

Journalism and Mass Communication Education in Nigeria:in Search of the Right Pedagogy

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INTRODUCTION

The intervention of technology in media operations has altered, albeit in a positive way, the ecology of mass communication across the globe. However, the speed of the adoption and diffusion of innovations in the contemporary media industry is posing a great challenge to media educators as the newsroom appears to be constantly ahead of the classroom, especially in the developing world. In Nigeria, like other developing nations, Journalism/Mass Communication educators grapple with the challenge of ever-increasing innovations and try to incorporate such realities in the curriculum. After over one hundred and fifty two years of journalism practice in Nigeria, the concerns of journalism and mass communication educators remain how to ensure an effective blend of journalism curriculum with the constantly changing needs of the media industry. The basic issue and recurrent themes at intellectual gatherings seem to resonate Michelle Seelig's (2010:245) posers: "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?"

Journalism education, as Knight (2012: 62) contends, is a reflexive process, and one that has a close relationship with the industry and society that the products work in. This relationship demands a constant interaction between media institutions and the industry to fashion out the nature of acceptable exchanges both in terms of output (personnel) and the effect of this on media content.

The usual quip made to young Journalism/Mass Communication graduates upon employment in newsrooms is: "forget what you learned in J-School." The idea, according to (Whitt, 1993: 91), is for students and graduates of Mass Communication alike, to jettison or purge themselves of those theories, rules and idealistic concepts taught in school which, it is believed, could prevent them from experimenting, or innovating. The experiential or common-sensical logic of this attitude by practitioners in the traditional media is, in the main, an indicator of a disconnect between the newsroom and the classroom, a pointer to the imperative need of a pedagogical overhaul of extant tradition and methodology of knowledge transfer in journalism / mass communication education, especially in developing nations like Nigeria.

While it is difficult, if not impossible, as Seelig (2010:245) points out, to provide a journalism and mass communication curriculum that is all things to all students, the dynamism and psychology of media audiences have become so intricate and complex such that no media professional that is worth his salt can afford to ignore. As Barrie Hartman, a former executive editor of *Daily Camera*, one of America's gender-sensitive newspapers once disclosed:

Because readers' likes and dislikes keep changing, we, too, must keep changing. That is why readership research, focus groups, and listening exercises are such important tools to use as we reshape and rebuild the newspaper. (Hartman, cited in Whitt, 1995: 90)

Hence, whilst the goal and preoccupation of practitioners remain how to stay afloat in the competitive media market through the constant creation and design of sophisticated media products/cutting edge content, both professionals and educators need to work together to re-invent journalism and mass communication education. Seelig (2010: *ibid*) underscores a blend of strategy:

The mindset should not be about creating new forms of journalism or mass communication, but about new ways of reaching and engaging audiences. The same holds true for educators. Just as the media look to innovative techniques to reach audiences, educators should be asking themselves if they are doing everything possible to reach and engage their students.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE NIGERIAN MEDIA EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

Mass Communication education evolved in Nigeria initially through unco-ordinated historical phases. Early Nigerian journalists and broadcasters acquired their professional training on the job. According to Oso (2012: 7), while most of Nigeria's education in terms of structure, philosophy and curricula was inherited from Britain, it was ironical that this was not so with mass communication education because the British, the country's colonial masters, had no communication education model to offer. Hence, while early Nigerian journalists turned to liberal British ideas and opinion in their pungent anti-colonial writings, the model of Mass Communication education came from America. Most scholars traced the history of Mass Communication/Journalism education

in Nigeria to 1961 when Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe replicated the curriculum of the Jackson College of Journalism at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The thrust of communication education at this time was on practical skills / training.

Scholars like Oso, while appreciating the historical necessity which informed the initial emphasis that our journalism forbears like Zik placed on praxis express concerns that this trend seems to have informed the current reductionist tendency that equates communication studies to mass communication. Communication, Oso posits, is a field and not just a discipline which has over the years drawn inspirations from many sources in both the Humanities and Social Sciences. Deacon, et al (1997: 2) underscores the interdisciplinary nature of communication, as its unique strength “where a range of existing academic disciplines meet, bringing their own particular questions, concerns and intellectual traditions with them.” According to Oso:

The encounters between and among these different intellectual traditions give communication studies its dynamism and relevance to contemporary social and cultural life. Our research and teaching must reflect this broad interdisciplinary outlook in order to capture the rich diversity of contemporary life. (Oso, 2012: 9)

The thesis of the scholars’ argument here is that the intellectual ambience of communication education and pedagogy naturally transcends the conventional syllabi of Journalism, Broadcasting, Public Relations and Advertising.

Akinfeleye (2003: 15) summarises the general aims and objectives of journalism education in Nigeria thus:

... to train journalists, educate them and make them responsible and useful citizens of Nigeria as they use journalistic expertise to build a new Nigeria especially in our developmental efforts in which the role of mass media had been recognised by government as a necessary but not sufficient social force towards nation-building and maturity.

Specifically, the goals according to the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National Universities’ Commission (NUC) include:

- (i) producing graduates who are to meet the middle and higher level manpower communication requirements of Nigeria;
- (ii) producing qualified communication/journalism teachers for the Universities, Polytechnics and other similar institutions;
- (iii) producing technically qualified graduates who can be self-employed upon graduation; and
- (iv) producing socially responsible journalists and communicators.

Although these goals provide the background which informs the minimum benchmark index for the accreditation of journalism/mass communication programmes across the country, they however appear inadequate due to the changing nature of journalism practice globally. Journalism and mass communication is a fast evolving vocation which has transcended the traditional level of the “He said, he noted he reiterated mode of reportage”. The basic objectives of journalism education emphasised by the N.U.C. and N.B.T.E. as listed above require some modifications in line with the unfolding realities of media convergence. Journalism\mass communication trainees require theoretical and practical exposures that would make them write across the different media platforms, master new technologies including the ability to fuse previously separated roles such as writer and videographer in a multimedia story-telling format that ensures accuracy, fairness and balance. Today’s journalists in a developing nation like Nigeria, must be able to use and manipulate technology in the typical Backpack Journalism tradition, to create powerful and intimate stories that take people beyond the boundary of their own life experience and connect them with the currents, forces and situations reshaping our world on a daily basis.

Of course, all of these could still derive from the core and subsidiary competences, similar to those identified by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)’s model curricula for journalism education. These include:

- competences of general knowledge and intellectual ability;
- professional techniques of research, writing (and other forms of presentation), editing, design and production;
- the ability to use the tools of journalism and to adapt to new technologies and innovative practices;
- professional understandings, including ethics;
- knowledge of journalism’s role in society, including journalism’s history, the organisation of the news media, and laws circumscribing journalism practice; and
- knowledge of best practices in journalism. (UNESCO, 2007: 30)

These core competencies are by no means exhaustive as each country reserves the right to streamline the curricula of its institutions in accordance with its national objectives as identified in their respective communication policies. These core competencies however provide the basic platform for journalism education in line with what obtains globally especially in universities under the three curricular axis / lines of development.

These comprise curriculum content that emphasize norms, values, tools, standards and practices of journalism; axis underscoring the social, cultural, political, economic, legal and ethical aspects of journalism practice both within and outside the national borders; and areas comprising knowledge of world affairs and journalism's intellectual challenges. The idea is that if communication must be maximally utilised as a tool to mobilize the citizenry for a meaningful national development in a country like Nigeria, operators of her media organisations must be people who know what to do through effective hands-on training.

Taking a cue from the UNESCO model therefore three categories of competencies are discernible. These include: professional standards, journalism and society, and knowledge. The professional standards comprise research skills indicating ability to comprehend, analyse, synthesize and evaluate unfamiliar material quickly (otherwise known as critical thinking), news judgement and a thoughtful understanding of what makes a good story and a story newsworthy, observational skills, ability to quickly and efficiently gather, understand and select relevant information through interviewing from published and Internet sources, and using investigative techniques. Other skills in the professional category include ability to take accurate notes, techniques for checking and corroborating information, writing skills, arithmetical skills and a basic knowledge of statistics and survey methods.

Under the second category of journalism and society competencies, prospective journalists are to be equipped with the knowledge of the role of journalism in society, including its role in developing and securing democracy including an understanding of how information is collected and managed by political, commercial and other organisations among others. Knowledge category as the third leg of the tripod of journalism training core competencies has to do with candidates' basic understanding of their countries' systems of government, their constitutions and systems of justice, political processes, economies, social and cultural organisations and their relations with other countries.

RATIONALE FOR A NEW PEDAGOGY FOR JOURNALISM EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Studies have established that journalism education and training in Africa is grafted on Western paradigms. From independence till today, the theories, models and applications of key concepts that guide media practice and education in Africa are steeped in foreign contents. As Wallace Chuma (2010: 17) observes, there is little in mainstream journalism training in Africa that speaks to African ways of communicating. Even, the hegemonic 5 Ws and H model of news writing, Chuma states, is consistent with Western ways of Communication, and steeped in Western culture. As Chuma rightly notes in "African folktales or stories, the climax does not come first. But when we write news, everything has to be contained in the first 40 – 50 words." The African culture is rich in diversity. At least, this much has been acknowledged even by foreign researchers. The African narrative mode dwells on its unique perspectives, much of which relies on the creation of suspense for effective delivery. This fact is exemplified in the story-telling strategy of most cultures, especially the Yorùbá people of South-Western Nigeria when they say "Àlò, Àlò." (i.e. Story! Story ... Once upon a time ...). The logic here as Chuma identified in the case of the Shona people of Zimbabwe, is that the African narrative does not usually begin with the shocking detail when we communicate. Rather, we first prepare the listener before dropping the bombshell. This consciousness by media scholars in Africa could spur news writing schemata that may upstage the inverted pyramidal or other foreign news structure for other context- specific format in the African tradition.

Another area where the western paradigm seems to have infested journalism education in Nigeria albeit Africa is in hegemonic status of English Language. Chuma puts it succinctly:

In Anglophone Africa, the Anglo-Saxon character of media training is illustrated most prominently by the uncontested, taken-for-granted use of English. The impression is created that journalism teaching (and consequently practice) is eventually an English Language affair which explains why, for example, media training institutions in Africa will not enrol students with poor grades in English. So connected is English to journalism training that several media and journalism studies departments in Africa emerged as offshoots of English Department. The transition was deemed to be smoother! The effect of mainstreaming English as the language of journalism instruction has been to marginalise the development of local African languages as media languages. (Chuma 2010: 16)

In other words, the issue as some Afro-centric media scholars have advanced, and which this author subscribes is to shift African languages, as part of African experience, to the centre of learning, teaching and theorising on media journalism. The problem however in a multi-ethnic and multi-lingua setting like Nigeria is how to determine which of the indigenous languages among Yorùbá, Igbo and Hausa will gain primacy over others including the English Language for pedagogical purposes. The objective of this paradigm reconstruction is not to alienate those aspects of western thoughts that are relevant to African media and social systems but as Chuma argues, to mainstream the African experience, and borrow relevant western models, but only where necessary to enrich the learning and teaching process.

JOURNALISM EDUCATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Journalism / Mass Communication is technology driven. 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 in 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” and raises the relevance of Seelig’s earlier posers on what educators should do to keep up with the technology changes in the media industry; and on whether journalism educators should or need to re-invent themselves every time another media technology is invented.

The situation in Nigeria like any other developing country where the realities of underdevelopment with its attendant consequences of dependency syndrome hold sway could be best imagined. As it were, no sooner people in developing countries, especially Africans, try to grapple or adjust to the realities of an emerging technological innovation than such is upgraded with the attendant challenge to step up. Of particular instance are the overlapping functions of the too numerous technological gadgets that now saturate the telecommunication industry. If professors elsewhere in the developed nations find it difficult keeping up to date with technology while also teaching and conducting research, then the plight of African journalism educators could best be imagined. In Nigeria, for instance, the year 2015 is the adopted deadline for digital switch-over from the analogue mode of broadcast transmission/reception. As resources are being mobilised and deployed to upgrade existing hardwares, the developed world who are drivers of such technological changes are already perfecting their strategies of the next technological agenda beyond digitization. This corroborates McQuail’s thesis on the critical theorists’ attempts to link exogenous development with the maintenance of dependency (McQuail,2005 :490).

If Nigerian journalism education must be severed from the umbilical cord of Western paradigms and its attendant impacts, practitioners and educators must apply the wisdom revealed in previous studies. For instance, Garrison (2003), Kraepelin and Criado (2005) counsel that both professionals and educators should equip students with an education that prepares them conceptually as well as giving them the skills required to blend together a mixture of media formats within a digital environment. This is what media scholars like Oso describe as multi-skilling.

Technology, as some scholars have observed, changes rapidly; hence while it is important to expose students to the latest trends and techniques, it is unrealistic to expose students and media training institutions to all the frequent and never-ending technological advances in delivery methods and presentation techniques. This is more so when media training institutions in Africa do not have the wherewithal to play and win the technology catch-up game.

Besides, it is high time Nigerian, and indeed, African journalism institutions adapt the converged curricula concept as enunciated by Claussen (2008). This model aims to teach journalism/mass communication students critical thinking, reporting and writing across media platforms. Developed by the Northwestern University’s School of Journalism, Medill, converged curriculum proposes an integrated curriculum which encompasses in the first year, traditional introductory mass communication survey class with content updated to focus on media in the 21st century; reporting and writing across all media platforms; and multimedia storytelling that includes an introduction to Web-based journalism and media. According Claussen converged curriculum in the second year includes courses on enterprise reporting in diverse communities and media presentation. At the third year the curriculum includes storytelling, media law and ethics, and a journalism residency. The curriculum also proposes a variety of electives beginning from the second year. These include Literary Journalism, Journalism of Empathy, Documentary, Legal Journalism, Business Journalism, Environmental Journalism, Health and Science Journalism, Military and the Press, Investigative Journalism, Building Interactive Communities, Ad Creativity and Innovation, and Direct and Database Marketing. Other additions could be Citizen Journalism and Entrepreneurial Studies.

At this age of globalisation and information society, journalism and mass communication education should transcend traditional print and broadcast journalism. The reality of media convergence makes it imperative and expedient to equip students with a well-rounded education that focuses on developing, writing and story-telling skills, coupled with critical thinking, visual literary skills as well as how to package stories for various media outlets with emphasis on professional values.

CONCLUSION

The object of this paper is, as Wallace Chuma observed, not to alienate those aspects of Western thought that are relevant to African media and social systems. Rather the goal is to argue for the mainstreaming of the African experience as it were and “borrowing relevant Western models, but only where necessary to enrich the teaching and learning process.” For instance, the analysis of the political economy of African media has some peculiar nuances which will not blend *stricto sensu* to the template of the radical/critical pluralist traditions of the West. Unlike the situation in the West where the state appears to concede some significant control to organised

business interests, the African state, with the exception of South Africa, remains a major and domineering player in media policymaking, especially in the broadcast sector.

Besides, African media are not as integrated into the global climate as radical/leftist scholars like Althusser and Gramsci would postulate. Hence the issue of concentration, conglomeration etc is not as clear-cut in Africa as Western analysis would permit. In Nigeria, for instance, contrary to the trend in developed economies, the major newspapers continue to cope as viable businesses in spite of the rising power of the Internet. What all these mean is that Western paradigms which do not take full account of the specific peculiarities of African situations or realities ought to be domesticated if they are to be applied in media teaching and learning.

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