



Mass Communication Education in Nigeria: Current Status, Challenges and Way Forward

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Abstract: Since independence in 1960, there has been a steady growth of mass communication education in Nigeria. However, recent studies have shown that a significant number of graduates in the discipline do not possess the requisite skills for employment. This paper reiterates the issue. It describes the current status of mass communication education in the country, with a focus on the challenges confronting it, and suggests the way forward. The discourse shows that the number of mass communication graduates continues to grow but quality is declining. The challenges identified are the inadequacy of modern journalism facilities, absence of good journalism institutes, the doctorate syndrome, inadequate curricula, few hands-on opportunities for teaching and learning, poor funding, and negative students' attitude toward research. The authorities and stakeholders must address these issues to enable the country keep up with the best global practices.

Keywords: Communication education, journalism, journalism training, research, Nigeria.

Introduction

Formal mass communication education started in Nigeria with the

establishment of the department of mass communication at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in

1961 (Ashana, 2012). The University of Lagos followed in 1967 as a UNESCO-backed program. Since then several tertiary institutions in Nigeria have established similar or the same programs to teach journalism and impart the skills. Besides universities and polytechnics, training schools were also established. *Daily Times* established its training school in 1965 known as the Times Journalism Institute (TJI), while the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) training school

commenced in 1959. The number of journalism schools in Nigeria had risen to 63 as of 2008 some of them accredited, and several others not known to law. The following table shows the number of academic and tertiary institutions offering the mass communication or journalism programs lately. The figures were compiled from the books of the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) in 2014 and Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB) in 2017.

Table 1: Tertiary institutions offering Mass Communication in Nigeria

Ownership	Polytechnics	University
Federal	19	13
State	19	15
Private	16	43
Total	54	71

The foregoing table shows that there are more universities offering mass communication program than polytechnics at the undergraduate levels. It also shows that there are currently more private universities offering mass communication than both the federal and state institutions.

In this presentation, an attempt is made to discuss the current status of mass communication in Nigeria, paying close attention to the challenges facing this field of study and how these challenges could be tackled.

Current Status of Mass Communication Education in Nigeria

Journalism education in Nigeria has grown exponentially since the advent of the first department of mass communication at University of Nigeria in 1961, followed by that of the University of Lagos in 1967, and the one at the Institute of Management and Technology (MIT) in 1978 which pioneered the study of mass communication in the polytechnic segment of the tertiary education system. Currently, no fewer than 120 universities and

polytechnics offer mass communication or journalism education programs in Nigeria (Ashana, 2012). This implies that mass communication education has flourished in terms of numbers.

However, recent studies have shown that the increase in number is not replicated in the quality of program and graduates. In newsrooms, new reporters are advised to forget what they were taught in the classroom as it hardly bears relevance to what obtains in the beats (Whitt, 1995). Seelig (2010, p.245) raises these important questions: “What is it educators are preparing Journalism or Mass Communication majors to do? What are educators going to do to keep up with the technology changes in the media industry?” Ashana (2012), in agreement to this position, notes that “the state of journalism education is in dilemma as a result of certain ailments that have besieged the profession.”

Akinfeleye (2009) also argues that: the proliferation of journalism institutions without the accompanying human and financial capital as prerequisites, inadequate funding, powerful regulatory bodies, proper accreditation benchmarks and enforcement of a few existing legal frameworks – inability of the Journalists to police their own ranks, abandonment of journalistic integrity, left-footed professional ethical codes and

their enforcement to mention a few, have negatively affected good and enduring professional standards (p.2).

Furtherance to Akinfeleye’s argument, it is necessary to note that journalism education in Nigeria, having existed for over fifty years, is still to a large extent anchored on the Western philosophy of journalism studies. The peculiarities of Nigeria are not visible in her journalism education of today. In agreement with this stand, Chibita (2009) raises some observations with regard to this gap. He is worried why the country’s mass communication education does not reflect community problems and dynamics and why reporters’ knowledge of the media poorly reflects poverty, environmental degradation, unemployment, energy crisis and other situations on ground. Odunlami (2014) adds that right from 1960 till today, the theories, models and applications of key concepts that guide media practice and education in Africa are embedded in foreign contents.

Challenges Confronting Mass Communication in Nigeria

In spite the growth in numbers, the discipline is confronted with challenges that affect quality. The current curriculum in several institutions belong in the past as it is not adequate enough to equip students with modern skills needed in the journalism practice of the

21st century. Due to the dynamism in the practice as a result of constant technological advancement, the fact is that mass communication curriculum also needs constant review.

It is important to disclose that a number of journalism departments still use the dummy sheet, partitioned studios, and short hand in teaching students! This is at a time when technological innovations have overtaken such archives. There is a huge disconnect between what the mass communication curriculum offers and what is obtainable in field (Okoro, Obayi & Onyebuchi, 2013). Oso (2012) argues that it is a concern that the current mass communication curriculum in Nigeria's institutions was inherited from the British colonialists. Since the advent of the study of mass communication in Nigeria, part of the concerns of journalism/mass communication educators have been how to ensure a blend of journalism curriculum with the changing needs of the media industry (Odunlami, 2014).

Observers have also noticed that today's curriculum is inadequate in applying journalistic knowledge to address societal problems and dynamics. Having the knowledge of journalistic operations is not enough, but using that knowledge to solve problems is more important. Chibita (2009) sums up the problem thus:

How, for instance, do we make writing tutorials work where space, equipment and human resource are limited, or strike the balance in training between the extremes of producing specialists and generalists? How do we provide sound journalism training while keeping an eye on the realities of the majority of our audiences, or grapple with the big political and economic questions while at the same time meeting the needs of indigenous language media and rural communities? (p.2)

Inadequate modern journalism facilities is also one of the most daunting problems facing journalism/mass communication education in Nigeria. A number of mass communication departments use out-dated and faulty equipment which are irrelevant to what is obtainable in the modern day journalism practice. It is quite unfortunate that many mass communication departments only struggle to update their practical studios with few equipment only when accreditation exercises are around the corner.

Odunlami (2014, p.48) has observed that the present decade is noted for the high adoption rate of technological innovations in journalism, and mass communication practice often creates a feeling of inadequacy for media/journalism educators because as they grapple to incorporate

technological phenomenon in the curricula, several others come in quick succession. This phenomenon illustrates how and why the newsroom appears to be constantly ahead of the classroom. This assertion agrees to the fact that lack of or inadequate modern journalism training facilities is responsible for why the modern day journalism operation is ahead of the classroom. The situation is even worsened by the ineffectiveness of bodies in charge of regulating and accrediting the profession.

Regulatory bodies, besides being incompetent in the discharge of their duties, which breeds poor accreditation exercises, have also been accused of collecting gratification in exchange for undeserved scorings. Odunlami (2014) asserts that this trend is still noticeable in Nigeria like other developing countries of Africa and adds that no sooner people in these countries, especially Africans, adjust to the realities of an emerging technological innovation than same are upgraded with the attendant challenge to catch up.

Are lecturers in mass communication doing the right thing? If they are not, what are the reasons? The doctorate syndrome which makes a Ph.D holder in journalism or mass communication (or some other relevant disciplines) an automatic lecturer in a university

or polytechnic is big problem for students. In most cases, these doctors do not have industry experience and it is unimaginable, for instance, for someone to be teaching students about a newsroom he or she has never seen or worked in before! This raises the question about the quality of what is being imparted to students and makes fragile the epistemology in Akinfeleye's assertion (2009) that a low degree of literacy rate contributes to a low degree of journalism education and training while a high level of literacy tends to contribute to a higher degree of journalistic training and professional standards. We reckon that a good journalism degree plus contemporary industry experience provides the platform to impart quality journalism education.

Ashana (2012) notes that the state of journalism education is now problematic owing to certain ailments that have besieged the profession. It can be inferred that the more rooted or grounded the lecturers are in the field of journalism, both professionally and academically, the more deep-rooted their students will be, as the quality of graduates produced can be linked to the quality of lecturers that taught those graduates. Lecturers in journalism need to further equip themselves both theoretically and in the practical aspects (skill) so as to

be able to teach and orientate their students toward solving societal problems. Often times, more attention is given the theoretical aspect of journalism to the detriment of skill acquisition. This trend must stop in order to keep up the pace with the best global practices.

Poor students' attitude to research is worrisome. This concern is compounded by their lethargic participation in research classes, lecturers' inadequate knowledge of media research and the pressures of social life over academics. It is a common occurrence in most universities to see that a number of students dread carrying out their final year research project because of the rigor involved. Some students succumb to the act plagiarism when they find they can no longer cope and what's more, leturers in some cases cannot detect this abnormaly!

It is a fact, and very visible, that inadequate funding significantly undermines journalism education in Nigeria's institutions of higher learning and it wouldn't make any difference whether they are private or public. Heads of departments take advantage of accreditation exercises to get funds from their managements as 'no' or 'interim' accreditation portends misfortune for their departments. Unaccredited programs are not permitted to admit students besides the fact that not being accredited is a stain on the overall

image of the university. The time of accreditation provides the opportunity to procure some badly needed equipment both for students and staff and put in proper shape office accommodation and toilet facilities, amongst others.

Chibita (2009) posits that one common feature across African universities in the last decade is that resource constraints have forced many of them to get into the 'numbers game'. As entry point qualifications are lowered to accommodate more 'clients', leading to the admission of weaker students from the outset, the future becomes bleak with regard to quality as students are not cut out for what they were admitted for. The implication is the production of half-baked graduates, which seriously undermines journalism as a knowledge production profession. Many institutions admit more students than they can cater for in order to generate more funds. This in turn impacts negatively on teaching and learning.

The configuration of mass communication into Print/online, Broadcast and Public Relations/Advertising sequences is generating argument in Nigeria. Some support it while some others do not like the idea. The pessimist's argument is that by asking a student from 300 Level and above to specialize in one sequence, he or she

loses the knowledge of other sequences which makes him or her half-baked. Besides that, a graduate who was oriented toward the public relations and advertising sequence, for instance, will find it difficult to cope working in a broadcast organization. This might be one of the reasons many media organizations are lamenting that media graduates are performing below expectation.

Mass Communication Education: The Way Forward

Omojola (2008) provides a list of media stakeholders as including media scholars, reporters, media owners, NGO's, media users and media audience. He asserts that for the profession of journalism to progress, there is need for all these stakeholders to work together and proffer solutions to challenges, adding that it should not be left only to journalists. Journalism education is a very classic platform to regard the profession as a "commonly-held value" (Sorauf, 1957, cited in Omojola, 2011, p.353).

There is an urgent need to update the current mass communication curriculum used by most tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The curriculum must be reviewed to accommodate new ideas that reflect the realities of today's modern media culture. Updating the current curriculum will allow mass communication graduates to be

adequately equipped with skills needed by the industry.

Using the case of Makerere University's Department of Mass Communication as an example, Chibita (2009) notes that the department, in addressing the inadequacy of its curriculum, agreed to change its name from Mass Communication to Journalism and Communication. The new name would reflect a broader and more relevant scope as well as pave the way for a variety of separate, more focused qualifications such as a Bachelor of Journalism and Media Studies, Bachelor of Communication (covering Public Relations and Advertising) and Bachelor of Development Support Communication. Nigerians can tap from this idea.

The idea of bombarding mass communication students with so many course units is not acceptable. A private university exists in southwestern part of Nigeria where students must take 170 course units to qualify for graduation. A careful investigation by our team shows this does not happen in any other university in the world. It was discovered during the investigation that in addition to departmental courses, students were asked to take college-wide courses and university-wide courses which made up the 170 units. Experts agree that 140 units are manageable for the

undergraduate mass communication or journalism program.

The profession of journalism is known to law and the constitution in Nigeria. Journalists are still regarded as the fourth estate of the realm, the activities of citizen journalists notwithstanding.

Therefore, government should endeavor to assist journalism institutions financially. It is assumed that governments will not fund private institutions but universities and polytechnics owned by them should be given financial succour. Furthermore, professional associations like the Newspaper Proprietors' Association of Nigeria (NPAN), Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE) just to name a few, could help mobilize wealthy Nigerians for endowments in these institutions.

Proper screening is advised when employing journalism educators.

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Persons with quality experience in media practice should be employed to teach the core hands-on courses in mass communication. The need also exists for media educators to be ICT-inclined to be able to teach students the innovations of the 21st century which accommodate both theory and practice together (Kraeplin and Criado, 2005).

Conclusion

Having examined the current status and challenges confronting mass communication/journalism education in Nigeria, it is visible that there is a need for institutions in the country to upgrade the quality of these programs to be able to produce skilled graduates. This should start with the revising of the current curricula used by these institutions. The curricula should be designed and expanded to accommodate the emerging techno-deterministic and local contents in the field.

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