Analysis of Investigative Journalism in Mass Communication Curricula

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Abstract

This paper examines the existence of the course title Investigative Journalism in the curricula to find out whether investigative journalism education is taught and also to ascertain the level of attention accorded to investigative journalism education. To achieve this, the study adopted content analysis and interview research design. The curricula of two pioneer mass communication departments from the University of Nigeria Nsukka and Bayero University of Kano, and six graduands were sampled. Findings indicate that investigative journalism education is accorded the least attention in the curricula, considering the absence of the course title Investigative Journalism from the 128 courses of the two selected universities. Also, Investigative Journalism is taught once in both universities under another course. Further results indicate that there is no difference in the level of attention conferred on investigative journalism education by both universities. Thus, there is need to revise mass communication/journalism curricula to accommodate investigative journalism education by allotting to it a standalone position and more space in the undergraduate curricula.

Keywords: *Investigative journalism, education, mass communication, curricula, Nigeria*

Introduction

Over the centuries, journalism was a profession some persons adopted as a last resort in despair after many failed attempts at lucrative professions like medicine, pharmacy, engineering, and law among others (Kalbag, 2019). But, since the dawn of Watergate scandal reportage by Karl Bernstein and Bob Woodward of *Washington Post* in the late twentieth century, individuals have been inspired to study and practise journalism (Kaplan, 2008; Ntibinyane, 2018; Perlstein, 2019). Investigative journalism is now popular at reporting social maladies such as corruption, terrorism, drug abuse, scientific and cultural discovery among others (Kaplan, 2008; Burgh, 2008).

The United Nations Economic Scientific and Cultural Organization (2011, p.9) defines investigative journalism as 'exposing to the public matters that are concealed either deliberately by someone in a position of power or accidentally behind a chaotic mass of facts and circumstances that obscure understanding.'

According to De Burgh (2000) investigative journalism is a profession that discovers truth, identify lapses and report via whatever media may be available. It is also about revealing new facts, especially what is hidden or deliberately kept secret from the public (Investigative Reporters and Editors, 2019).

*The foregoing clarification shows that investigative journalism is an important genre of journalism, as it sufficiently informs, educates and uncovers the daily activities in our community and environs (*Asemah & Asogwa, 2012). Drawing from Asemah and Asogwa's comment, Kaplan (2008) argues that the relevance of investigative journalism has translated into higher enrolment of learners into journalism and mass communication schools. This has also led to increase in media industries in Nigeria and elsewhere. Writing in the same tone, Pate, Lai and Jibril (2017) observe that Journalism and mass communication are among the popular programmes with a high rate of applicants in tertiary institutions in the fifteen West African countries. These authors explain further:

> As at 2015, Nigeria has 127 universities. Of this number 73 offer journalism and mass communication. In addition, 31 polytechnics and mono-technics offering mass communication and journalism. On the industrial side, as of 2013 the country has 282 registered newspapers and magazines companies, 350 television and radio stations, 33 multichannel multipoint distribution services and 13 direct to home service provider.

The above implies that there is a large editorial resource (manpower and media houses) that could be resourceful in producing quality journalism for public interest - investigative journalism inclusive (Wendy, 2011). However, empirical evidences indicate that there is little investigative journalism practice in Nigeria (Okereke, 2000; Yushau, 2009; Yushau, 2010, Anyadike, 2013; Okon, 2017; Suntai & Shem, 2018). This means that the increase in number of universities and graduates in this area has not been reflected at reporting investigative journalism. Could this be as a result of the level of investigative journalism education? On this note, the study seeks to assess investigate journalism education with respect to the undergraduate curricula of pioneer mass communication departments in Nigerian universities.

The study has the following objectives:

1. To explore whether the course title Investigative Journalism exists in the University of Nigeria Nsukka and Bayero University of Kano undergraduate curricula for mass communication.

2. To find out whether investigative journalism education is taught in BUK and UNN undergraduate mass communication programme.
3. To determine the university that accords more attention to investigative journalism education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Investigative Journalism

Investigative journalism is a combination of two words 'investigative' and 'journalism'. Investigative means a systematic fact finding and reporting process (Whitney & Christopher, 2005) while journalism according to Niles (2007) is a form of writing that tells people about things that really happened that the audience might not have known about already. Investigative journalism, on the other hand, is a term that means different things to different people (Hollings, 2010). In other words, Investigative Journalism is a term that has been interpreted widely. This further re-echoes the view that researchers and journalists across cultures do not see investigative journalism through one universal lens (Obijiofor, Murry, & Shailendra, 2016). Each clime has divergent views on the concept, though they all agree that investigative journalism is different from the conventional daily reporting (Gonzalez, 2017; Aucoin 2005; Aretha, 2012, Kaplan, 2013; Hunter & Hanson 2011).

According to Carson (cited in Amanda, 2016, p. 48) investigative journalism theorists: Hugh de Burgh, Tiffen and Schudson have all attempted to define investigative journalism. Although their definitions vary, they all agree that investigative journalists is to 'expose injury and injustice, reveal information in the public interest and, where necessary, promote legislative reform to correct a wrong legal or administrative loophole.'

According to De Burgh (2000) investigative journalism is a profession that discovers truth, identifies lapses and reports via whatever media may be available. Aucoin (2005, p. 91) also states that

> investigative reporting has five distinct components: exposure of information, about an important public issue, that someone or some organization does not want report, revealed through the original,

> time-consuming "digging" of the reporter, for the purpose of inspiring reform.

Likewise, to Kaplan (2013, p.60) investigative journalism can be defined as:

> the in-depth systematic use of original research and reporting, it often uses large amount of data and documents, it uses public records, to find out what is going on. It also involves frequently the baring of secrets; it makes information that before had been hidden into the public domain. Finally, it has strong emphasis on social justice and accountability.

It is also about revealing new facts, especially what is hidden or deliberately kept secret from the public (Investigative Reporters & Editors, 2019). Similarly, Aucoin (2005) sees investigative journalism as serious journalism that takes a comprehensive, exhaustive look at issues that have significant impact on the lives of the audience.

This means that investigative journalism is more than just reporting scandal or corruption but is also about new discovery on science, art, economics, and culture, among others. For example, a documentary on COVID 19 pandemic, considering it is in-depth, possesses multiple sources among others.

Emergence of Mass Communication in Nigerian Universities

The coming of missionaries in Africa, according to Ntibinyane (2018), gave birth to the emergence of journalism. He explains that journalism in Africa began with the protestant missionary needs to print Bibles and educational material to spread their religious beliefs. The missionaries began to import printing press technology to Africa. As time goes by they allowed indigenous communities to use the printing press. Consequently, Africans became printing technology savvy, which led to the emergent of newspapers in Africa in 19th century (Ntibinyane, 2018).

Maringues (2011) observes that, by early 19th century, many Africa countries later had their own newspapers. Among the earliest newspapers were *Cape Town Gazette* - the first English newspaper that appeared in 1800 in South Africa. A year after was the *Royal Gazette* in 1801 in Sierra Leone, then Ghana in 1822, followed by Liberia in 1826, among others. The first indigenous owned newspaper, according to Ntibinyane (2018), was the *Liberia Herald* founded in 1826, *The West African Herald* in 1857, and *Iwe Irohin* in 1859.

In Nigeria, after the establishment of "Iwe Iroyin fun Awon Ara Egba ati Yoruba" (The Newspaper for the Egbas and Yorubas) by Reverend Henry Townsend in Abeokuta, other newspapers emerged. Some of these papers according to Aretha (2012) include:

> *Lagos Weekly Record* founded by John Payne Jackson and later succeeded by his son Horatio Jackson (1890-1930), *Lagos Standard* founded by George Alfred Williams and partially succeeded by his son, Alfred Williams and James White (1894-1920), *Nigerian Times* by James Bright Davies (1910-1911), and *African Messenger* founded by Ernest Sesei Ikoli (1921-1925)

Then, there was the concern on the need to train quality staff for journalism education (Ojomo, 2015). This concern was informed by the fundamental functions of journalists and media organization in Nigeria. By 1960, the first university mode training for Nigerian journalists was established. The training institute was called Jackson College of Journalism, later renamed Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. According to Ojomo (2015) the training institute was named after John Payne Jackson, the publisher of *Lagos Weekly Record*. The college began with forty-seven students and only four full time staff (Ojomo, 2015).

In 1967, another mass communication department was established at the University of Lagos. Years later, Bayero University Kano, mass communication department followed in 1979. This made Bayero University Kano the first university to establish mass communication department in northern part of Nigeria. From 1967 onward, the number of mass communication departments has been increasing ever since. According to Pate, Lai and Jibril (2017) Nigeria has 127 universities. Of this number, 73 offer journalism and mass communication. In addition, 31 polytechnics and mono-technics offer Mass Communication and Journalism.

Furthermore, *Daily Times* established her training school in 1965 known as the *Times Journalism Institute*. Also, Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) Training School commenced in 1959 (Ayodele & Olisa, 2017). As at the year 2000, there were 58 journalism training institutions in Nigeria (Ojomo, 2015).

Mass Communication Curriculum in Nigeria: An X-Ray

The media and society in the 21st Century have witnessed a lot of tremendous social changes. Taylor and Maxwell (2016) observe that in the field of journalism education, what was current and acceptable to teach some years ago may now be outdated. Agba, Abang and Ogri (2019) warn that the fast pace at which these social changes are moving calls for a more pragmatic approach. Thus, in this case education takes the center stage (Agba, Abang, & Ogri, 2019).

Education is expected to prepare learners (deliberately or accidentally) for their survival in the society. The National University Commission (2017) - government regulatory body for Nigerian Universities - states in the benchmark minimum academic standard (BMAS) that journalism students are expected to graduate from Nigerian universities with knowledge, appropriate skills, competencies and dispositions that will make them globally competitive and capable of contributing meaningfully to Nigeria's socio-economic development. Again, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) and the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication (cited in Ojomo, 2017) reiterate that the goal of journalism and mass communication programme is to provide students and the larger society with a deeper understanding of mass communication processes and to improve the practices and performance of mass media professionals.

Considering the above scenario, Akinfeleye (2009) laments that the journalism education curriculum in Nigeria has existed for over six decades, yet it was not planned, developed and implemented on Nigeria philosophy, but on that of Western philosophy of journalism studies. In other words, the Nigerian journalism education does not reflect community perceived and felt problems (Chibita, 2009). According to UNESCO (2013, p.4) journalism education should entail 'the need for well-trained and critically-minded journalists who can contribute to the processes of democracy and development in their societies'. Drawing from Akinfeleye's, UNESCO's and Chibita's comments, UNESCO (2007) sees it fit to redesign journalism education curriculum that will be suitable for use in developing countries.

Furthermore, some related studies commented on the state of investigative journalism in Nigeria. For example, the study by Okereke (2000) titled *The Place of Investigative Journalism in Democracy: a Case of Nigeria* indicates that

investigative journalism is not practised well in Nigeria. Similarly, Yushau's (2010) study on *Investigative Journalism and Scandal Reporting in the Nigeria Press* found out that investigative journalism is not fully practised. Also, Okon (2017) in *Partnering with EFCC: Investigative Journalism in the Service of the Nigeria Public* submits that investigative journalism is no longer being practised by reporters in Nigeria. Anyadike's (2013) study entitled *Problems and Prospects of Investigative Journalism in Rivers State, Nigeria* shows that the level of investigative journalism practice is abysmally low.

Other studies by Agba, Abang and Ogri (2019, p. 53) show that there is a wide disparity between what is taught in the classroom and the real-world journalism practice which takes place in the newsroom as the crop of journalism graduates produced by most Nigerian institutions have been adjudged as lacking the requisite skills and competence to properly fit into the constantly changing needs of the media industry in the contemporary world. In Okoro, Obaya and Onyebuchi's (2013) study titled *The Status and Challenges of Mass Communication Education in Nigeria*, the paper argues that journalism education in Nigeria is at a crossroad in terms of lack of synergy between professional practice and institutional training. Also, UNESCO (2007) in her Model Curricula for Journalism Education established that there is a yawning gap between journalism education as taught in most Nigerian journalism training institutions and what is required to practise journalism in the 21st century globally. In the same mood, Ojomo (2015) in *Journalism and Mass Communication Training in Nigeria: Some Critical Thoughts*, identifies the absence of synergy between journalism academia and the industry, as a major gap in the total process of journalism education in Nigeria. Similarly, Ayodele and Olisa (2017) in *Mass Communication Education in Nigeria: Current Status, Challenges and Way Forward* observes that the number of mass communication graduates has proliferated, whereas the quality of journalism education is declining.

Based on the aforementioned, the deduction is that the journalism curriculum is defective. No wonder, Ojomo (2017) observes that the quality of the journalists depends on the quality of the education programme that produces them. This means

that no center of learning can adequately function without a sound curriculum (Agba, Abang & Ogri, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

Since the quality of journalists depends on the quality of the education programme that produces them, then the programme should be implicated each time the journalists perform above or below standards (Ojomo 2017). It on this note that the theoretical framework adopted for this study is the Behaviorism theory and Tyler curriculum model.

The Behaviorism theory and Tyler curriculum Model have been widely used by psychologists, sociologist, applied scientists, political scientists, and communication scientists among others, because of their apparent usefulness in understanding learners' learning behavior. Also, the tenets of behaviorism theory and Tyler curriculum Model have been applied to a wide range of studies relating to learning domain, knowledge, practice, and behavioral change among others (Mangal, 2008; Zaid, Paula & Chris, 2019; Hickey, 2014; Harold & Corcoran, 2013).

The Behaviorism theory was propounded by John B. Watson in 1940. Behaviorism is based on the findings of the Russian Psychologist Ivan Pavlov (propagator of classical conditioning theory). Building on Ivan's classical conditioning theory, Watson came up with the theory of Behaviorism. The Behaviorism theory is a learning theory that focuses on modifying behavior (Sabo, 2020). According to Paul (2019), the theory is based on the idea that knowledge is independent and learners are dependent on the knowledge.

Unlike constructivism theory (of Lev Vygotsky) that argues that learners are not blank slates but have prior knowledge and experience on a given subject, behaviorism theory argues otherwise. Ann and Susan (2014), while explaining behaviorism theory, postulate that in a behaviorist's mind, learners are passive. Mangal (2008) adds that learners are blank slates that should be provided with information to be learnt. Also, that habits are formed through repeated actions and eventually maintained or discharged due to reward and punishment reinforcement (Ann & Susan, 2014; Mangal, 2008). This implies that the absence of learning equates to absence of knowledge.

According to Harold and Corcoran (2013), the key principles of behaviorism that support education are:

- Behavior is learned.
- Behavior is governed by the setting in which it occurs.
- Learning doesn't occur without teaching.
- Learning equates to changing behavior.
- Behavior is governed by what follows actions.

With regard to the above, it is obvious that behaviorism theory is about learning through stimulus. But what takes precedence before and after stimulus is the crux of this article. In other words, what is the state of knowledge on investigative journalism among learners before and after investigative journalism education?

The other theoretical framework is Tyler curriculum model. The model is propounded by Robert Tyler in 1940. He introduced the model of curriculum development in his book *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction.* Tyler's curriculum was one of the first models of curricula and a very simple model even used by modern educationists (Hasa, 2020).

According to Hasa (2020), Tyler's model of curriculum describes how to formulate educational objectives, how to organize them, analyze them and adjust them so that the students are able to meet these objectives. The model recommends that curriculum planners should identify general objectives by gathering data from three sources: the learner, contemporary life outside the school and subject matter.

Furthermore, Tyler presented his curriculum model using four steps. These steps are:

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
4. How can we determine whether the purposes are being attained?

From the foregoing, it could be seen that Tyler's Model of curriculum centers on selecting aims and objectives, selecting and organizing of content, selecting and organizing of learning experience and evaluation. The step 1 of Tyler's model of curriculum entails that the general aim of education or ends of schooling should be about directing the activities and behavior of the learners. This means, curriculum is to be derived from the needs, problems and philosophy of the society. Thus, curriculum should be geared towards the aims set to be achieved in an educational system (Hasa, 2020) for example, investigative journalism education, for purpose of checking the activities of citizens and society. Step 2 of the model is about what content/experience are likely to be provided to attain these aims. This means that the content must be related to the aims set to be achieved, for instance, teaching investigative journalism to learners. Step 3 entails organizing learning experience - the element to be organized. This implies that learning opportunities must be in such a way that they support and reinforce each other. And, step 4 involves measurement and assessment of the extent to which learners have achieved the intended learning outcomes.

Furthermore, Tyler asserts that every curriculum should possess two major characteristics. The first aspect is curriculum should be dynamic. El-sawy (2016) unlike some others sees curriculum always as static. Secondly, it should be a program under constant evaluation and revision. In other words, curriculum planning is a continuous, cyclical process and an instrument of education that needs to be fine-tuned. Agba, Abang and Ogri (2019, p.48) add that from the foregoing, 'one major quality of a functional educational curriculum is that its goals and content have to be relevant on the socio-cultural, economic and political environment of the trainees as well as prepare the learners to sustainably contribute their quota to the development of their societies.'

Methodology

This paper analyzed two undergraduate curricula using content analysis and interview research design. A purposive sampling was adopted in selecting the content analysis population considering longevity and geography of Nigeria (north and south), while convenience sampling was use in choosing the interviewees. The population is made up two pioneer mass communication departments in Nigeria: Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Enugu State, established in 1961 and Department of Mass Communication, Bayero University,

Kano State, established in 1979. And likewise, 6 graduands from these universities (3 for each) were chosen as sample.

The study adopts Texas (1995) Units of Analysis: words and themes (i.e. investigative journalism) while the Content Categories formulated for the study are Course, course structure and attention.

1. **Course**: A subject taught at university. This will be achieved by searching for the course *investigative journalism* on the selected universities curricula.
2. **Course structure**: The course structure is about the detail account/summary of a course.
    - Standalone
    - Submerge

3. **Attention**: **T**he number of times a course is taught.
    - once
    - twice
    - thrice and above

Finally, Data were sorted in accordance with the units and categories of the study. Keywords in Context (i.e. investigative journalism) was searched throughout the list of course outlines from the two selected universities curricula. Also, the course descriptions curricula were analyzed to understand the course content in case of polysemic words (such as advanced reporting or special reporting). More so, phone interview was conducted to support the findings. Thus, data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Findings and Discussion

The first objective: *To explore whether the course title investigative journalism exists in BUK and UNN Undergraduate Mass Communication curricula*, indicates that no single course title on investigative journalism exits in the two selected universities' curricula. A content analysis and interviewees responses concurred with the fact that there was no course labelled *investigative journalism* in the curricula.

Specifically, UNN curriculum shows that the department has 62 courses with credit units of 165 for the 4-year undergraduate degree programme in Mass Communication (UNN, 2020). Similarly, *BUK Student Hand book* (2008) mentioned a sum of 66 courses with 160 credit units. Yet, out of 128 courses and 325 credit units none had the name investigative journalism even though investigative journalism is considered a veritable tool in curtailing corruption and other related social vices in Nigeria (Imam, 2019; Suntai & Shem, 2018; Okon, 2017; Asemah, 2012).

Similarly, Oyewole and Olisa (2017) in a study titled *Mass Communication Education in Nigeria: Current Status, Challenges and Way Forward* also observed the decline in journalism education in Nigeria. This further indicates that these curricula ignored Tyler's model of curriculum that admonishes that the general aim of education or ends of schooling should be about directing the activities and behavior of the learners. This means that curriculum ought to be derived from the needs, problems and philosophy of the society. Commenting, Akinfeleye (2009) laments that the journalism education curriculum lacks Nigeria philosophy of journalism studies.

Consequently, empirical studies also corroborate the foregoing findings; for example, Okereke's (2000) study on the *Place of Investigative Journalism in Democracy: a Case of Nigeria* detected that investigative journalism is not practised well in Nigeria. In the same mood, Okon (2017) found out that investigative journalism is no longer being practised by reporters in Nigeria. It on this note that UNESCO (2007) sees it fit to redesign journalism education curriculum suitable for use in a given country. According to UNESCO (2007, p.7) journalism curriculum should reflect 'an axis comprising of norms, values, tools, standard and practice of journalism.' The document also should specify an ability of critical thinking, incorporating skill in comprehension, analysis, synthesis and evaluation of unfamiliar materials and a basic understanding of evidence and research method.'

The second objective seeks *to find out whether investigative journalism education is taught in BUK and UNN Undergraduate Mass Communication programme*. The result shows that investigative journalism is taught in the selected universities. The interviewees all affirmed that they were taught investigative journalism. Also, content analysis indicates that the polysemic term – *specialized reporting*, in both

curricula, does encompass investigative journalism and other journalism topics (i.e. it is submerged with other topics). The course description, even though vague, explains it thus:

> *MAC 3209: SPECIALIZED REPORTING focuses on the techniques of reporting special beats like communication, agriculture, religion, politics, etc. with the aim of exposing students to outstanding issues in the chosen area(s)* (*BUK Student Hand Book,* 2008). In the same vein, *MAC 302: SPECIALISED REPORTING*, *this course is designed (i) to provide instruction in the techniques of reporting specialized subjects such as agriculture, medicine, religion, sport, labor, the courts, the arts and the like; (ii) to expose student to the basic literature as well as outstanding examples of reporting of these issues* (UNN, 2020).

These findings support behaviorism theory's postulation that in a behaviorist's mind, learners are passive and blank slate that should be provided with information to be learnt. In other words, learning does not occur without teaching. Yushau (2010) in his study also corroborates the result that Nigerian journalists have a fair understanding of investigative journalism.

On objective 3, the study seeks *to determine which university accords more attention to investigative journalism education*. The analysis indicates that there is no significant difference on the level of attention accorded to investigative journalism education by both universities. A cross analyses of findings show that both universities taught Investigative Journalism once in a four-year programme. Similarly, it is taught under another course *specialised reporting* (i.e. a course with other topics). Also, both universities do not have a course labelled *Investigative Journalism.* This perhaps explains why Ronning (2009) wrote that even the few investigative reports in Nigeria are blameworthy as they lack investigative journalism standard of thoroughness, genuineness and adequate attributions. Therefore, investigative journalism education should be given much attention, as Behaviorism theory argues that habits are formed through repeated action and eventually maintained or discharged due to reward and punishment reinforcement.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings from this study indicates that investigative journalism education is accorded a very low attention in the curricula considering the absence of the course title Investigative Journalism among the 128 courses of the two selected universities. Also, investigative journalism is taught once in both universities as a topic subsumed by another course. Further result indicates that there is no difference in the level of attention conferred on investigative journalism education by both universities.

To this end, a good curriculum should be developed to prepare learners for the practice and challenges of investigative journalism (Agba, Abang, & Ogri, 2019; Ojomo, 2015; Ayodele & Olisa, 2017). Arguing in the same disposition, Ojomo (2015) advises that mass communication curriculum should entail all the necessary learning domains such as cognitive, affective and psychomotor. This calls for a functional education curriculum goals and content on relevant socio-cultural, economic, political milieu of the learners (Jacob, Osheg, & Eric, 2019). No doubt, this effort would enhance the skills and knowledge of graduands on investigative journalism. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommends the following:

- Investigative journalism should be allotted a place as a course in the undergraduate curriculum since there are course like photojournalism, online journalism, wire service journalism, development journalism.
- Also, investigative journalism should be taught thrice or more in the undergraduate curriculum.

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