

Employers' Assessment of Mass Communication Graduates of Nigerian Universities and Polytechnics

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Abstract

This is the report of a TETFUND-sponsored national survey aimed at ascertaining the assessment of Nigerian universities and polytechnics mass communication graduates by the managers of the organizations that employ them. The survey became necessary to update extant literature and to test the hunch that the present journalism/mass communication curricula of Nigerian institutions may not be meeting the needs of the ever-changing world of work in this knowledge-driven dispensation. Forty organizations employing Mass Communication graduates were selected by quota sampling technique, to include newspapers, magazines,

radio, television, public relations, and advertising agencies; and managers working directly with the graduates were asked to fill a questionnaire. The findings of the survey, conducted in Abuja, Lagos, Port Harcourt and Kaduna, show deficiencies in critical competences such as writing ability, critical thinking, numeracy, as well as computer and internet savvy. The findings also suggest that Polytechnic graduates may be serving the needs of the industry better than their University counterparts. This paper therefore suggests areas of improvement to meet the demands of the changing times.

Keywords: Assessment, Mass
C o m m u n i c a t i o n ,
Graduates, Writing Ability,
Critical Thinking, Internet
Savvy

Acknowledgment

This study was conducted with a grant by the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND).

Introduction

Mass Communication departments of Nigerian universities and polytechnics are modelled after their counterparts in the Anglo-American university system, with the aim of producing middle and high-level professionals for the society's mass media and related industries. A few of the graduates go on to obtain higher degrees in the discipline to fill faculty positions in the ever-growing number of training institutions offering the course.

As a product of the modern industrial, urban mass society, Mass Communication started with the proliferation of books, magazines, and newspapers in 18th Century Western Europe. In the late 19th Century and early 20th Century photography, film, radio, and television were invented to compliment the print media as carriers of messages for public consumption. And it was before the very eyes of this generation that computing, telecommunication, and the internet revolutionized the processes and ramifications of mass communication in the whole world.

This has no doubt imposed on the institutions training mass media professionals the enormous task of meeting the expectations of an increasingly knowledgeable and critical society.

The main objectives of the B.Sc. Mass Communication Programmes are:

1. To produce well-trained Mass Communication Personnel in the areas of print and broadcast journalism, public relations and advertising, and multimedia journalism, to be able to compete favourably with their counterparts nationally and internationally.
2. To provide sound theoretical background to enable the students to appreciate the essence and relevance of Mass Communication in society.
3. To provide adequate practical facilities and training to empower the graduates to utilize the resources of ICT in the world of work and in social relations.
4. To produce the graduates who will be familiar with and conscious of their responsibility to their environment and the nation.
5. To equip the students such that they have confidence to engage in self-employment and other entrepreneurial activities.

Accordingly, mass communication training institutions want their products to have the following competencies and skills:

1. General and specific professional skills relevant to media practice
2. Strong writing and information processing skills
3. Competence in the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) resources to enhance operational effectiveness
4. Broad exposure to all major components of mass communication and entrepreneurship to afford wide opportunities after graduation

Regulatory bodies such as the National Universities Commission (NUC, for the universities) and the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE, for the polytechnics) conduct five-yearly accreditation exercises for all programmes including those of mass communication. Accreditation is based on three broad criteria, i.e.,

1. Availability of adequate library resources, including at least 250 book titles and a substantial number of journals related to the various branches of the discipline;
2. Adequate physical structures, including classrooms, laboratories, studios and lecturers' offices;
3. Adequate staffing, which means having qualified faculty members in the right number and seniority.

For good measure, there is accreditation by professional bodies such as the Advertising Practitioners' Council of Nigeria (APCON), which enables graduates of visited programmes to enjoy waivers when enrolling as members, without which they cannot practise.

Significantly this study aligns with the expectations of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) *Series on Journalism Education* that has since 2007 continued to highlight and provide a universal road map for Journalism training globally in a determined effort to make journalism education continuously relevant not just to the media

and cultural industries, but for increasingly expanding the democratic space and broadening the frontiers of freedom, fundamental human rights and citizens engagement with the various tiers of government which are elected to represent and serve the people.

In recent times particularly within the last two decades, Journalism has been undergoing changes in various ways. Some of these include increasing societal demands on the profession and its practitioners, changing technologies, declining patronage of some hitherto conventional mass communication platforms, industry expectations, socio-cultural and economic challenges like global conflicts, internal strife within nations and global economic challenges typified by the Economic Meltdown of 2008. These changes have also placed daunting challenges for Journalism Education and on Journalism Educators hence, UNESCO's concerted effort in encouraging the profession to keep reinventing itself.

According to UNESCO (2013), “this new global reality poses important challenges for journalism education and how it can take such challenges on board, particularly in a strategic rethink of journalism curricula.” UNESCO (2013, op cit.) cautions that its present publication titled *Model Curricula for Journalism Education: A Compendium of NEW Syllabi*, represent its response to these challenges “which if not seriously taken up, will have dire consequences for media practice and journalism education in the developing world”.

The connection is obvious. Journalism education prepares future professionals for the challenges of a changing world, evolving technologies, world of work and challenges of various political environments in and beyond national boundaries. An adaptation to these realities will perhaps place professionals on a better footing to survive and to help society understand these changes and make better meaning out of them.

Gladly, the UNESCO Curricula aim at universalizing

Journalism Education and Mass Communication training with the hope of having more well-groomed professionals irrespective of whether they are university-trained or polytechnic-trained, though the emphasis appears to be more on the university system with its three to four-year uninterrupted academic stretch.

This study represents an insight into what employers of labour have observed and their appraisal of the products of both categories of higher education in the study period, which hopefully will help educators, and curriculum planners adjust to various demands being made on prospective and potential graduates in the discipline of Journalism and Mass Communication.

Statement of the Problem

Mass Communication institutions, which scale NUC and NBTE accreditations usually, pride themselves as having met the demands of the present dispensation. But how true can this be, when standards in the schools are known to be falling at an alarming rate? Mass communication training, known to be equipment-intensive and physical structure-intensive, has been severely debilitated by the dwindling funding of public institutions in recent times, a situation which has necessitated the intervention of agencies such as the Education Trust Fund (ETF) in Nigeria, UNESCO, and the World Bank. Indeed, how true can any claim of excellence be when the employers of Mass Communication graduates have not confirmed it to independent researchers? Apart from the self-serving, unconfirmed “employers' reports” used in the accreditation exercise, there are no known studies which can provide a reliable assessment of graduates of mass communication by those who employ them. Besides, even baseline studies on this important subject are few and far between.

Objectives of the Study

It was therefore the objective of this study to ascertain employers' current assessment of Mass Communication graduates of Nigerian universities and polytechnics in terms of some relevant selected criteria.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following Research Questions:

1. What kinds of organizations employ most graduates of Mass Communication?
2. How did managers rate Mass Communication graduates in terms of power of expression, numeracy, and computer literacy?
3. How did managers in print rate the graduates?
4. How did managers in radio and television rate the graduates of Mass Communication?
5. How did managers rate the graduates' basic computer skills?
6. How did managers in Public Relations and Advertising rate the graduates?
7. How did managers rate the graduates in other relevant skills?
8. How did managers compare and contrast university and polytechnic graduates?

Significance of the Study

This is perhaps the first comprehensive study of this nature, which not only ascertains employee assessments, but also goes further to compare and contrast Mass Communication graduates/products from universities and polytechnics of Nigerian Higher Educational system.

Utility

The study provides useful data for addressing the following: (i) Curriculum development, (ii) Faculty re-training, (iii) Equipment procurement, (iv) Physical structure development, (v) Restructuring of mass communication departments

Literature Review

In spite of the importance of scholarly inquiry into Employers' Assessment of Journalism and Mass Communication graduates in Nigeria, there appears to be a dearth of literature in this area. In the course of literature search most materials found dwelt on the assessments of the job market for graduates of journalism and Mass Communication programmes around the world, the employability of students upon graduation, and the assessments of the skills needed by graduates. Others examined the relationship between the various segments of the industry and the Universities that provide the vast majority of its entry level employees. Very few, if any addressed the specific problem of this study.

Assessments are important because in addition to giving employers a clear picture of the contributions of these graduates to the success or failure of their organizations, they offer the educators insight into the gaps between *Town* and *Gown*. These assessments therefore may signal the need for educators to review and amend the institutions' curriculum, while also evaluating their teaching and possibly increasing their standards. A career in Mass Communication can take a person throughout every sector of the market. Communications companies need writers, speakers, actors, designers, technicians and others to bring their message to the world. These employees are often recruited from a market essentially populated by graduates of Universities and Polytechnics and while these two broad categories of tertiary institutions use different pedagogical approaches, differences if any in the quality of their products remain an issue of controversy.

Some argue that polytechnic education which was

inherited by Nigeria from Britain was intended to provide low-brow and middle-level manpower (Kperogi, 2010), and is therefore inferior to University education. Others dismiss this argument, describing it as an attempt to create social stigmas aimed at making the choice of careers in technical education unattractive to Nigerian youths. They state that while polytechnic education is more of practical, that of the university is theoretical, with Polytechnic education consisting of 60 per cent practical and 40 percent theoretical while that of the university is the opposite (Salawu, 2005; Powell, 2008; & Bremer, 2009).

Salawu (2005) further observes that today the polytechnic graduates are competing favourably with their university counterparts in the labour market in Nigeria, and argues that it has been proved time without number that some courses in the polytechnics are by far superior to their university counterparts. He identifies Mass Communication, Engineering, and Accountancy as examples of such courses, citing the reports of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) as showing that HND graduates of the polytechnics pass their ICAN examinations more than their university counterparts. He also argues that students of Nigerian polytechnics are not inferior to university undergraduates since majority of the former gain admission with more than five credits. He cites himself as a typical example, having gained admission into the Mass Communications Department of the Federal Polytechnic, Oko, Anambra State with eight distinctions.

Irrespective of their differences in training institutions typology, employees working in the field of Mass Communication need to get comfortable working with advancing technologies and figuring out how to persuade people. With the meteoric advance in new media and its corresponding demands on today's multimedia journalist, public relations and advertising practitioners, broadcasters and indeed film makers, to be technology savvy, assessment of Mass Communication graduates becomes even more important.

New Technologies and Changing Curricula

During the past decade, new technologies have altered employers/job expectations in the media and cultural industries. According to Becker & Vlad (2011) these changes in the communication industries have had tremendous impact on the labour market for the various communication occupations and even on the definitions of those occupations; and they have challenged the educational institutions that are linked to those occupations. In the U.S., where universities historically have offered programmes designed to serve specific niches of the labour market, the response to the challenge has begun in earnest. According to the **Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication (ASJMC, 2012)**, Journalism and Mass Communication programmes are making sweeping changes to their curricula and putting new models in place for training the next generation of American journalists. Results from the Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Enrolments indicate that nearly 80 percent of all U.S. university programmes in journalism and mass communication have made changes to their curricula in the last two years to reflect changes in the communication landscape.

UNESCO'S Global Empirical Update

UNESCO has fervently been providing international direction in adjusting to these realities and adapting journalism and mass communication education curriculum to suit the unfolding new order. UNESCO (2013) notes under a sub-theme: *“The Global academic culture of journalism education”* thus:

An important issue here is the place of journalism in the broad academic culture of the university, something that pertains to its theoretical and research credentials, and also

how these relate to its practical dimension and to the place of such hands-on activity within the academy. During the first 2005 consultative meeting in Paris involving experts in journalism education, it was agreed that in the best of circumstances, a journalism curriculum – not to mention its faculty and students – should nest comfortably within the intellectual and academic culture of the university and be invigorated by it. So the initial discussion of the curricula included a thorough review of the frustrations as well as the successes of journalism educators, and it included much talk about 'journalism' as opposed to 'media' or 'mass communication', as the core subject of a proposed programme (see Banda and Schmitz Weiss, 2013).

It is important to draw copiously from the UNESCO compendium, which elaborates that the discussion was happening at a time when some countries were undergoing their own reforms in the way they approached journalism education. For example, in October 2005 the Brazilian National Council for Research and Scientific Development (CNPq), a national academic funding agency, updated the key of scientific knowledge. As Sonia Virginia Moreira argued, this educational policy reform resulted

in the confirmation of journalism as a field of research in communication, to emphasize the theoretical aspect of journalism. For its part, communication was already treated as an integral subject area of applied social science, with emphasis on the practical aspects directly linked to industry. After several debates involving professors and researchers, representatives of the main scientific societies signed a final document, which defined six sub-areas of knowledge in communication: cyber culture and communication technology; audiovisual communication; movies, radio and television; organizational communication, public relations and advertising; mediation and communicational interfaces; and theories of communication. Nine journalism areas of expertise were included on the list – Brazilian, communitarian, scientific, digital, business, specialized, online, segmented, and rural – in addition to three topics related to the field: history of editing, the press, and journalism (Banda and Schmitz Weiss, 2013, cited in UNESCO, 2013, p. 11).

Today, the bridge between media organizations and the academic world is yet the subject of a complex reconstruction – a topic that the UNESCO Model Curricula had partly addressed through emphasis on student internships. This Brazilian experience exemplifies a global trend in efforts to legitimize journalism as a respected field of study within the university context. This, according to UNESCO is clearly demonstrated by the Principles of Journalism Education declared at the World Journalism Educators conference (WJEC-1) in Singapore in 2007. Todd (2009) observes that employers have criticised educators for not quickly updating the curriculum by teaching students how to use new technologies that are emerging in the media industry. Researchers observe a skills gap occurring between the demands of employment and the level of educational preparation of graduates. Citing Peddle, Robinson and Garton (2008) note specifically that employers do not feel as though higher education is succeeding in

adequately developing the employability skills of graduates. A common belief in industry is that higher education institutions should equip graduates with the proper skills necessary to achieve success in the workplace.

However, before higher education institutions can be held accountable for providing such skills, a series of basic questions should be answered:

1. What skills are most important for graduates in performing their job?
2. How competent are graduates at performing these skills?
3. How can the current curriculum be enhanced to include the necessary skills to better prepare future graduates for the workplace?

Todd argues that employers do not tend to understand the obstacles educators experience, such as the lack of release time to learn new technological applications, how to integrate new media into the classroom, and how to fund these curricula. Citing a Council of Public Relations Firms survey of 285 Public Relations practitioners, which found that practitioners expect growth in social media and digital content in the near future, Todd emphasizes the need to integrate new media technologies into undergraduate curriculum, with educators informing students about emerging uses of technology. However, Benigni and Cameron argue that an integration of new media into the curriculum alone cannot be sufficient to fully prepare students to work with educators. They consequently propose that students work with professional clients and integrate a theory-based strategic component while teaching the course (Cited in Todd 2009).

Furthermore, Todd argues that both Mass Communication educators and employers expect recent graduates to possess critical thinking ability. She submits that although consensus regarding a definition of critical thinking does not currently exist, researchers frequently cite the last four categories of Bloom's

taxonomy of educational objectives- application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, all of which require the higher order of thinking that characterizes critical thought. Citing Lauer she, however, notes that students focus on the lower-order cognitive skills of knowledge and comprehension which separates course content from higher order cognitive skills and blocks students' learning of course material.

Role of Internship and Students' Industrial Work Experience Schemes (SIWES)

Scholars argue that internship programmes boost students' competencies and equip them for the industry when they graduate. Norwood & Briggerman (2010) argue that the major value of an internship is the signalling of an ability to work well with others, while participation in religious organizations does not signal personal character. Citing Brown & Fall, Todd (2009) states that academic internship supervisors and industry professionals can enhance an institution's curriculum by enabling faculty members to keep their hands-on-the-pulse of expectations in the field, thereby better positioning students' success in the industry after graduation.

In Nigeria's Higher Education, two variants of internship obtain with particular reference to journalism and mass communication education/training. Many universities send their students to an intensive long-vacation-based internship between May and July with the expectation to cover an average of 300 hours of industrial training. Some universities have it as on-off arrangement (once in the four-year programme), and a few universities allow their students to do it two different, succeeding long vacations after their Second Year (200 level) and Third Year (300 level). In the polytechnics a standard one year industrial training (internship) is embarked upon by 200level students of Mass Communication at the end of their second semester

examinations. This is done under the auspices of the Industrial Training Fund (ITF's) Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES), which also recommends that these interns be paid monthly stipends by their hosts (employers) during this one year. Unfortunately a lot of these interns do not get paid and are exploited as cheap labour by some operators in the media industry, especially the print and electronic media.

Notwithstanding, it is widely believed that these industrial exposures imbue the various categories of students/interns with meaningful experience of working life and its various expectations. Whether the length of time spent and the financial rewards they gain during this period inspire their performance in post-university life work life are matters for research in the Nigerian situation. Scholars, however, cautioned that industry professionals must allow students to use the knowledge and competencies they have acquired in the classroom during their internship as this will benefit the student, academic programme and internship employer and in the long run, the industry, as the skills learned may lead to employment upon graduation. Todd (2009) also argues that educators should work with professionals to respond to changing industry trends and to benefit future graduates. Additionally, educators should proactively network with professionals through attending their conferences and inviting professionals to attend academic conferences.

What Do Employers Want From Journalism And Mass Communication Graduates?

Regarding what exactly employers want from journalism and mass communication graduates, much research has focused on the attributes employers seek in graduating college students, but to the knowledge of these researchers, few studies have addressed how employers assess students' possession of these attributes. Norwood and Briggerman note that employers often

use various signals in determining job candidates' level of different attributes including number crunching ability, character, communication skills, problem solving skills, and an ability to work well with others. Employee assessments may consist of selected supervisor records and summary, interim performance report and reflections from learning in practice from the new mass communication graduate entrant, which will also have been rated by the supervisor. For example, it is well known that employers value communication skills and an ability to work well with others. Most of these general skills and personality traits are not directly observable though, and must be inferred from other signals. However, the particular signals used to infer highly valued commodities, like a high moral character and problem solving skills, has received little attention by researchers. As an example, we know grades are important, but what skills employers infer from grades is not known. Are grades a signal of intellect, work ethic, or both?

Empirical Review of a Research Study in Ghana

One of the objectives of a 2002 study by Boatenge and Ofori-Sarpong on the analysis of the labour market for tertiary graduates in Ghana was to ascertain employers' perception about the quality of recent tertiary graduates. This study, which was conducted at the instance of the World Bank, employed a macro approach of interviewing policy makers in the labour market, and the micro approach of interviewing human resource managers at the enterprise level. The responses from the firms indicated a general satisfactory performance rating of recent graduates on the job, with 14.3% of employers surveyed rating the performance of recent graduates at the work place vis-à-vis past standards as excellent; 57.1% rating it is as good; and 28.6% of employers rating them as fair. Similarly, 71.4% of employers indicated that the performance of local graduates is as good and 28% graded it as

fair, compared with graduates from abroad (Boatenge & Ofori-Sarpong, 2002).

They also found that in assessing **skills and personal attributes of graduates**, employers **on the** average, perceived managerial and technical skills as most critical to the performance of new graduate entrants followed by computer and analytical skills; whilst general skills were considered as less critical. Findings show that while managerial and technical skills are considered most critical to new graduate entrants in the areas of agriculture, engineering and computer science, managerial, technical, computer and analytical skills are perceived to be equally critical to graduates in social sciences and accounting. In contrast, skills in communication were thought to be most critical for graduate entrants in management. On average 21% of employers described the performance of recent graduates as very good, 59% as satisfactory, and 20% as poor. However, in terms of managerial and technical skills considered critical to the performance of their jobs, 43% of employers rated recent graduates as poor or inadequate.

Summation of Literature Review

From the above Literature Review it could be deduced that greater emphasis is being placed on composite training and education of students of Mass Communication by various facets of society: the public, the academia, the industry, businesses, the nation(s), UNESCO, and civil society organisations among others. This is because of the increasing role of Journalism and journalists in holding up the tenets of public information dissemination, widening the democratic space with agenda-setting discourses and expositions, holding political leaders accountable to the people for matters of public trust and responding to the continuously evolving and changing technologies and platforms of public/mass communication. All these in turn place corresponding responsibility on Journalism educators to impart to mass

communications students/ prospective graduates current and curricula-relevant knowledge, interactions and training in line with the various societal and professional expectations.

Method

Survey Research Method was used for this Study.

Population of Study

The population of study were public and private sector organizations whose core business activities are mass communication and media-oriented. Specifically, these are newspapers establishments, magazines, radio stations, television stations, public relations firms and advertising agencies. At the time of this study, there were 109 television stations, 167 radio stations, 36 Pay TV and Multipoint Media Distribution Services (MMDS) companies, and 22 Campus radio stations in Nigeria (NBC Source). There were 81 institutional members of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR). The figures for newspapers, magazines, and advertising agencies could not be obtained from the relevant bodies. Surveys were conducted in 2012 to find out how managers working with Mass Communication graduates of Nigerian Universities and Polytechnics assessed their wards in terms of some specified criteria.

Sample Selection/Study Sites

Quota sampling technique was used to select the sample size from four locations of media concentration in Nigeria. Lagos, Abuja, Kaduna, and Port-Harcourt were purposively chosen as the study sites for the survey, based on the assumption that most of the organizations employing Mass Communication graduates are in those four cities. Besides, their selection reflects a convenient North-South quota.

Sample Size

Forty (40) organisations employing mass communication graduates were selected by quota sampling.

Data Gathering Instrument

Data were gathered with the aid of a 40-item questionnaire, which solicited responses about the graduates' competences and weaknesses, as well as the comparisons of University and Polytechnic products. The companies polled were those doing business in the mainstream Mass Communication areas of newspaper and magazine publishing, radio and television broadcasting and public relations and advertising operation, and independent multimedia productions. The questionnaire sought to establish the following:

1. That the company employed at least two Mass Communication graduates
2. That the company was doing business in any of these areas: newspaper or magazine publishing; radio or television broadcasting; independent radio/television multimedia production; public relations or advertising agency, public relations unit of an organization, government ministry of information or related endeavours.
3. That the company had been in existence for up to three years
4. That the company had properly defined professional roles and responsibilities

Those selected to fill the questionnaire were managers who had up to five staff members under them. Our trained research assistants and their supervisors visited the selected organizations, administered the questionnaire, and waited to retrieve them. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended and open-ended, requiring the respondents to describe their views. Most of the

managers were willing to comment on the competences of their wards, so the survey did not witness a high rate of recall.

Findings/Data Presentation

We present our data in the order of the Research Questions.

RQ1. What kinds of organizations employ most Mass Communication graduates?

The organizations used for the survey were doing business in the specializations of advertising (6 or 15%), public relations (4 or 10%); Newspaper (6 or 25%); Radio (8 or 20%); Television (10 or 25%) and Independent Multimedia production (6 or 15%). We also found that 25% of the organizations have been in business for 30 years and above; 25% have been in the business for between 20 and 29 years; 15% have been in the business for 10 to 19 years; while 35% of them have been doing business for below 10 years.

Furthermore, those who filled the questionnaire included Accounts directors, Advert directors, Production directors, Heads of media departments, and heads of media production. Others include editors, deputy editors, sports editors, station managers, directors and deputy directors of radio stations as well as directors of news and station managers of television stations. We can therefore say with confidence that those who filled the questionnaire were sufficiently highly placed and therefore competent to assess the capabilities of the mass communication graduates in their organizations.

RQ 2. How did managers rate the graduates in terms of power of expression, numeracy, and computer literacy?

The respondents were asked to assess the graduates in terms of spoken English, written English, cthinking ability, and critical writing ability.

Only 5% of the Respondents considered the graduates excellent in spoken English. But no one considered them excellent

in written English, critical thinking and critical writing. A little more than half (55%) considered them good in spoken English, but only 35%, 30% and 10% considered them good in written English, critical thinking and critical writing. The graduates were just rated as “fair” in these crucial skills.

Regarding numeracy and teamwork, 55% rated graduates poor in numeracy, while 55% rated them “Good” in acceptance of responsibility, while less than half rated them “Good” in teamwork.

RQ 3. How did the managers rate the graduates' print journalism competences?

Half of the respondents considered the graduates “Good” in news writing but only 30% considered them good in feature writing and 40% rated them “Good” in editing. Most of the respondents only saw them as “fair” in these critical competences.

RQ 4. How did the managers rate the graduates' Electronic media competences?

An impressive 65% of the managers rated the graduates “Good” in the production of radio programmes, but only 35% thought they were “Good” in the ability to produce television programmes and a paltry 40% rated them “Good” in the “ability to edit recorded programmes”

RQ 5. How were the Graduates rated in basic Computer Application?

Our data show that 50% of the Respondents rated the graduates “Good” in word processing and presentation packages; while only 9% considered them “Good” in spreadsheet. Not a single respondent considered them “Excellent” in any of these skills. But the ratings in advanced computer application were not particularly encouraging: 41.7% considered them “Good” in page design; 15.4% considered them “Good” in picture editing; 14.3% rated

them “Good” in sound editing; 33.4% rated them “Good” in Adobe Audition; 15.4% rated them “Good” in Adobe premiere and 27.3% rated them Good in Animation Tools.

RQ 6. How did the managers rate the Graduates' Public Relations and Advertising skills?

Table 10 shows that only 40% of the respondents rated the graduates “Good” at writing press releases; 27.3% rated them “Good” in writing advert copy; 25% rated them Good at events management and 25% rated tem “Good” at public speaking.

RQ 7. What are the managers' ratings of the Graduates in other relevant competences?

The graduates were rated highly, i.e 61.1% and 60% respectively in acceptance of responsibility and teamwork. However, they scored only 6.3% in managerial ability, and a modest 55.5% in computer-assisted research.

RQ 8. What are the managers' general comments about the graduates' performance?

The respondents were required to comment freely about the graduates' performance in the open-ended portions of the questionnaire. Below are some of the most pertinent comments.

On the Graduates' General Performance

“Some of the graduates perform excellently while others perform below expectation”

“Mass communication needs graduates to improve on the abilities”

On skills improvement

“A lot needs to be done to improve their writing skills”

“They lack practical skills”

“More teaching should be based on computer-related courses.”

“They should lay more emphasis on media attachment.”

On curriculum Development

“The Mass Communication curriculum should be looked at again”

“There is a need to improve the Mass communication curriculum”

“Training institutions should embrace modern trends”

On Lecturers

“Lecturers should update their knowledge of modern trends in teaching mass communication”

“Most mass communication trainers are out-dated”

“Many lecturers have no practical experience themselves”

On Funding

“Both the private sector and government should improve the funding for mass communication training institutions”

“Training institutions should be better funded to improve their facilities.”

RQ 9. How do the Managers compare and contrast Polytechnic and University graduates?

Next, we asked the managers to compare and contrast University and Polytechnic graduates based on their experience working with them. The weight of evidence from the following 13 statements, which are direct quotes of the respondents, suggests that Polytechnic graduates have an edge over their University counterparts.

Statement No 1:“Years of experience has shown that Polytechnic graduates are better practically”

Statement No 2:“I believe performance is based on ability and self-development; one of our best reporters is an HND holder”

Statement No 3:“I believe the practical knowledge of the Polytechnic graduates places them above their University counterparts”

Statement No. 4:“Polytechnic graduates are better practically”

Statement No. 5:“Polytechnic students are better practically”

Statement No. 6: “Polytechnic graduates are better than University graduates”

Statement No. 7:“Polytechnic graduates are better on the job”

Statement No. 8: “Polytechnic graduates are far better than their University counterparts”

Statement No. 9:“Polytechnic-trained Mass Communication graduates are better than University graduates of Mass Communication”

Statement No. 10:“The Polytechnic graduates are better practically while the University graduates are better in area of presentation”

Statement No. 11:“The University trained (Mass Communication graduates) are better and able to grasp things better than Polytechnic graduates”

Statement No. 12:“University graduates are theoretically (more) grounded than their Polytechnic counterparts”

Statement No. 13:“Years of experience have shown that Polytechnic graduates are better on the job.”

Discussion of Findings

1. As pointed out earlier, the mass communication training institutions of Nigerian Universities and Polytechnics want their products to have the following competences and skills.
2. General and specific professional skills relevant to media practice
3. Strong writing and information processing skills
4. Competence in the use of Information and

Communication Technology (ICT) resources to enhance operational effectiveness

5. Broad exposure to all major components of mass communication and entrepreneurship to afford wide opportunities after graduation

Accordingly, Norwood and Brigerman (op.cit) note that employers often use various signals in determining job candidates' level of different attributes, including number crunching ability, character, communication skills, problem solving skills and an ability to work well with others.

From the findings of this study, to what extent would one say the objectives of the training institutions and the expectations of the employers of mass communication graduates of Nigerian Universities and Polytechnics are being met?

Not surprisingly, the employers rate our products high in “ability to work well with others” (Team spirit) (60%) and Acceptance of Responsibility (61.1%), but the rating for Numeracy is a paltry 35%. More worrisome are the poor ratings for Critical thinking (30%) and Critical writing (10%). But most worrisome are the poor ratings for Written English (35%), spoken English (55%), News writing (50%), feature writing (30%) and Editing (40%). The findings of this study obviously corroborate the findings of Boatenge & Ofori (2002) in Ghana (described in the empirical review of this current study) and they state “on the average 21% of employers described the performance of recent graduates as very good, 59% as satisfactory and 20% as poor. However, in terms of managerial and technical skills considered critical to the performance of their jobs, 43% of employers rated recent graduates as poor or inadequate”.

Also surprising are the low ratings in the relevant computer skills, such as Picture Editing (15.4%), Sound Editing (14.3%) and Animation tools (27.3%). This is surprising in the sense that even those in non-media related disciplines show

considerable proficiency in these skills.

Moreso, this study supports finding by Salawu (2005) which observes that polytechnic students compete favourably with their university counterparts and are by far superior to their university counterparts in job competencies and performance in many disciplines and he cites examples with mass communication, engineering and accountancy. In our study, employers also rated university products low in Press Release Writing (40%), Advert copy writing (27.3%), Public Speaking (25%), Ability to produce TV programmes (35%) and Ability to Edit Recorded programmes (40%).

The present study also supports UNESCO's assertion for the review and update of Mass Communication and Journalism curricula as expedient now.

Although finding the root causes of these deficiencies is outside the objectives of this research, it is any body's guess that the structuring of Mass communication departments, lack of facilities and paucity of quality lecturers may be major contributory factors. With regard to structuring, most mass communication departments are housed in the faculties of Arts or Social Sciences, where they compete with departments of history and sociology for scarce funds. Institutional authorities often fail to appreciate that the discipline is equipment-intensive, resulting in the neglect which many mass communication departments are often subjected to. But what can one say about the quality of lecturers who teach the discipline in the Universities? Because of the emphasis on Ph.D. holders, there is a dearth of lecturers with the relevant industrial experience to impart the nuts and bolts of journalism. This is where the Polytechnics have the edge: their lecturers and instructors have more relevant competences. A Latin adage says "you cannot give what you don't have." Besides, it is also surprising that up to now the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) has not thought it wise to include Mass communication in the list of

disciplines it sponsors for SIWES. This current study therefore corroborates the two different studies by Boatenge & Ofori and Salawu as well as UNESCO's recommendations.

Conclusion

This study was undertaken against the backdrop that existing literature on this subject must be updated, especially from the Nigerian perspective. We shall no longer continue to rely on the so-called Employers' Remarks stage-managed for accreditation. Moreover, there are concerns by industry, UNESCO and civil society that, in view of the increasing roles of journalism and journalists play in holding up the tenets of public information dissemination, widening the democratic space with agenda-setting discourses and expositions, holding public officials accountable to the people, and responding to the continuously evolving and changing technologies and platforms of mass communication, journalism and mass communication training institutions cannot continue their analogue business as usual. They must respond positively to the changing times. The findings of this study show deficiencies in some critical areas, which need to be addressed urgently, if the mass communication programme will continue to be relevant in the coming years.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are submitted:

1. There should be a periodic review of the NUC and NBTE BMAS for Mass Communication, which must include the input of employers of mass communication graduates.
2. Mass communication lecturers must include those with practical industrial experience, whether they have Ph.D. or not.
3. Lecturers should be encouraged to spend their sabbatical leave in the industry to be abreast of current trends.

4. SIWES must be better supervised to ensure that the students are exposed to the relevant areas. ITF should include mass communication in the list of disciplines it sponsors. The curriculum should be amended to include six months of industrial training.
5. Some “Core” or compulsory mass communication courses should be only electives, so that enough emphasis can be given to some critical writing and problem-solving courses.
6. ICT competences must be strengthened in the Journalism/Mass communication training institutions. Training institutions should encourage staff and students of mass communication to acquire laptops and the relevant software for presentation and multimedia productions.
7. Train-the-trainer courses should be emphasized. To this end, the Centre of Excellence in multimedia and cinematography established by STEP-B at the University of Lagos should start training the trainers, as it is meant to do.
8. Efforts should be intensified to sell the idea that mass communication deserves to be a school or faculty of its own to have enough leg room to operate effectively.

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