorded long awaited regard. As such the study recommends serious infrastructural improvements in media/ communication/ journalism education systems with the compulsory inclusion of high-tech functional/ up-to-date special purposes libraries. Indeed, university based media/ journalism/ communication education curriculum should be implemented into a five-year system/ programme hosted by Colleges/ Faculties of Media and Communications as well as a 12 month strongly supervised theory-industrial balance-based experience with adequacy/ appropriateness of student internship/ industrial scheme. This is suggested as the way forwards towards expert/ specialised/ professional contemporary media/ communication practices.

KEYWORDS: Universities, Media and Communication, Media Education, Communication Education.

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INTRODUCTION

"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change"

Charles Darwin, in Duarte (2009:29)

Taking a cue from the above quotation, it may suffice to ask: to what extent are media/ communication/ journalism educationists responsive to contemporary media/ communication/ journalism industrial changes and demands for media/ communication/ journalism professionalism? Until recent times, journalists were being considered or viewed as a group of drop-outs who had been rejected in other professions. This uncomplimentary view of journalists and mass communication made the "profession" very non-prestigious during African's early nationhood. Nevertheless, as countries started developing economically, socially and politically there was the need for a reorientation of the concept "journalism." With the prevailing state of affairs, Akinfeleye (1987:2) states that "...the need for well trained journalists has become a matter of top priority. Therefore, the tendency towards a very low view of journalists and journalism as a profession is now diminishing in all black African countries particularly in such countries as Nigeria." One might hypothetically state that this marked a turning point in the history/ development of media practices in Africa, and Nigeria in particular. Today, the level of expertise in media/ communication practice cannot be disassociated from the kind of education received. The quality/ level of education determines the quality of professionals in a given profession. This explains why Ibezimako (2006:53) observes that "...in the early days, journalism was hardly regarded as much of a profession. This is because most journalists then were not trained for the job and not dedicated to the practice."

In Nigeria, changes and developments culminated in the belief that mass communication practice

has become more relevant and needs to be standardized. According to Ali (1989:4) journalism and media education (mass communication) started at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. This was just a year after the establishment of the university in 1961. Today, there has been an appreciable increase in the number of universities and other institutions of higher learning that offer media/ communication/ journalism education as an academic course at different levels. While this progress is appreciable, there are worrying concerns about whether the increasing numbers of student/ candidates who apply to study media/ communication/ journalism education in general do so out of serious desire-making the course their first choice among other competing courses. Other concerns are the extent to which such student/ candidates actually fill prepared for the practice at the end of their training/ education and whether such students passionately intend to become practitioners. Nwosu (2004:7) affirms that studies and experience have shown that the more educated or trained a practitioner or professional is, the more likely he/ she would be good in his/ her professional job.

Akinfeleye (1987:27) sustains that there are changes and developments that are negatively affecting media/ communication/ journalism education in Nigeria. This has led to doubts about the calibre of media/ communication/ journalism practitioners that are turned out into the "market" from various institutions of higher learning scattered all over the country. The implication is that the path to sound/ quality mass communication practice is crowded with the influx of half-baked/ quakes/ semi-literate media/ communication/ journalism practitioners. The essence of the existence of media/ communication/ journalism education is as such threatened. The quest for standardization in the practice of media/ communication/ journalism

education therefore is also becoming ever challenging. Specialisation and professionalism in the education/ practice of media/ communication/ journalism seems to remain a mirage.

Considering all these, it is imperative, therefore, to study media/ communication/ journalism education/ practice in Nigeria and see what is actually happening in the profession. Ali (1987:39) long ago notes that there would be a degenerate into mockery of a profession if nothing is done about the situation. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to basically examine students' of media/ communication/ journalism towards understanding the need for specialised curriculum and understand intentions to practice.

Other concerns are: adequacy of practical skills/ industrial training; restricted media practice for those formally trained in media/ communication/ journalism as well as understand possible problems that may have been impinging on the potentials of professional media/ communication/ journalism practice.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Media/ communication/ journalism as an academic endeavour has attracted many persons, most of whom may be willing to subsequently becoming practitioners. However, since the commencement of media/ communication/ journalism education in Nigeria, there have been assertions or claims of fundamental changes and development which have affected the standard/ quality of media/ communication/ journalism education/ practice in Nigeria and possibly beyond (Ibezimako, 2006). This study therefore, seeks to examine the extent to which students of media/ communication/ journalism education feel satisfied or otherwise, as well as understand if there are some serious concerns that may be affecting the prospects of would-be professionals in the media/ communication/ journalism

industry, especially, as far as Nigeria is concerned.

OBJECTIVES

The paper has the following as objectives:

1. To determine if students of media/ communication/ journalism intend to practice and s such specialise.
2. To ascertain students' sense of significance about media/ communication/ journalism education towards media/ communication/ journalism practice.
3. To understand students' feelings towards those who are practicing in core media and communication areas without media/ communication education.
4. To determine how passionate students of media/ communication/ journalism are towards the course.
5. To ascertain the possible problems inherent in media/ communication/ journalism education in Nigeria.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions form the basis for this paper:

1. Are students of media/ communication/ journalism willing to practice and specialised?
2. Do students of media/ communication/ journalism feel the significance of media/ communications education towards media/ communication/ journalism practice?
3. Do media/ communication/ journalism students feel that those without the relevant education should be restricted from professional media/ communication practice?
4. Are students of media/ communication/ journalism passionate about the course?
5. What are the possible problems inherent in media/ communication/ journalism education?

CONCEPTUAL FRAME

Education, seem to be considered as the medium through which society transmits what it finds valuable. Achieving set standards and professionalism in media/ communication/ journalism practice is dependent on media/ communication/ journalism education, except if the so called "all comers" situation experienced in Nigeria is deemed tolerable. Nevertheless, the situation is least satisfying and has since challenged the very essence of media/ communication/ journalism education towards media/ communication/ journalism practice. In Nigeria, like other parts of the world, it is the daily challenges of development that demand for the sort of education that is desired. This is also true of mass media practice, which was hardly regarded as a profession because journalists (most) were not trained for the job and were also not dedicated to the practice.

According to Akinfeleye (1987:11), the need for well trained mass communicators became a matter of top priority as a result of economic, social and political developments. Thus, the tendency towards a very low view of mass communication as a profession also began to diminish in many countries, including Nigeria. After some decades, there was an emerging need to assess the "journey" so far. Ali (1989:1) notes that "there have been a lot of fundamental changes and development in the field of journalism/ media education and mass media practice in Nigeria." These changes and development have brought about attendant worrisome realities and circumstances which seem to be hampering media practice.

Ibezimako (2006:59) thinks too that "most practitioners are ill-educated and are thus, not competent." Education is most significant in mass communication practice. That is why the Journalism Practice Enhancement Bill, which Ciboh (2007) says was before the National Assembly included recommendations for a

National Media Examination Board, for fresh graduates into media/ communication/ journalism profession. What is the progress made?

Similarly, Baran and Davis (1995:92) assert that "in contrast with medicine and law, media professionalism does not include standards for professional training and licensing." It is therefore important to stress that other professions make it mandatory for practitioners to receive long and closely monitored professional training. Baran and Davis (1995) assert that; —doctors and lawyers undergo from 4 to 10 years of specialised training in addition to completing 4 years of college, but media practitioners are unwilling to set standards for professional training and have strongly resisted efforts to license journalists. They argue that these requirements would inevitably be used by government to control the press. The feeling is that the press should remain free to hire anyone no matter how untrained or unqualified -anyone should be able to start a newspaper and exercise his/ her free press right. Professionally, where is this trend/ situation leading us?

There is need for value change. Licensing has not brought doctors and lawyers directly under government control. In situations where governments even issue such licenses, professional associations effectively control the standard used to determine who gets a licensee. Nonetheless, bona-fide institutions of higher learning that offers media/ communication/ journalism at diploma/ degree levels, according to Ali (1989:4), cannot cope with the increasing number of applicants who want to study mass communication. In other words, the available equipment, manpower and infrastructure have been overstretched. The need therefore arise for at least a basic assessment of the media/ communication/ journalism education system towards a hope for the attainment of quality media/ communication/ journalism education and reciprocal media/ communication/

journalism practice. The quality of media/communication/journalism education cannot be disassociated from the quality of media/communication/journalism practice and the continuous quest for high standards/professionalism.

Supporting this view, Akinfeleye (1987:1) posits that it is a truism that a low level of literacy has contributed to a high degree of media/communication/journalism training/performance. In his direction, Ciboh (2007) asserts that because the world has grown more diverse, more interest should be given to advance formal training in media/communication/journalism in higher institutions of learning. There appears to be a need for Nigerian universities, and many other universities offering media/communication/journalism studies to re-examine their functions and redefine their curricula objectives. Indeed, Akinfeleye (1987) posits that major problems in media/communication/journalism education are thus: inadequacy of academics and technologists, lack of modern communication equipment/textbooks [hard and or electronic], shortage of office accommodation and teaching facilities; the often restricted financial support to expand existing media/communication/journalism facilities and poor salaries. Other problems are poor funding for researches, conferences, seminars, and media workshops; complexities in curriculum design, as well as challenges in industrial training; timing and time frame for spread of training and the issue or concept of having media/communication/journalism education programmes offered under a separate Faculties/College/Schools of Media and Communications.

This assertion implies that the state of media/communication/journalism education needs to be checked in order to ascertain the basic problems and their implications to media/communication/journalism practice. Another issue of concern according to Ali (1989) is a problem of producing media/communication/

journalism graduates who may be versed in theory but lack the practical skills. Akinfeleye (1987:5) yet again, is of the opinion that people feel that anyone, who graduate from any of the Nigerian high schools should be able to write, read and talk, therefore, such a person can also be a writer, news reader, broadcaster and "journalists" per-se. This of course is a threat to professionalism in mass communication practice.

Any sort of education is irrelevant if those who do not acquire the required education still find relevance within the midst of those who acquire it. In terms of specialisation in media/communication/journalism education/practice, Sambe (2005:232) feels that "trying to separate the various mass media into tight compartments is a futile task and pointless too." They are closely interrelated both in functions/ personnel. Employees shift from one medium to another with comparative ease. In relation to the thesis herein, it may be vital to note the term "comparative ease." Irrespective, Sambe (2005:232) still affirms that "any newcomer in any area of mass communication practice must learn new details or techniques, no matter how much experience he might have had in other aspects of mass communication."

One may therefore rightly infer that specialisation nevertheless brings out the best, stimulates high standards of practice and enhances professionalism, rather than limit it. Ali (1989:11) in another but related dimension, notes that with trained and well structured media/communication/journalism programmes and curriculum, it is possible to produce well vested media practitioners that will be well prepared for the 21st century media/communication/journalism challenges/surprises such as fake news syndrome, computer algorithms and generated media contents such advertising flows/patterns; artificially intelligent media occasioned by algorithms, as well as social/conventional media divergences/convergences to mention but a few

THEORETICAL FRAME

This paper is theoretically anchored on the mathematical theory of communication (information theory). The theory is a systems theory. Baran and Davis (1995) note that social theorists, after World War II became intrigued by systems notions as a way of conceptualising both macro/ micro phenomena. Others decided that the idea of system offered a heuristic means of constructing useful models of various social processes -including communications. This model fundamentally explained how relationships between variables were understood rather than merely adding more variables. Systems theories employed a circular but evolving communication process by late 1940s. This conceptualization changed messages from receiver to influence sources which in turn alter their messages. These circular processes are described as "feedback loops." Mutual adjustments in these systems are possible and seem to be an important lead towards achieving long-term communications' objectives. Thus, there is a reliance on feedback loops as a means by which complex machines make ongoing adjustments to changes caused by the environment. This enhances the monitoring of influence of messages on receivers. But just as important, receivers are also considered capable of influencing sources. If the effects are not the desired outcome, sources can keep altering messages until the desired feedback is obtained.

The mathematical theory of communication is associated with Shannon and Weaver. Baran and Davis (1995) considered accuracy in message transmission as being essential if systems are to operate effectively and achieve long-term goals. Technologically, communication engineers, in order to address this situation, developed a very sophisticated way of conceptualising the flow of communication from one part to another within a system. In the field of communication, majority of the personnel working in this area had the constraint of following the mathematics of

Shannon's theory, but Weaver's translations and commentary were easier to understand. Nowadays, most of the terms used in social scientific perspectives of mass communications, according to Griffin (1994), originate with Shannon and Weaver's terms such as "message fidelity", "multiple channels", "information loss", "source credibility" and "feedback".

Media/ communication/ journalism education and media/ communication/ journalism practice, according to this theory, can be understood as two variables which consistently relate to each other and are inseparable within a function information/ media system. If the very essence of one the existing variables [media/ communication/ journalism education] are denied or not understood through a critical assessment, the foundation of the other variable [media/ communication/ journalism practice] may/ will be lost. Rather than merely adding more variables, there should be an understanding between media/ communication/ journalism education and media/ communication/ journalism practice, which will lead/ culminate into efficiency and attainable maximum essence.

Social processes, including communication, no matter how complex, can be assessed "mathematically" evaluated. In other words, factors encapsulated in those social processes of daily societal existence that negatively affect media/ communication/ journalism education are noise, which according to the mathematical theory, limits "feedback loops." The term "feedback loops" in the theory means a circular process through which message's come back from the receiver to influence sources which in turn alter their messages. This means that the better practitioners there are, the better the understanding of the value of media/ communication/ journalism education, and then in turn, media/ communication/ journalism practices.

The reciprocal relationship between media/ communication/ journalism education and media/ communication/ journalism practices is in line with the circular process analogy in the mathematical theory (information theory) of communication. This finds relevance in this paper and is indeed very well applicable. Applying the “loops” effects, of the mathematical theory, what happens in media/ communication/ journalism education inevitably affects media/ communication/ journalism practice and vice-versa. The implication is that media scholars and educators should or are expected to constantly examine the entire process involved in the system.

METHOD AND DATA

Empirically, this paper is dependent on a survey conducted in two universities -Benue State University, Makurdi, and Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko -respectively from Central and South-Western Nigeria. This was over

a period of four years and involved a total of 160 respondents: 80 in each university. The sample was purposively because of some peculiarities associated to the survey process thereof; thus: the respondents were final year students; have had a consistent four-year flow of academic experience studying media/ communication/ journalism; were positively disposed and available for sampling. A standard, to-the-point, close-ended questionnaire was used. However, the questionnaire was applied not administered. The questionnaire application method was considered in other to reduce phobia towards participation in the study; the possible effects of research formalities on respondents; as well as the perceived tendency towards a more relax atmosphere/ mind-set between the researchers and the respondents. Nevertheless, no respondent was individually profiled irrespective of the fact that the researches sample equal number of students in the two universities. All responses remained confidential. Data obtained thereof is cumulatively compiled.

Table 1.Willingness to practice

University	Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total
BSU	Yes	71	88.75	80 (100%)
	No	9	11.25	
AAUA	Yes	68	85	80 (100%)
	No	12	15	

Table 1 show that at BSU, only 88.75% of the respondents intend to become media practitioners; at AAUA, 85% of the respondents

intend to practice. This means that majority of the respondents are very likely to become practitioners.

Table 2.Willingness to specialise

University	Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total Responses
BSU	Yes	51	63.75	80 (100%)
	No	29	36.25	
AAUA	Yes	67	83.75	80 (100%)
	No	13	16.25	

Table 2 show that at BSU, only 63.75% of the respondents wish to specialise in any particular area of media practice; at AAUA, 83.75% of the

respondents intend to specialise. This means that majority of the respondents prefer to specialised.

Table 3. Whether respondents feel there is need for training towards practice

University	Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total Responses
BSU	Yes	76	95	80 (100%)
	No	4	5	
AAUA	Yes	73	91.25	80 (100%)
	No	7	8.75	

Data in table 3 show that at BSU, 95% of the respondents believe people need media/ communication/ journalism education to become practitioners; at AAUA, 91.25% think so too. Majority of the respondents are therefore against

the tolerance of a situation where those who have no formal media/ communication/ journalism related education are allowed to indulge in media/ communication/ journalism practice.

Table 4. Desire to change course

University	Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total Responses
BSU	Yes	11	13.75	80 (100%)
	No	69	86.25	
AAUA	Yes	8	10	80 (100%)
	No	72	90	

Details of data in table 4 indicate that 86.75% of the respondents at BSU serious passion for media/ communication/ journalism education and do not wish to change course even if given

the opportunity. At AAUA, 90% of the respondents disagreed they would change course if given the opportunity.

Table 5. Possible problems associated with media/ communication/ journalism education

Possible problems	BSU			AAUA		
	Response	Frequency	%	Responses	Frequency	%
Lack of specialized curriculum	Yes	71	88.75	Yes	17	21.25
	No	9	11.25	No	63	78.75
Infrastructural/ facility adequacy	Yes	0	0	Yes	0	0
	No	80	100	No	80	100
Lack of equipment	Yes	77	96.25	Yes	27	33.75
	No	13	16.25	No	53	66.25
Adequacy of practical lessons	Yes	2	2.5	Yes	8	10
	No	78	97.5	No	72	90
Adequacy of theoretical teaching	Yes	76	95	Yes	59	73.75
	No	4	5	No	21	26.25
Adequacy of Industrial training/ internship	Yes	42	52.5	Yes	51	63.75
	No	38	47.5	No	29	36.25
Availability of "media" library	Yes	11	13.75	Yes	0	0
	No	69	86.25	No	80	100
Accessibility to "media" library	Yes	0	0	Yes	0	0
	No	80	100	No	80	100

According to data contained in table 5, 88.75% of BSU respondents feel the curriculum is not specialised enough, while only 21.25% of those at AAUA think so too; all the respondents (100%) at both BSU and AAUA agreed that there is no infrastructural/ facility adequacy for the their studies in media/ communication/ journalism education; 96.25% of BSU respondents feel a lack of equipment for media/ communication/ journalism education practical studies, while only 33.75% of the respondents at AAUA agreed to a lack of equipment for practical media education; 97.5% of BSU respondents felt that there are no adequate practical lessons given to them, while at AAUA, 90% of the respondents felt the same.

Furthermore, 95% of the respondents at BSU and 73.75% AAUA respectively felt that there is adequacy of theoretical teaching. In terms of availability adequacy of industrial training and internship, 52.5% and 63.75% of the respondents at BSU and AAUA respectively agreed; only 13.75% of the respondents at BSU agreed that there is an available/ accessible of media/ communication/ journalism education library, but at AAUA, no (0%) respondents agreed that there is an available media education library. The respondents at BSU and AAUA all (100) agreed that they no accessible media/ communication/ journalism education library.

FINDINGS

Based on the data collected and analyzed, this study deems it more relevant to draw attention to the common experiences of students in both Universities than to the differences; hence, the study found out the following:

Majority of the students in-an average of 86.9%- showed great promise and hope of becoming media/ communication/ journalism practitioners. This implies that there is a possibility of more interest in media/ communication/ journalism practice among media/ communication/ journalism students in Nigeria, and perhaps

beyond. Majority of the respondents loved media and mass communication education, and are not likely to change course even if provided with the opportunity. This was found to be so within an average of 88.4%.

Majority of the respondents -an average of 93.1%- were found to be against the tolerance of a situation where those who have no formal media/ communication/ journalism related education are allowed to indulge in media/ communication/ journalism practice. They felt that one necessarily needs media/ communication/ journalism education to become a media/ communication/ journalism practitioner.

There exist some serious problems with media/ communication/ journalism education in Nigeria, thus: an average of 55%, respondents felt that the curriculum of media/ communication/ journalism education is not specialised enough; all the respondents (100%) at both BSU and AAUA agreed that there is no infrastructural/ facility adequacy. At an average of 65%, respondents feel a lack of equipment for practical aspects in media education. However, at an average of 93.75%, respondents felt that there are no adequate practical lessons given to them. Furthermore, respondents, at an average of 84.4% felt there is adequacy of theoretical teaching. In terms of adequacy of industrial training/ internship, respondents scored an average of 58.1%; only an average of 13.75% of the respondents agreed that there is an available media/ communication/ journalism education library, but all (100) agreed they hardly have access to media/ communication/ journalism library.

CONCLUSION

Majority of the media/ journalism/ communication students have a serious interest towards becoming media/ communication/ journalism practitioners. Most of such students

love media and mass communication education, and also feel that such training is vital towards related practice. However, the situation where students or lay people who have no formal media/ communication/ journalism education are allowed unrestricted opportunity to practice is unavoidably working against the very essence of media/ communication/ journalism education. This is especially found to be a discouraging factor for students of media/ communication/ journalism who feel unhappy that those without formal training compete for relevance.

While there are several interests in the study of the media/ communication/ journalism, there are serious problems negatively affecting media/ communication/ journalism education in Nigeria, and possibly beyond. Some of the problems are: an unspecialized/ streamlined curriculum, serious infrastructural inadequacy, lack of up-to-date equipment for accessible and practical lessons in media and mass communication education, and a serious lack of accessible media and mass communication education library, as well as an unrestricted media/ communications practice in Nigeria, and perhaps, beyond.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Though there exist a constitutional right of expression and of the press, specialised aspects of communication like editing, gate-keeping, advertising, media management, media research, public relations should be led and held by professionals who have acquired quality media/ communication/ journalism education. African Council for Communication Education (ACCE), The Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Nigeria Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON), amongst others should be up to date with the challenges and trends in other professions. This will greatly influence seriousness and commitment towards research/ scholarship and respectively among students and media/ communications' scholars. This is expected to

also enhance seriousness to duty among persons involved in media work towards keeping up to the professional tasks; hence, a re-circling positive effect on media/ communication/ journalism education.

The Nigeria Universities Commission with the collaboration of the African Council for Communication education (ACCE), and possibly, the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) should ensure commitment to not just theoretical aspects of media/ communication/ journalism education, but should also ensure consistent compliance standards. The Nigeria Universities Commission (NUC), through a synergy with the specialists/ scholars in media/ communication/ journalism should "dress down" the "accreditation phenomenon"; -a situation where universities/ other tertiary institutions offering media/ communication/ journalism education strive to perfunctorily upgrade equipment/ facilities, and man-power (academic/ non-academic staff) only to achieve successful resource verification, interim/ full accreditations, but not necessarily towards upholding media/ communication/ journalism standards towards professionalism should be honestly/ seriously discouraged.

Other problems like infrastructure, libraries, theory-industrial based experiences, an improved curriculum that meets specialised needs of professional media/ communication/ journalism practices, as well as adequacy of internship/ industrial based experiences should be taken seriously. This is because such are considerably potent towards affecting media/ communication/ journalism practice and professionalism. In the case of Nigeria, the foregoing may all deserve some Bench-Mark for Minimal Academic Standard considerations at the National Universities Commission, especially in the aspect of having media/ communication/ journalism education programmes offered under separate Faculties/ College/ Schools of Media and Communications.

Indeed, media/ communication/ journalism education programmes may benefit from an adjustment from a four (4) year degree duration to a five (5) year time frame. This is expected to adequately and sufficiently accommodate and deal with emerging and continuous sophistication of complex communication technologies and related communication dynamics.

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