

Enhancing Synergy between Journalism Training and Practice in Nigeria: The Curricular Challenge

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Abstract: *Media practice in Nigeria is today facing a serious challenge occasioned by deficit in the professional qualities of the Mass Communication graduates. The challenge is made stiffer by the new media environment which makes the media industry increasingly more complex. As such, there is a need for the Nigeria Mass Communication graduate to possess basic professional skills in order to function well in the new media environment. This study has explored ways of building synergy between journalism training and practice in Nigeria through curricular adjustment. Views from the academia and the Nigerian media industry were collated and a consensus on how to adjust the curricular to make them more industry-friendly was made. The finding identifies minimal set of basic competencies that will enable a graduate of HND/BSC/BA Mass Communication practice journalism skillfully within the context of global professional standard. Qualitative analysis was done using ANOVA software from which interpretations was made on how the curricula can be adjusted to fill the skill gaps in the HND/BA/BSC Mass Communication curricular in tertiary institutions in Nigeria and the results shows that curriculum review can be the key technique to enhancing synergy between journalism training and practice in Nigeria.*

Keywords: ANOVA, Curricular Journalism, Media, Skill, Synergy

1. Introduction

Journalism is a highly skill-based profession with the journalist requiring several competencies to be able to practice well. This means that the journalist ought to have undergone thorough training for him/her to imbibe these skills. Obviously, the challenge of ensuring effective journalism practice lies with the training institutions, notably the mass communication departments in higher institutions of learning. In other words, like any other profession there has to be synergy between journalism training and practice. But does the nature of journalism practice in Nigeria index this synergy.

The issue of how to improve journalism practice through the right journalism educational system has received good attention among communication researchers. Rethinking the future of journalism education, Mencing (2010) observed that journalism education programs are distinctly unprepared to face the new structural challenges in the environment. In the context of Nigeria, scholars have also addressed the lack of synergy between Mass Communication training and journalism practice as a major gap in journalism education system (Ojomo, 2015).

The systemic nature of this problem of lack of synergy between journalist training and practice in Nigeria means that several components are interplaying. Admission processes, quality of faculty; huge programme accreditation, internship and training infrastructure are some of these key components (Ojomo, 2015). Perhaps, more outstanding of these components is the curricular of higher institutions in Nigeria which lack the dynamism that can face the realities of the new environment. As Moja notes, the curricula in tertiary institutions "tend to be outdated; therefore, there is need for curriculum transformation in order to take into consideration the changes that are taking place in the nation as well as in the world" (2000, p. 14). More recent studies like Okoyeand Arimonu, (2016) also show that Nigerian tertiary

institutions' curricular no longer meet the needs of the industry.

Skill gaps in journalism practices

Views of Mass Communication scholars also converge on the fact that journalism curricular in higher institutions in Nigeria are outdated, although the scholars advance different contextual realities for adjustment. For instance, while Ojomo (2015) recommended curricular adjustment in the context of new technological realities, Okoroafor (2016) sought for curricular adjustment in the context of media convergence. Perhaps, one of the core contexts which have least been explored by the scholars is the increasing deficiency in the basic communication skill of Mass Communication students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, a phenomenon that is terminally creeping into the media industry.

Severe shortcomings in the written and oral communication among graduates of tertiary institutions in Nigeria have since been noticed by managers of firms in the Nigeria labour market (Dabaleni, Oni & Adekola, 2001). Today, the situation must have become worse due to the digital native which the undergraduate has irredeemably become. Numerous empirical studies have documented how the new media usage has taken a huge toll on the language proficiency of undergraduates (Cingel & Sundai, 2012; Grace, Kemp, Martin & Parrila, 2014; Drouin & Driver, 2014; De Jonge & Kemp, 2012).

A casual assessment of HND II Mass Communication students in my over three decades of teaching experience suggests what the editors in Nigeria media industry today must be contending with in terms of deficiency in language skills of the graduate journalists that report for them. This is an objective assessment that draws from the basic writing standard that has long been set by the journalism profession itself (see, 2004; Callihan 2010; Bealimjoco 2015; Ol'ga, 2016). Let us visualize the

problem a bit more: a benign argument ensued between one of my HND II project supervisees and her brother at home over which of these two statements was correct: either “347 of our respondents agrees that...” or “347 of our respondents agree that...”, and my supervisee said she ‘confidently’ chose the former. So, if it is settled that journalism curricular in the Nigeria tertiary institutions are moribund and scholars have documented contexts for adjustment, can we route for consensus among Mass Communication academics and mass media editors on how the curriculum adjustment can be made to make it more responsive to the realities and standard requirements of the media industry.

Conceptual Framework

The concept of basic skills and its importance to the labour market worldwide have been subject of empirical studies (Bryan and Harter 1897, 1899 in Winterton, Deist, and Stringfellow, 2006). Skill is a cumulative phenomenon which often begins from the base level up to the peak. In other words, it involves stages associated with getting to the peak of performance with continuous improvement beyond achieving an adequate level of education and training. Building adequate skill in HND/BA/BSC Mass Communication trainees is, therefore, a way of ensuring efficiency in journalism practice, which is an important source of higher productivity and improved living standard of the practitioners. This, cumulatively, will rub off on the national growth which is critical to any country economy wellbeing (International Labour Organization, 2008).

This study identifies minimal set of basic competencies that will enable a graduate of HND/BSC/BA Mass Communication practice journalism skillfully within the context of global professional standard.

2. Methodology

The study employed in-depth interview qualitative approach. The study first sought to identify minimal set of basic skills that will enable a graduate of HND/BSC/BA Mass Communication to practice journalism functionally in the media industry on completion of his or her degree. This objective basically addressed **RQ1**. The interview protocols were then used to understand how the HND/BSC/BA Mass Communication curricular can be adjusted to accommodate the basic skill requirements which addressed the **RQ2** of the study.

The research questions RQ1 and RQ2 are as follows:

RQ1: What are the gaps in the current HND/B.SC/BA Mass Communication curricular that hinder acquisition of basic skills and competencies by the students?

RQ2: How can the Mass Communication curricular in tertiary institutions in Nigeria be adjusted to enhance acquisition of basic skills and competencies by the students?

Mass Communication academics and mass media editors were asked to rate skill competency attributes which are adapted from Snoke and Underwood (2002). The skill attributes are rated on a scale of importance using seven-point Likert scale in the order of importance where 1 = extremely unimportant, 2 = unimportant, 3 = of little importance, 4 = neutral, 5 = very important, 6 = of major importance, and 7 = extremely important

Qualitative analysis was done using ANOVA software from which interpretations was made on how the curricula can be adjusted to fill the skill gaps in the HND/BA/BSC Mass Communication curricular in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

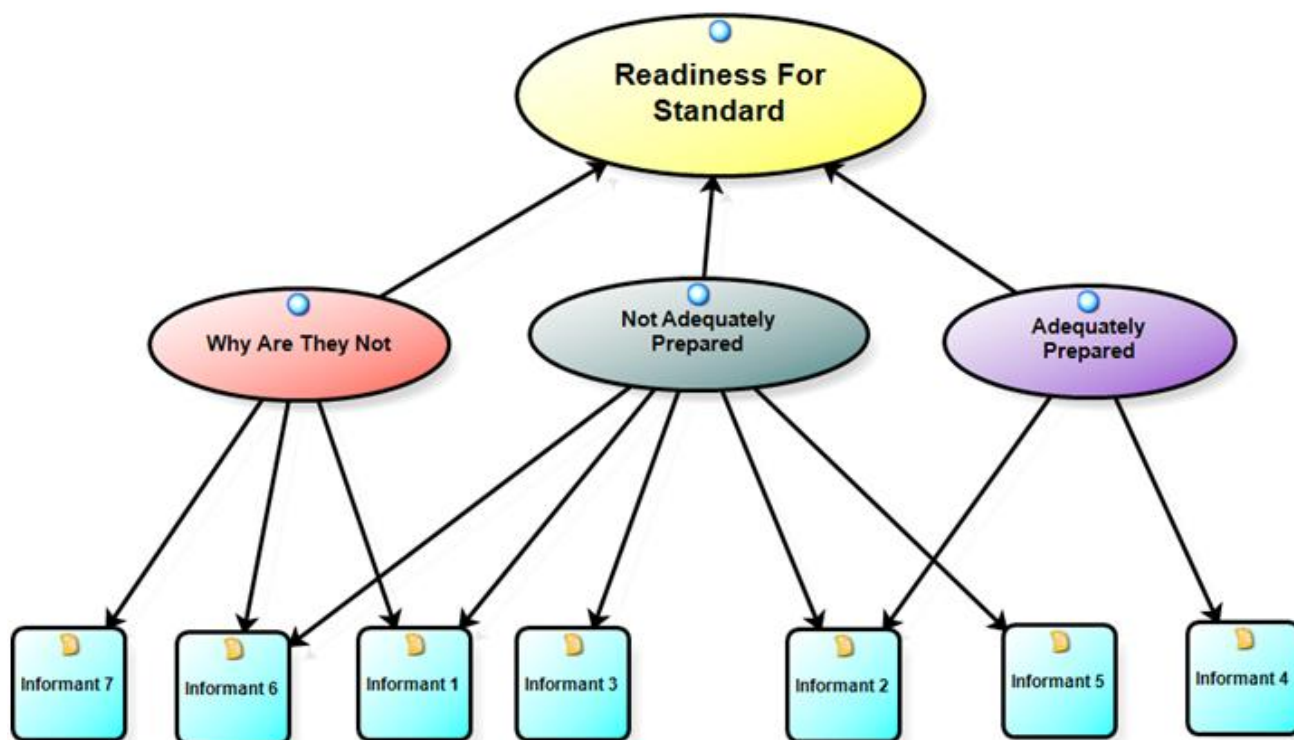
3. Results (Findings)

The study selected ten (10) informants made up of academic staff in Mass Communication department of universities and polytechnics across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria and the media industry. Based on Creswell (2012) where 5 to 25 informants were recommended for a phenomenological investigation, in-depth interviews were conducted with seven (7) of them to address the two research questions. The remaining three (3) could not be reached for logistic reasons. Analysis was done on ANOVA software.

Readiness for Standard

Before we address the gaps, we sought to know from our informants the level of synergy between journalism training and practice in Nigeria by trying to know whether the nigerian journalism graduates are ready to face the challenge of modern global journalism.

In an attempt to find out whether Nigerian graduates can actually face the challenges thrown at them by the modern journalism training and practice in the country, a qualitative analysis was carried out. About seven informants were interviewed and it was revealed that while very few nigerian journalism graduates are adequately ready to face the obstacles of modern professionalism; majority are not adequately prepared. And why are they not is another point highlighted in this research.



Adequately Prepared

We cannot totally overrule the flexibility of journalism practice in the modern age, compared to the past. Informant 2

They are relatively well equipped. Informant 4

Not Adequately Prepared

According to most of the respondents, majority of journalism graduates are not sufficiently ready to hit the road to professionalism as they are not well trained for the outside world and “it may not be adequate to suggest that, media organizations equip their workers.” From the words of informant 5, “Nigerian Journalism graduates are products of an educational system that’s generally believed to be of low standard. So, they are not adequately equipped to face the challenge of a fast-paced Communication system whose operational procedures are dictated by the dynamics of technology.” In agreement to this, informant 6 affirmed that, “Nigerian graduates of journalism are trained as jack of all trade and master of none. Therefore, they will not fit in into global practice of journalism in more established societies.” Informant 3 also confirmed the fact that, “Most graduates who take to the journalism profession are not adequately prepared to hit the ground running in the industry. Most of them cannot successful write a punishable story, some lack the knowledge of the language needed to excel amongst other things. Although, some graduates are well-primed, a larger number struggle.”

In an interview with informant 1, he also thinks that there is insufficiency of readiness in the overall journalism practice in Nigeria, “The entire journalism practice in

Nigeria is severely challenged with inadequacy of tools and resources. The organizations lack resources and equipments” he emphasized that “the practitioners are even worse.”

Conclusively, journalism practitioners, graduates and media organizations are all not adequately prepared in enhancing synergy between journalism training and practice in Nigeria.

Why Are They Not

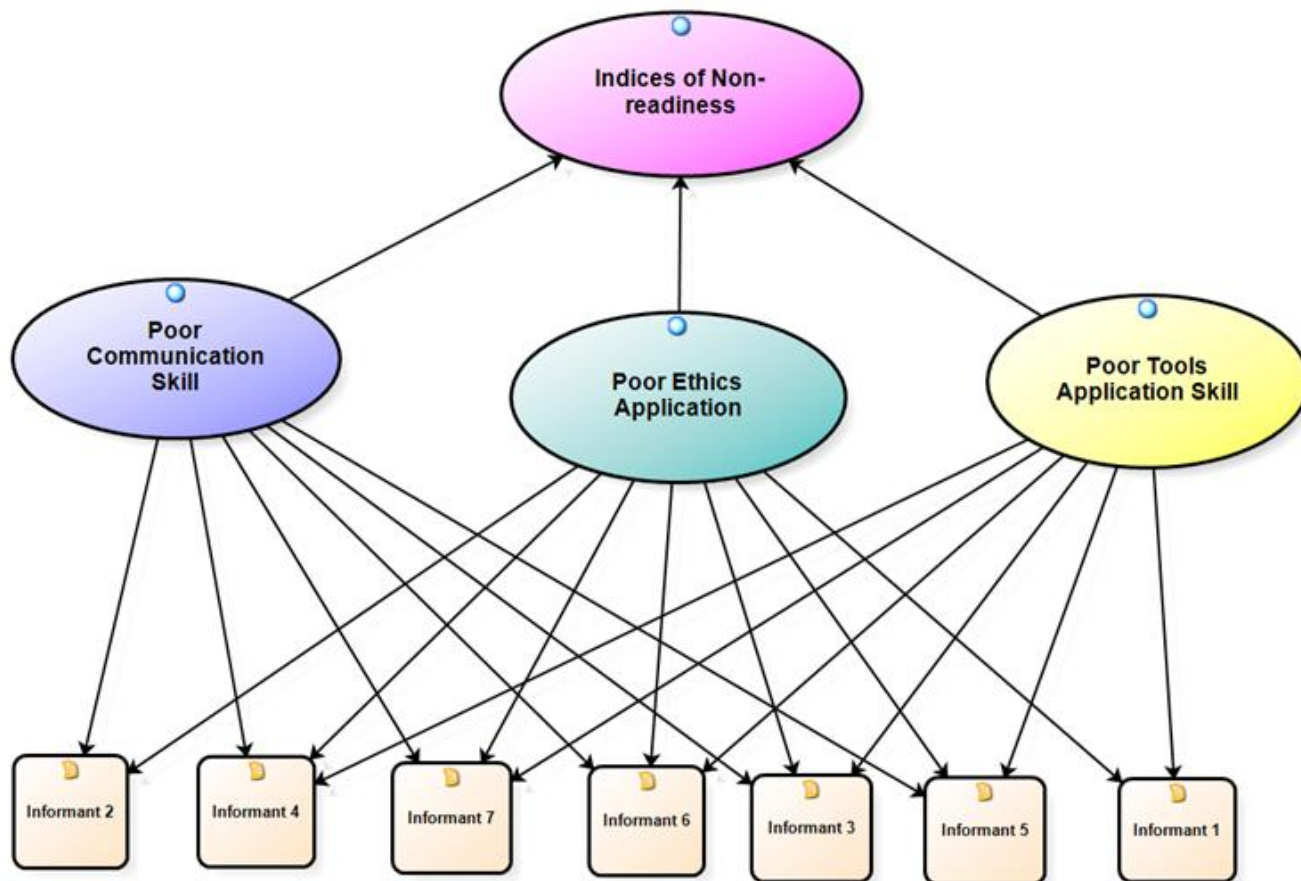
From the high rate of negative perception of the readiness of standard in journalism, the question of why the all parties involved are not adequately prepared arose, which most of the answers point at the inadequacy of sufficient tools and techniques to train the journalists. “Generally, most of the schools in Nigeria are not well equipped therefore most of the students are not adequately equipped.” Informant 7 affirmed. Correspondingly, Informant 1 agreed that “There are practitioners who do not even receive basic emoluments, so, it is hard to even expect that, they are provided with adequate work tools.” Speaking of the techniques involved, Informant 6 explained how it looks like to study journalism Nigeria and in other countries.

“In other countries, such as is in the US, United Kingdom and South Africa, one of the requirements to study journalism is to have a degree in a discipline first after which you can now enroll on the journalism program for two or three years. The first degree in another discipline provides prospective journalist with the requisite skill to be an expert in a particular area.”

In contrary to the Nigerian system, “graduates of journalism are trained as jack of all trade and master of none.”

Indices of Non-readiness (gaps in journalism training-practice synergy)

This research is the result of indices of non-readiness of Nigerian Mass Communication graduates towards synergy. Our informants identified three indices of non-readiness of journalism graduates to face the challenge of modern global journalism which translate to gaps in the synergy between journalism training and practice in Nigeria: poor communication skill, poor application of ethics, and poor tools application skill.



Poor Communication Skill

Many prominent scholars of journalism agree that one of the problems faced by mass communication graduates in Nigeria is poor communication skill among others which leads to poor discharge of duty in the media.

In agreement to the above, informant 3 reported that, “Poor communication is one of the issues faced by journalism graduates. This is usually as a result of poor knowledge of basic grammatical rules.”

“This (poor communication) is one of the major problems being encountered among students these days. Most of the students are not measured up by virtue of their foundational education. Substantial numbers of them are poor in communication skills and this is really affecting their performance.” – Informant 7

Informant 2 also agree that “poorly trained journalists who cannot write well” have “capacity challenges and resort to syndicating stories developed originally by their peers who are more competent.”. Similarly, informant 4 agreed that

poor communication “hinders their information gathering, processing & dissemination competence.”

However some scholars still believe that poor communication skill is not a barrier to being a competent journalist as such person can be an excellent resource in some other key aspect of the profession such as information gathering, processing and production for mass consumption. In informant 7’s opinion, “ A journalism graduate with poor communication skills can be efficient in other basic areas of media operation involving information gathering, processing and production for mass consumption.”

In summary, regardless of whether a poorly trained journalist could perform in other sectors of the media operation or not, in any case, it is unarguably agreed that good communication skill is highly essential to producing apt results in the journalism profession. Poor communication skill is a major setback in and the result can be extremely perilous.

Poor Ethics Application

Another major issue to research about in journalism is the issue of its ethics. Poor ethics application in the media industry is a big problem.

Ethics in journalism is the symbols of morals that journalists are supposed to uphold. These consist of a commitment to revealing the truth objectively without being subjective by self-interest; maintaining the privacy of sources and attributing what is said to the appropriate source. Nasidi, Qaribu. (2016).

According to informant 7, one of the critical things that is affecting journalism today is about ethic. Even, the traditional media outfits no longer adhere to the ethic of the profession.

"It is a fact that once information has found its way into the space, it is difficult to take it back. Therefore, it is imperative that those who are in the industry of information and media production are armed with the necessary skills and mechanisms to process, report and represent information along ethical lines". Metoo, Christiana. (2013).

It is dead obvious that "most practitioners don't apply ethics of the journalism and it bastardizes the profession. This case is rampant." (Informant 3). The output of this issue of incredibility of sources of news and stories among others has brought about decay not only in the journalism profession, but in the society. In agreement to this, informant 4 reported that "The rot in the society made unethical behavior highly attractive.

In the opinion of Informant 1, "We can see for instance that, most journalists do not undertake the necessary fact-checking before going to the public with their content, and their gatekeepers enable it, too. Fake news for instance has greatly diminished the credibility of media practice". Informant 2 also added that "only a negligible few have the capacity. Only a negligible fewer are patriotic outside loyalty to religion, ethnicity and partisan politics or in specific terms, a politician".

Graduates of journalism with poor knowledge and application of ethics of the profession in the view of Informant 5 is a "liability not an asset to his/her place of work."

To conclude, code of ethics in journalism is of vital importance and need to be applied and abided by the Nigerian journalists in every area of the profession. Unethical conduct, immorality or negative values are devoid of ethical benchmarks. They are dangerous social evils. They can be damaging to the society, to the extent of leading to a failed state. And, like all forms of things that are wrong, the dangers are multifaceted and some of them concrete enough (Pate, 2013).

Poor Tools Application Skills

Poor application of tools is yet another bigger issue faced by media graduates in the media profession. Any journalism graduate who could not handle basic modern tools of media production has no business working in media outlet - Informant 5.

In the opinion of informant 1, "we can attribute part of the problem to poor equipping of journalism practitioners. Also, the failure of Nigerian journalists to catch up with the dynamism and trends of the practice like their counterparts elsewhere shows the enormity of this deficiency." Among the informants were those that attributed this issue to schools. I mean lack of adequate training of the graduates from schools. Most of the graduates are not being given abundant training with the required tools. According to Informant 7:

Most of them are deficient in the handling of the modern tools for some reasons: First, most of the journalism training schools did not have basic modern tool, so, by implication these students did not have access. Secondly, media production tools keep changing rapidly so, the schools cannot afford to be buying them as they change. Thirdly, most of the technologists that teach these production techniques are themselves not knowledgeable to teach them.

In accordance with the all above informant 3 also highlighted the fact that "lack of adequate exposure to media production hampers on graduates' on field efficiency". And graduates go through this problem to a great extent. Siding with this, informant 4 as well stated that "many of them (graduates) are not engaged sufficiently in practical at school, hence minimal mastery of modern tools."

All in all, we could figure out that the issue of journalism graduates' poor tool application skill lies in their schools' inadequacy to train them with the appropriate modern media tools and prepare them for the outside job. A journalism graduate who cannot handle simple present-day media production tools should have no concern working in media market.

RQ2: How can the Mass Communication curricular in tertiary institutions in Nigeria be adjusted to enhance acquisition of basic skills and competencies by the students?

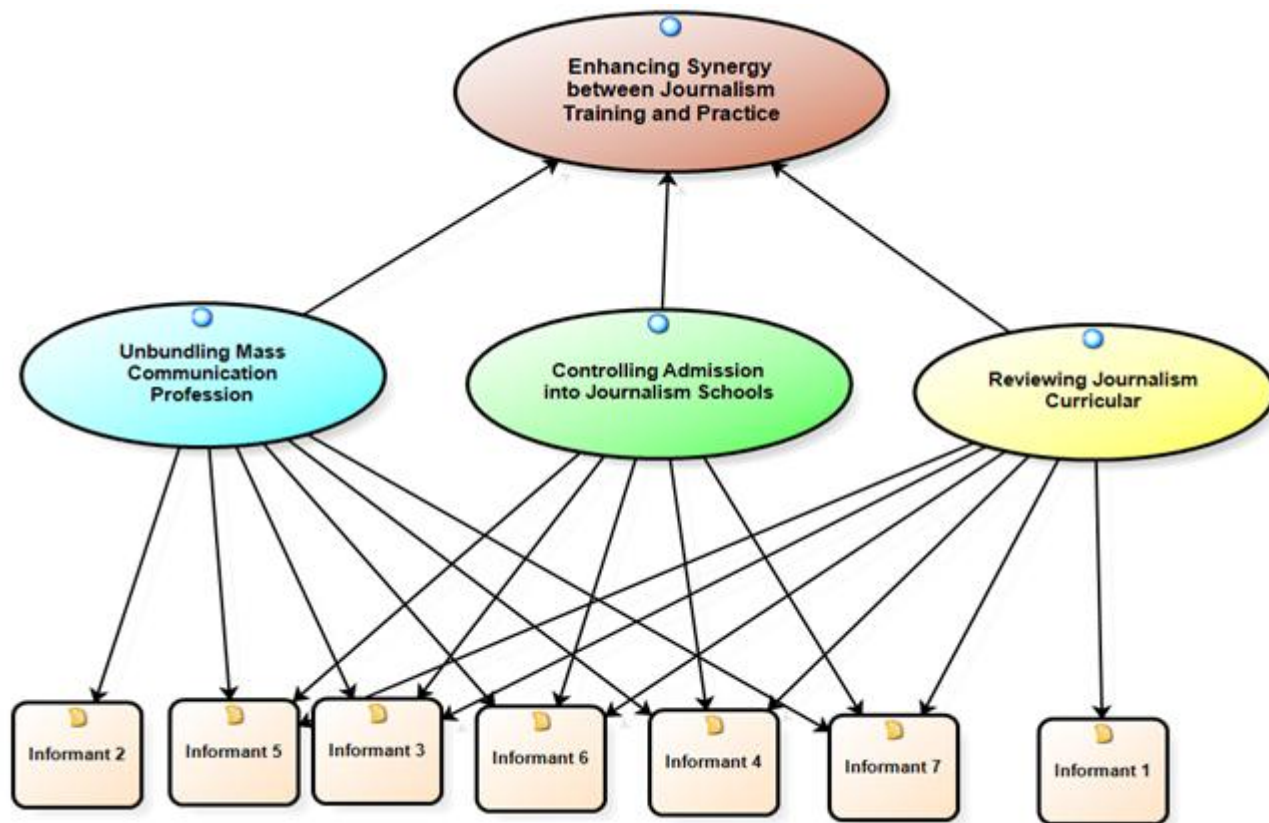
Enhancing Synergy between Journalism Training and Practice Our informants identified several strategies to enhance synergy between journalism training and practice in Nigeria which include unbundling the Mass Communication profession, regulating or controlling the volume of admissions into journalism courses in various higher institutions and reviewing the journalism curricula.

Unbundling Mass Communication Profession

According to our informants, Mass Communication, of which Journalism is a component, should be broken up or

unbundled so that Journalism can stand as a full-fledged degree course in Nigerian Universities and Polytechnics. The streamlining, according to informant 6, will lead to a focused training of journalists, “The unbundling might allow for a more focused training for journalism graduates for the more enduring solution lies in a major overhaul of the admission process and curriculum for journalism training in Nigeria”. This complements the view of

informant 4 that unbundling will “enhance professionalism and specialization”, The professionalism that unbundling creates engenders specialization “as students will no longer be jack of all trades and master of known”, according to informant 3. All in all, unbundling the Mass Communication profession is a step, in the words of informant 7, to “ensuring synergy between journalism training and practice in Nigeria”.



Controlling Admission into Journalism Schools

In relation to scholars’ perspectives, most of the informants interviewed also attested to the need for control of admission into journalism schools. For instance, informant 3 noted that “This would help ensure that students who possess the basics needed for the profession are employed. This includes writing skills, avid reader, good communication skills, versatility in knowledge etc.” Similarly, informant 4 said “This can help in gating/ rejecting applicants that are not serious. The remodeling of journalism schools can be synonymous to controlling the admission process into the schools. According to informant 6, “the more enduring solution lies in a major overhaul of the admission process”. Also, controlling admission into journalism schools, in line with informant 5, “is important to ensure that appropriate manpower is supplied for the media industry”. Moreover in journalism, the fewer the number of students, the more knowledge is sufficiently impacted as proclaimed by informant 7:

“It is very important for number of intakes to study journalism be reduced. Journalism is practical course which needs fewer students to be able to impact the

knowledge adequately. So, there is a need to stick to the ratio system where 30 students is to one teacher”.

To wrap up, the responses of the informants interviewed aligned with the scholars’ perspectives on controlling admission into journalism schools as one of the relevant ways to enhance synergy between journalism training and practice in Nigeria. Informant 7 added that “Establishing a joint Communication school (like Law school) where all MCM graduates can be trained more before being employed can also assist”.

Reviewing Journalism Curricular

Compared to other developed countries, Nigerian journalism institutions are operating below standard and an urgent call for rebuilding and modernization of the curriculum is required. In agreement to this, informant 1 reported how “it will go a long way, if the curriculum is enhanced or reviewed. Most journalism training institutions are functioning below the standards of other far developed nations. To a large extent, curriculum review may address some of the major problems” According to informant 7, “There is a need to look into the curriculum and fashion it to meet the current need of the

society”. In agreement with informant 7, informant 4 also mentioned the “urgent need to actively involve practicing Journalists in preparation of curriculum”. “This is important because it would ensure streamlining courses to very important lessons that would be of utmost usefulness to students”, informant 3 revealed. Informant 5 stated likewise, “This will ensure consistency in updating knowledge and skills required to power the industry in the modern age”. In the Nigerian journalism schools, most courses added to the curriculum and being taught to students are mostly irrelevant to the journalism profession. In the opinion of informant 6, “There are several courses that journalism students are required to undertake while in the university that have no bearing whatsoever with the requirement of journalism practice”. This leads to the production of bunches of incompetent journalists in the country, and this has been the fate of journalism in Nigerian institutions. “When they complete their studies they will not be sufficiently grounded in those subjects for

example, politics, society, economy, property, international affairs, crime, legal issues. Etc”, informant 6 attested. He further explained that “In Nigerian universities, a 3 or 4 year degree program in mass communication is all what is required to practice journalism. In other countries, such as is in the US, United Kingdom and South Africa, one of the requirements to study journalism is to have a degree in a discipline first after which you can now enroll on the journalism program for two or three years. The first degree in another discipline provides prospective journalist with the requisite skill to be an expert in a particular area. On the other hand, Nigerian graduates of journalism are trained as jack of all trade and master of none”.

Descriptive Statistics

In the table below, data presentation for each item on the questionnaire was determined for reliability test.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Sections	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	Remark
Strategies to Enhancing Synergy between Journalism Training and Practice	.821	7	Significant
Indices of non-readiness of Nigerian Mass Communication graduates towards synergy between journalism training and practice in Nigeria	.723	7	Significant
Perception about the synergy between Mass communication and Journalism.	.711	7	Significant
SECTION D [Readiness for standard] Nigerian journalism graduates are adequately ready to face the obstacles of modern professionalism	.709	7	Significant

From Table 1 shows that the analysis carried out for reliability test are significant for the cronbach’s alpha values which means the tools used in the achievement of the various objective are all reliable.

Inferential analysis of the data

This is done in order to achieve the objectives of this research.

Table 2a

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.991 ^a	.972	.934	.03513

a. Predictors: (Constant), MD, MC, MB

Table 2b

ANOVA ^a						
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	.058	3	.022	17.285	.175 ^b
	Residual	.001	1	.001		
	Total	.059	4			

a. Dependent Variable: MA
b. Predictors: (Constant), MD, MC, MB

Table 2 c

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.847	.267		10.673	.049
	EED	.145	.057	.672	3.277	.008
	CP	.421	.064	.9222	5.387	.127
	TV	.241	.068	.734	-3.340	.183

a. Dependent Variable: ED

Table 2 describes, R-square is .972, meaning 97.2% of the variation from the dependent (Curricular Challenge can be explained by variation in the independent variables (Synergy between Journalism Training, synergy between Mass communication and Journalism and obstacles of modern professionalism). The remaining 7.8% can be explained by other factors that were not in the model. With these results, it can be concluded that Enhancing Synergy between Journalism Training and Practice has strong predictive powers. The ANOVA table above reveals that the regression equation is not significant. It implies that, most of the parameter of the model is not significant.

4. Conclusion

Journalism is a highly skill-based profession with the journalist requiring several competencies to be able to practice well. This means that the journalist ought to have undergone thorough training for him/her to imbibe these skills. Obviously, the challenge of ensuring effective journalism practice lies with the training institutions, notably the mass communication departments in higher institutions of learning. In other words, like any other profession there has to be synergy between journalism training and practice. This study has concluded that curriculum review can be the key technique to enhancing synergy between journalism training and practice in Nigeria, the media could play better and improved roles if the systemic challenges as identified here are address with the seriousness it deserves. It is therefore recommended that stakeholders in journalism and mass communication training and practice must continue to place the issues in the front burner in order to bring the field to the front row and make the industry take its proper place in national development.

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