

JOURNALISTS COGNATE TRAININGS AND PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA

¹Okechukwu Christopher Onuegbu, ²Ogonna Wilson Anunike, (PhD.)

¹Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria.

²Department of Mass Communication, Federal Polytechnic, Oke, Nigeria.

¹ORCID: 0000-0002-6362-1993., ²ORCID: 0009-0008-1879-9929.

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Abstract: The study assessed the performance output between journalists with a degree in mass communication or journalism and those without it who are practising in South East, Nigeria. The survey study employed interviews as an instrument for data collection. A total of 20 journalists were interviewed in line with the study objective. The objectives were to find out if journalists with a degree in mass communication are more professional than those without degree; to discover how a degree in mass communication makes journalists professional; and to evaluate the performance outputs of degree holders and non-degree holders' journalists. It hinged on the performance theory. The study found that journalists with a degree in mass communication practise more professionally than those without a degree in the field. It was further found that journalists with a degree in mass communication perform professionally in news writing, news coverage and keeping to the ethics of the journalism profession. The study concluded that a degree in mass communication or journalism makes journalists become professional. It recommended that intending journalists and those already practising should strive to acquire a degree or diploma in the journalism profession.

Keywords: Academic standing, degree holders, journalists' trainings, non-degree holders, performance evaluation, South-East Nigeria.

I. INTRODUCTION

Academic qualification is a basic requirement for practising most professional jobs all over the world. As a result of this training, individuals (learners) are transformed or bequeathed with relevant knowledge, skills, ethics and others needed to thrive in their desired profession. Hence, most institutions of learning, while awarding students' certificates at the end of their respective programmes, indicate in the credentials that they have been found worthy in character and learning (Indeed, 2021; Northeastern, 2019).

In Nigeria, most disciplines admit or induct only those with first degree usually referred to as Bachelor or Diploma into professional cadre. This could be Higher National Diploma (HND), Bachelor of Science (B. Sc.), Bachelor of Education (B. Ed.), Bachelor of Engineering (B. Eng), Bachelor of Laws (LLB), Bachelor of Medicine (BM), among others. Some of them are obtainable after four years of studies or more, as well as requiring their holders to undergo one-year mandatory service, training, internship or housemanship as the case may be, before practising. This could be why Abone (2021) sees adequate training as requisite for excellence.

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Journalism is one such profession requiring a diploma or degree to practise. Section 3 (2a) of the Constitution of Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ as amended in 2023), umbrella body of practising Journalists, among other things, stipulates that a person can only qualify to be admitted into the profession if he/she possesses a minimum of Higher National Diploma or Degree in Journalism or Mass Communication. This includes Postgraduate Diploma, Bachelor of Science (BSc) or Bachelor of Arts (BA).

However, available records show that the profession is populated with practitioners who neither acquired a degree nor a diploma in journalism or Mass Communication (Olajide, Benjamin and Ogundeji, 2012). These practitioners, although not admitted into the NUJ, are recognised as journalists, probably because they are employees of reputable media organisations and/or handle different journalistic tasks such as news reporting, specialised or beat reporting, features writing, editorial writing, investigation, editing and others too numerous to mention. It is against this background this study intended to evaluate the performance output between the degree holders and non-degree holders' journalists in South East, Nigeria. Olajide, Benjamin and Ogundeji (2012) showed that the majority of people that joined journalism from other professionals are those with access to either print or electronic media organisations as employees, freelancers or publishers. Some of them have flair for writing and in handling some other journalistic tasks. However, while some have complemented their efforts by undergoing further studies and in-house training, majority have not, and cared not to. Hence, they engage in unprofessional conducts like soliciting and accepting financial gratification to defame characters or dissemination of fake news due to lack of requisite training (Lumba, 2021; Okafor, 2019; Mbamalu, 2019; Ojomo, 2015). This does not only tarnish the image of the journalism profession but generally endangers the society which journalists ought to serve as watchdogs.

Objectives of Study

It would be anchored on the following objectives:

1. To ascertain if journalists with a degree in Mass Communication are more professional than those without a degree.
2. To assess how a degree in Mass Communication makes journalists professional.
3. To evaluate the performance outputs of the degree holders and non-degree holders' journalists.

Scope of Study

This study evaluated the performances of degree holders and non-degree holders' journalists with a focus on three thematic areas; objectivity, professionalism and social responsibility. The three key words summarised the fifteen ethical codes of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) namely; editorial independence, accuracy and fairness, privacy, privilege/non-disclosure, decency, discrimination, reward and gratification. Others are violence, children and minors, access to information, public interest, social responsibility, plagiarism, copyright, and press freedom/responsibility. However, the study was restricted to journalists practising in South East, Nigeria.

II. BODY OF ARTICLE

Literature Review

The importance of training to mankind could not be overstated. It's a process of empowering individuals with requisite knowledge, skills and experience needed for excellence in their chosen career or endeavour. This could be done in schools, offices, at homes, or through workshops, seminars, and conferences to develop or improve people's performance and abilities. It includes personal studies, e-learning or online education, mentoring, on-the-job learning (personal experience at course of practising), and in-house training (Abone, 2021; Aguinis, 2009).

Some benefits accruing from training are improvement of employees' and organisations performance, jobs satisfaction, morale boosting, and addressing of weaknesses. It also helps organisations and individuals to increase their productivity, stay focused and adhere to quality standard, while exposing them to new innovations and creativity, building of reputation and others (Crawford, 2016; Project, 2020).

Several professions like law, medicine, nursing, engineering, education and accountancy see requisite training as a top priority or most valued. Hence, in Nigeria, it takes about five years or more intensive academic and professional training

for a person to qualify and be licensed to practise as a lawyer, engineer or medical doctor. Those licensed are regarded as professionals, and could practise anywhere although under the professional checks (ethical codes). The unlicensed are classified as quacks, and could hardly practise in public to avoid been caught or prosecuted (Odinaka, 2020; Opeyemi, 2020).

In journalism specifically, to become a professional journalist, one is required to undergo a four-year course and obtain a degree or diploma in Mass Communication or Journalism in the universities and polytechnics. Students of mass communication or journalism are also expected to embark on industrial training, youth service and/or internship as well. All these are expected to expose journalists to several work opportunities in communication including advertising, public relations, media laws, and how to uphold the ethics of the journalism profession. The ethics of journalism in Nigeria are editorial independence, accuracy and fairness, privacy, privilege/non-disclosure, decency, discrimination, reward and gratification. Others are violence, children and minors, access to information, public interest, social responsibility, plagiarism, copyright, and press freedom/responsibility (Breiner, 2011; Lindsey, 2021; Nigeria Press Council (NPC, 2021).

Experts believed that journalists who underwent these relevant training are professionals and often practise professionally. For instance, distinguished journalists admitted into the Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication 'Hall of fame' from 1948 to 2020, had degrees in the field. There are degree holder journalists who have equally performed excellently in Nigeria. Unfortunately, majority of the trained journalists hardly secure jobs in the mass media organisations. This is obviously because of fear of occupational hazards, get-quick-rich syndrome, poor remunerations, non-payment of salaries, among other reasons (Emmanuel, Okoro & Ukonu, 2021; Iowa, 2020; Thecable, 2019; Paul, 2021; Ranker, 2019).

Majority of mass media companies chose to employ quacks. Quack-journalists are people who have no degree or diploma in mass communication or journalism as stated in the NUJ constitution. They are usually the unemployed who have degrees in science, arts, social science, humanities or other fields, and flare for writing or editing. They easily take whatever pay offered by media employers without complaint, and engage in all kinds of unethical practices to survive (African climate reporters, 2021; Lumba, 2021; NUJ constitution; Okafor, 2019).

Perhaps, this entails why the Nigeria's Federal House of Representatives, in February 2021, moved to amend sections 19, 21 and 35 of the Nigerian Press Council (NPC) Act Cap N128 LFN 2004. The amendments would, among other things, make it compulsory for practising journalists in the country to have first degree, Higher National Diploma or postgraduate certificate in Journalism, Media Art or Communication (including Mass Communication). The bill, which died after going through first and second reading and public hearings, sparked opposition and support from all quarters. Some saw it as a draconian law because some journalists without a degree or diploma in the field were practising professionally, while others view it as a blessing in disguise to the journalism profession (Baiyewu, 2021; Baiyewu, 2021; Paul, 2021).

Empirical Review

Ojomo and Tejuosho (2017) conducted survey research on journalism training, workplace influence, and the quest for professionalism in Nigeria to find out how they contribute to journalists' professional conduct. A questionnaire was administered on 80 journalists working in Ogun state. It was found that training and workplace make journalists become professional, while unethical journalists were mostly untrained and poorly paid. Ishola, Adeleye and Tanimola (2018) investigated the impact of educational, professional qualification and years of experience on accountant job performance in South West, Nigeria. The survey adopted a questionnaire as an instrument for data collection. A total number of 210 questionnaires were administered on the respondents. It was found that employees with professional and academic qualifications perform better than non-certified staff in accounting tasks.

In another study, Manda (2018), examined how journalism education and training was contributing to journalists output in Malawi. The survey employed interviews as a data collection instrument. The respondents were 23 journalists across print and electronic media, including media managers and educators. The researcher found that journalism education was on the increase in Malawi since independence but the quality of the output was low due to inadequate human resources and lack of material resources to impact practical skills on trainees. Ziani, Elareshi Alrashid and Al-Jaber (2018) sought the perceptions of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) students and professional journalists on the quality of curriculum and training sessions they gained at the university and afterwards. It focused on the three Arab countries such Saudi Arabia,

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences

Vol. 11, Issue 1, pp: (101-109), Month: January - February 2024, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Questionnaires were administered on 34 journalists. The study found, among other things, that journalism study has a positive impact on practising journalists.

Sendawula, Kimuli, Juma and Muganga (2018) evaluated training, employee engagement and employee performance with a focus on Uganda's health sector. The study applied cross sectional and correlational research methods. A total of 150 questionnaires were administered on hospital workers. It was found that training and engagement determines employee performance.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was performance theory. It was the most appropriate theory for the study because it gives insights on vital elements that could influence or determine an individual's level of performance. The theory was popularised by Richard Schechner (1985) and Victor Turner (1988).

Performance theorists argue that every individual or group puts in their best performance in the society through diverse means. But to perform, an individual or group has to engage in different activities such as learning or skill acquisition so as to improve their capacity to perform (Elger, 2007; Sonnentag and Frese, 2002; Institute for the public understanding of the past (IPUP) and Institute of historical research (IHR) 2007).

Elger adds that performance could be improved upon through the performer's mindset, mind-set in an enriching environment and engagement in reflective practice. This could be why he identifies six components of performance theory as context, level of knowledge, levels of skills, level of identity, personal factors, and fixed factors. UKessays (2020) further maintained that performance theory was founded on principles such as 'presentation of self', 'restored behaviour', 'expressive culture', and 'incorporates social drama and ritual.' This theory shows that journalists' can increase their performance or advance their professional career if they acquire knowledge, skills, ethics and others training through undergoing studies in journalism or mass communication. Academic training helps to improve people's cognitive, social, affective and psychomotor skills.

Methodology**Research Design**

This survey research was focused on the South East, a geopolitical zone in Nigeria, comprising five Igbo speaking states. The states are Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. There are several mass media organisations operating in the region, as well as journalists residing in the region as correspondents of some international and national print and electronic media houses. Each of the states has one recognised Council of NUJ (branch) as provided by Article 5 (A) of the constitution of Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ). That is; South East Nigeria has five State Councils of NUJ namely; Abia State Council, Anambra State Council, Ebonyi State Council, Enugu State Council, and Imo State Council.

The NUJ constitution in Article 3 (sections 1, 2 and 3) and Article 5 (G sections 1, 2, 3 and 6), further empowered state councils to respectively, register chapels (units); one at each medium operating in the state. Every chapel contains a minimum of 10 practising registered journalists as members. This is because the constitution recognises members of these registered chapels as Nigeria practising journalists. There are 5 chapels of NUJ in Abia State Council, 21 chapels of NUJ in Anambra State Council, 16 chapels of NUJ in Ebonyi State Council, 16 chapels of NUJ in Enugu State Council, and 16 chapels of NUJ in Imo State Council.

Therefore, there are 74 registered Chapels of NUJ in South East Nigeria. The 74 chapels have 1,555 registered members. But the sample size for this study was 20 journalists selected using purposive sampling. These include 10 reporters, correspondents and editors/sub-editors working in the print media, and 10 reporters/correspondents and editors/sub-editors working with the electronic media. The seven of the respondents were females while 13 were males. Four journalists were selected from each state council of NUJ in the South East, Nigeria. The 8 (four from Anambra and four from Enugu councils) were interviewed face-to-face at definite locations respectively chosen by them, while the other 12 (from Abia, Ebonyi and Imo) agreed to speak over the phone, and were interviewed accordingly.

Method of Data Analysis

The method of data analysis used in this study was qualitative. Answers extracted via the interviews were presented using thematic and descriptive narrative approach.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table one: Respondents descriptions

TABLE: I

Name	Gender	Media	Position	Entry Qualification	Practice years
A	Male	Electronic	Deputy News Editor	B.Sc., Mass Communication	14 years
B	Male	Electronic	Reporter	B. SC., Mass Communication	8 years
C	Male	Electronic	Correspondent	HND, Mass Communication	18 years
D	Male	Print	Correspondent	B. SC., Mass Communication	25 years
E	Male	Print	Editor	B. A , English language	17 years
F	Male	Print	Correspondent	B. Sc. Political Science	23 years
G	Female	Electronic	Editor	HND Mass Communication	20 years
H	Male	Electronic	Editor	B. Sc. Public Administration	25 years
I	Female	Print	Correspondent	B. Sc., Social Science Education	17 yearS
J	Female	Print	Correspondent	B. A , English Language	20 years
K	Male	Electronic	Chief Reporter	B. Sc., CIVIL Engineering	14 years
L	Female	Print	Correspondent	B. A., English Language	10 years
M	Female	Electronic	News Editor	HND, Mass Communication	16
N	Female	Electronic	Reporter	HND, Mass Communication	8
O	Male	Print	Reporter	B. Sc., Psychology	30
P	Male	Electronic	Editor	B. Sc., Mass Communication	28
Q	Male	Electronic	Director, News and Current Affairs	HND, Mass Communication	31
R	Female	Print	Correspondent	B. Sc., Economics	12
S	Male	Print	Regional Editor	OND, Mass Communication	25
T	Male	Print	South East Bureau Chief	B. Sc., Political Science	32

The table one above describes the respondents interviewed. Their names and media houses were protected as agreed in order to prevent possible sanctions since some of them work in government owned media organisations. Thus, their names were represented with alphabets A to T. The table also shows that a total of ten respondents either possess a degree or diploma in Mass Communication, while ten others have degree in courses other than mass communication. Similarly, ten of them are reporters/correspondents, while the other ten have risen to the ranks of Director of News and Current Affairs, Editors, News Editors, Deputy News Editors, Regional Editors, and Bureau-Chief in their various media organisations.

Findings:

The study findings were discussed under the following themes or sub-headings;

Practical

All the respondents agreed that journalism is a practical oriented course that requires constant practising to master. They all agreed that experience helped them to become better journalists.

Professionalism

All the respondents agreed that journalism is a professional course and required a degree or diploma in the field to practise. They, however, maintained that whether you have a degree or none in mass communication or journalism, you must work under someone's supervision for the first week or more before you would understand the mass media environment. In order words, training and retraining makes a better journalist.

However, they expressed divergent views on how long it took them to master the rope. Respondents R, P, I and H said it took them less than six months to learn news covering and writing skills from their senior colleagues in the office, and by reading published news stories and others. They also disclosed that not having a degree in mass communication influenced their conduct while practising.

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences

Vol. 11, Issue 1, pp: (101-109), Month: January - February 2024, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

Similarly, respondents O, J, L, F, E said it took them one year, six months, seven months, seven months and five months respectively. The respondent L says that for the first month, she was writing news like minutes of the meetings. As a result, she was compelled to do desk work as a proof-reader whereas she was previously employed to cover education beats.

“It was from proofreading; I was groomed by my news editor and other sub-desks before I was restored back to my beat. When I returned to the education desk, I worked with a National Diploma holder in Mass Communication who was undergoing his industrial training in our office. The boy really helped me to maintain objectivity,” she added.

But respondent K says “I passed through different processes. First, I joined the sports news desks as a newscaster. From there, I learnt how to cast all kinds of news. Then, I started learning how to write news from the news script. It took me over one year to become a journalist; especially news writing and events coverage.”

Respondent A says, “I was totally confused when I was sent on the first assignment as a reporter in my organisation. It was a press conference. I wrote everything everyone said in the event. When I was asked to write the report, I didn’t know where to start. It was my mentor, a staff reporter that helped me organise the report from the lead (first paragraph) to end.” Respondent A added that it took him one month to start writing news without supervision. And within the first month, he writes a story for about an hour or more.

But respondents B, C, D, G said it took them less than a month to learn the job. This is because they graduated from higher institutions where students write and publish stories, and other happenings in the school almost every month. These universities and polytechnics also have functional radio and televisions studios where they mandate their students to carry on practical work every semester. “As an undergraduate student of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, I never missed participating in those practical works. From there, I started writing letters to the editor and campus reports to Daily Star newspapers. That was how I gained employment with them as an undergraduate,” respondent B, enthused. He added that as he joined the medium, the major concerns usually raised by his editor was not following their house-style. He later overcame that too. And where he presently works as a correspondent, most stories he authored were published without much editing.

Objectivity

It was found that many journalists with a degree or diploma in mass communication or journalism adhere to objectivity in their reportage and while performing other journalistic assignments. All the respondents agreed that it was at the course of studying mass communication or journalism that objectivity is being learnt, re-learn and internalised based on journalism codes of ethics. This ethics guide them to perform professionally than others with no degree.

Respondents K, J, L, T and S admitted strongly that no journalists can function effectively without having knowledge of ethics. It was because of this ethics respondents K, J, L and T respectively enrolled for postgraduate diploma in mass communication, and professional diploma in journalism while practising. It also made the respondent S to further his education from OND to PhD level, which he finished in the year 2021.

Respondent A says, “...because of knowledge of journalism ethics, I refrain from reports that would earn me libel. I always strive to stick to my knowledge of mass communication law. You may never have the opportunity to learn mass communication law and ethics if you don’t have a degree or diploma in the profession. There had been instances where I killed some stories I couldn’t balance. You know if you don’t balance a story, your editor may kill it or query you to avoid legal issues.”

Respondent C submits that “When it comes to objectivity, I give it to the professional journalists. I mean those with a degree or diploma in mass communication. We are usually careful. I have been threatened because of my stories. But none could drag me to court. There was a report I wrote on a former state governor in the South East, he visited our Lagos office with teams of SANs (Senior Advocate of Nigeria). My office told them to go to court and that we are ready...they ran away. So, there is no story I cannot write. I know how to balance them using my knowledge of journalism ethics and mass communication law. I recently added a degree in law so as to become more professional in law and communication.”

On his part, respondent Q said his only headache with journalists who have no degree in mass communication or journalism is objectivity. “In my office (a state-owned medium), I don’t allow them to cover events alone. If they do, it won’t be aired in time; because I will force them to balance it. They write one-sided stories often. One interviewed a politician that belonged

to the state ruling party. When the news script got to my table, I asked him to look for the other person (the man from an opposition party accused in the report). It was then I learnt that the interviewee offered him some money to give me so that it would be aired without balancing. Trust me; I sent him away with the story and money... The commissioner for information later learnt about the story; I explained to them why the story required balancing. They had no option than to allow it to be balanced," he revealed.

Discussion of Finding

Research Question One: Are journalists with a degree in Mass Communication more professional than non-degree holding journalists?

Theme two, professionalism provided the answer to it. The respondents shared their experiences on how they were able to fit in the industry upon employment. Also, all the respondents with a degree in mass communication namely; respondents A, B, C, D, G, M, N, P, Q and S agreed during the interview that acquiring a degree in mass communication was making them behave professionally than others. Similarly, respondents without a degree in mass communication or journalism such as E, F, H and K recalled how they underperformed until they gained the knowledge. These are not different from the findings of Emmanuel, N. O., Okoro, N. & Ukonu, M. O. (2021), Lumba (2021), and other experts that journalists who underwent these relevant training are professionals and often practise professionally and performed excellently in Nigeria.

Research Question Two: How does a degree in Mass Communication make journalists more professional than non-degree holding journalists in South East, Nigeria?

Responses provided in theme three, objectivity provided answers to this question. Respondents argued that acquiring a degree in mass communication makes them knowledgeable of ethics of journalism, which makes journalists perform professionally. This was also why some of the respondents acquired postgraduate diplomas and others in mass communication as they practise the profession. The non-professionals were hardly hired by credible media houses; hence, they resort to all kinds of unethical practices to survive (African climate reporters, 2021; Lumba, 2021; NUJ constitution; Okafor, 2019). Ethics of journalism profession are editorial independence, accuracy and fairness, respect to privacy, etc. (NPC, 2021).

Research Question Three: What is the performance output of the degree holding and non-degree holding journalists in South East, Nigeria?

All the three themes provided answers to this research question. The respondents explained that acquiring a degree or diploma in mass communication or journalism makes journalists adhere to the journalism ethical codes, write or file stories in time, maintain accuracy, respect to minors, among others. The findings were in line with that of Abone (2021), and African (2021) that academic and professional training are indispensable in excellent performance.

III. CONCLUSION

This study found that journalists with a degree in mass communication or journalism are prone to perform better than others without a degree in the field. This is because the training helps to acquire professional skills and equipping intending journalists to gain knowledge of ethics of journalism profession and mass communication laws. All these helped journalists to perform creditably and professionally. It is hereby concluded that journalism or mass communication degree is necessary and should be gained by all practitioners of the profession.

Recommendation

This study prompted the following recommendations;

1. Academic qualification is necessary for career advancement. Every intending journalist should strive to obtain a diploma or degree in mass communication in order to acquaint self with the ethics of journalism profession, mass communication law and others.
2. Also, practising journalists who have no degree in mass communication, journalism or media studies should enrol into any recognised higher institution to gain the necessary qualifications. The Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) should help in this regard by partnering with at least one university or polytechnic in all states in Nigeria so as to train and certify their members and intending members at an affordable rate.

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences

 Vol. 11, Issue 1, pp: (101-109), Month: January - February 2024, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

3. Academic institutions in Nigeria should incorporate basic practical knowledge into their mass communication, journalism or media education curriculum. This will help to engage their students with all the practical, theoretical knowledge and skills necessary in the field of journalism. This will help them to fit in immediately employed.
4. Mass media houses should employ more people who studied mass communication or journalism to work in their editorial department for professionalism. They should also enhance the salary and other welfare packages of the media practitioners so as to encourage their staff to perform better.
5. There is also a need for every medium to offer professional in-house training and retraining to all their staff, especially those in the editorial department. This should be a continuous exercise, held at least once a year, and should include the theoretical and practical aspect of the profession.

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