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TOWN AND GOWN CONVERGENCE: DOES JOURNALISM EDUCATION MEET 21ST CENTURY MEDIA INDUSTRY EXPECTATIONS IN NIGERIA?

ABSTRACT

This study interrogates the extent to which journalism education in Nigerian higher institutions converges with or meets the demands for journalism practice in the contemporary age. Using a sample of 164 respondents, consisting of 87 media practitioners, 54 media lecturers, and 23 final-year journalism students in Nigeria, and based on the space interaction theory, this study found that media practitioners and media lecturers find the present education curriculum and training of journalists inadequate. It also established that discrimination based on religion, disability, ethnicity, and income exists in the media workplace and, on average, male journalists earn higher salaries than their female counterparts under the same conditions. Also, nine in ten journalism students are not enthusiastic about their future in the media industry because they believe that their education/training does not meet their initial expectations. The study recommends that the curriculum of journalism studies in Nigerian higher institutions be reviewed and overhauled to reflect the current reality and demands to serve society better.

Keywords: journalism education, media education, media industry, Nigeria, space interaction theory, SDG 4, SDG 16

INTRODUCTION

The journalism profession is experiencing changes and challenges, propelled by the impact of the internet (Egielewa *et al.*, 2021). The resulting implication is that journalism education is struggling to gain a foothold on the rapidly changing media practice globally (Emmanuel, 2021; Larrondo & Peña, 2018; Emmanuel *et al.*, 2021; Odunlami, 2014).

There are several changes and shifts taking place in the media industry in terms of how media companies compete and generate value, which in turn impact the quality and value of their products, profits, and growth. In an increasingly crowded media space, the number of traditional media jobs continues to drop while digital media soars. This has resulted in stagnated or slower growth in the mainstream media, pushing media companies to innovate, develop strategies, and build human capabilities. In part, this means they must combine compelling content with the breadth and depth of distribution and then connect it all to a good user experience, where content is easily discoverable on an array of screens and at an attractive price (Oduunlami, 2014; Ifedigbo, n.d.).

In particular, the changing landscape has been propelled by the expansion, ownership and accessibility of smartphones, and the internet. With the omnipresence of smartphones and global penetration rising to 6.04 billion (73.2% of the world's total population) in 2025 (DataReportal, 2025a), the media landscape has been permanently altered. However, in sub-Saharan Africa, three out of four people remained offline in 2024 (Benamara, 2025). In Nigeria, where this study took place, there were 150 million active mobile phone connections at the start of 2025, with 107 million individual internet users (DataReportal, 2025b).

The growth in social networking platforms and artificial intelligence is also influencing how journalists do their work (Ngonso *et al.*, 2018a; Ngonso *et al.*, 2018b). Technological advances have made it possible to generate and distribute information rapidly to large numbers of people across public platforms (especially social media) with little or no professional or editorial scrutiny (Emmanuel, 2021; Ifedigbo, n.d.).

The rapid changes in the media industry have led to the question whether media studies curricula in Nigerian higher institutions are tailored to meet the expectations in the field (Emmanuel, 2021). Just as journalists struggle to keep up with new developments in technology, which are relevant to media practice, so also do media educators struggle to keep abreast of media industry demands and expectations (Emmanuel, 2021). Emmanuel (*ibid.*) opines that “while the media industry is very welcoming to fast changes, journalism training institutions are primarily conservative spaces, stuck in their ways”; thus, implying that higher education institutions are slow to adapt to new changes. In journalism, this could create the impression that graduates are already at a disadvantage when they enter the media industry.

In a study of 298 students from six universities in Nigeria, Emmanuel *et al.* (2021) found that only 18.2% (53 students) saw a connection between their studies and the expectations of the media industry. The majority of the students acknowledged the disruption that digital technologies brought to the newsroom, with 51% of them preferring the mainstream media of television radio, newspapers and magazines.

As a result of the need to bridge the gap between the media industry (town) and media education (gown), communication educators in Nigeria, in collaboration with media and communication professionals and industry regulators, developed

a new curriculum for communication studies, which was approved by the National Universities Commission (NUC) and implemented in 2021. This effectively unbundled what was known as “mass communication” into seven degree-awarding departments in all universities. These include journalism and media studies; public relations; advertising; broadcasting, film and multimedia studies; development communication studies; and information and media studies. Mass communication was later added as a programme, bringing the total to eight degree-awarding programmes. By 2023, only four out of the 260 universities in Nigeria had unbundled and implemented the new programmes (NUC, 2023).

Given this context, there is a need for research to re-interrogate how media education meets the needs of the media industry in Nigeria, particularly in the context of the ubiquity of information sources and accessibility to the internet.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- ◆ How do media practitioners perceive the media training received by future journalists?
- ◆ To what extent is there discrimination in the Nigerian media industry?
- ◆ To what extent do media organisations report on the marginalised in society?
- ◆ What challenges inhibit the performance of journalists/future journalists?
- ◆ How do future journalists perceive the prospects of their career as journalists?

LITERATURE OVERVIEW

Town and gown convergence

Universities and their surrounding communities have often been perceived to be in a symbiotic yet complicated relationship (Addie, Keil & Olds, 2015; Carlson, 2019; Copeland, 2020; Ogola-Emma & Amini-Philips, 2021). There seems to be a relationship between the success of universities and that of their host cities, as global city rankings and university rankings have shown. For example, in the United States of America (USA), Boston’s economic success has been attributed to the strength of its metropolitan region’s 53 colleges and universities, while Silicon Valley’s success is believed to be driven by innovative research undertaken at Stanford University. In Canada, the University of Waterloo is considered the driver of smart urban development in the tri-city region of Cambridge, Kitchener, and Waterloo, Ontario. Thus, there is a relationship between the “gown”, symbolising the educated populace of a university, and the “town”, the host and a dynamic business community (Addie, 2015; Copeland, 2020; Ogola-Emma & Amini-Philips, 2021).

Town and gown is also a notion that explores emerging opportunities in media and communication and it is aimed at bringing about a valuable interface between students undergoing training in the classroom, their tutors, and the professionals in the industry. It creates opportunities where scholars, students, and educational institutions engage

to synergise on how best to meet changing societal needs in the areas of news gathering and dissemination (Aikulola, 2023; Odunlami, 2014; Daily Trend, n.d.). Aikulola (2023) argues that three factors have changed how journalists do their work, and that these must resonate in the classroom if the next generation of journalists is to meet the rapidly changing environment of the industry. These are (1) the advent of the internet with its accessibility and speed at processing and distributing information; (2) the revolution in information and communication technologies in terms of the production of communication and media equipment and gadgets; and (3) the rise of populism politics all over the world in which politicians manipulate the emotions and sensitivities of people.

In a study conducted in the USA by Cueto (2019), interviews were conducted with 184 local government and university officials. Based on the findings, Cueto (*ibid.*) argues that local government engagement with universities enumerated the opportunities and challenges associated with the relationships. The opportunities include (1) low crime rates; (2) the attraction of a “creative class” and bright minds in students; and (3) an increase in new business and economic activities (e.g. housing developments and banks). The challenges include (1) misbehaviour by university students; (2) studentification, which is the displacement of residents by students; (3) the change of existing business types to student-oriented businesses; and (4) low tax revenue as a result of a university’s nonprofit status.

Similarly, Copeland (2020), in a study involving 16 university and local officials of the Magnolia University and the City of Opportunity in Arkansas in the USA, found that officials of the City of Opportunity and Magnolia University found ways to work together while leveraging their influence with external constituencies. Moreover, financial resources did not hinder the realization of the common goals between the two parties.

A quantitative study conducted by Wenger and Owens (2013) analysed 752 jobs postings for newsroom positions from the websites of ten media companies in the USA. The findings indicated that previous professional experience (84.8%), strong writing skills (55.7%), strong news judgement (55.6%), non-linear editing skills (42.3%), and the ability to be a team player (42.2%) were the most sought after skills from prospective journalists.

In Nigeria, Ogola-Emma and Amini-Philips (2021) conducted a study with 800 academic and non-academic staff members of three higher institutions in the southern Nigerian state of Bayelsa and their respective host communities. The findings indicated that host communities contributed to the development of tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State in various ways. This included assisting in instilling good behaviour in students, supporting the institutions’ administration to improve their quality, assisting in the provision of good health facilities for institutional development, aiding in the provision of security services to the institutions, assisting in maintaining peace among staff and students, providing certain building materials needed in the institutions, integrating some members of the host communities into the workforce of the institution, assisting in donating land for institutional development, aiding in creating a good road network within and outside the system, and boosting new business opportunities within and outside the institutions.

Aikulola (2023) posits that students entering the media industry must be equipped to be able to serve as professionals who are competently and confidently informed on what they need to do to push society forward within contemporary emerging global situations. Aikulola (*ibid.*) adds that higher institutions must produce journalism graduates who understand issues of conflicts, and the dynamics of the society that could lead to conflict, insurgencies, terrorism and poor governance, and who are able to facilitate solutions. Such journalists should be able to develop the capacity to become investigative journalists who are able to ensure accountability, transparency, and trustworthiness in the process of governance. Moreover, journalism students should not only acquire the basic knowledge and skills from universities, but they must also understand the complexities of the societies in which they will practice. More than a decade ago, Odozi (2014) already argued that the journalism curriculum of most Nigerian universities are skewed towards a Western model and therefore does not prepare students to address the challenges of Nigerian society.

Space of interactions theory

The theoretical foundation for this study is based on the space of interactions theory, which explains the relationship between space and behaviour (Benyon, Höök & Nigay, 2010; Chai *et al.*, 2017). The theory interrogates how development, particularly urban development, influences human behaviour. It argues that as society develops, so do the effects reflect in the changing behaviour of inhabitants. These changing dynamics seek to examine diversity, homogeneity, heterogeneity, evolving behavioural trends based on different periods, as well as the distinctiveness of various population segments, positing that all these interact to explain how such a society advances or declines depending on whether the interaction has more positive or negative effects. Applied to this study, the space of interactions theory is used to reflect on how journalists perform their duty based on the training they received from universities and other institutions in Nigeria.

METHOD

The study used a mixed method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to answer the research questions.

Participants

The population of the study consisted of media practitioners, media educators, and students of mass communication/media studies from three higher education institutions in the Edo and Delta states of Nigeria, namely Edo State University (Iyamho, Edo State), Auchi Polytechnic (Auchi, Edo State), and Delta State Polytechnic (Owashi-Uku, Delta State).

A total of 49 media educators at higher education institutions completed the questionnaire:

- ◆ Department of Mass Communication, Edo State University: five of eight mass communication educators;
- ◆ Department of Mass Communication, Auchi Polytechnic: 24 of 37 mass communication educators; and
- ◆ Department of Mass Communication, Delta State Polytechnic: 20 of 24 mass communication educators.

A total of 77 media practitioners from various media organisations completed the questionnaire:

- ◆ Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) in Edo State: 13 of 28 media practitioners;
- ◆ Voice of Nigeria (VON) Radio in Edo State: 32 of 42 media practitioners;
- ◆ Edo Broadcasting Service in Edo State: 27 of 67 media practitioners; and
- ◆ Peak FM 90.5FM, a training radio station of Edo State University: five of six media practitioners.

In addition to the questionnaires completed by the media educators and the media practitioners, a focus group was conducted with 21 final-year students (400 Level) at Edo State University.

The questionnaire was distributed to the media educators and the media practitioners between 15 April 2023 and 31 May 2023, while the focus group was conducted with 21 of the 26 students present in a lecture on 9 May 2023. Thus, a total of 49 media educators, 77 media practitioners, and 21 students made up the sample of 147 for the study.

FINDINGS

Demographic results

The demographic data from the study showed that of the total number of respondents (n=147), 106 respondents (72%) were male, while 41 respondents (28%) were female. The average age of the media practitioners (n=77) was 43.7 years (see Table 1), the average educational level of the media practitioners (n=77) was Bachelor's degree or Higher National Diploma (see Table 2), and the mean monthly salary is N110,000 (\$157) (see Table 3).

TABLE 1: AGE RANGE OF MEDIA PRACTITIONERS

Age	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
25 years & below	1	1.4	1.4
26-35 years	21	27.2	28.6
36-45 years	42	54.4	83.0
46-55 years	12	15.6	98.6
56 years & above	1	1.4	100.0
Total	77	100.0	

TABLE 2: EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF MEDIA PRACTITIONERS

Educational Level	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
SSCE/WAEC	5	6.9	6.9
OND/NCE	23	29.2	36.1
BSc/HND	32	41.7	77.8
MSc/PhD	16	20.8	98.6
Others	1	1.4	100.0
Total	77	100.0	

TABLE 3: AVERAGE MONTHLY SALARY OF MEDIA PRACTITIONERS

Monthly Salary	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
N50,000 & less	27	35.2	35.2
N51,000 to N100,000	20	25.4	60.6
N101,000 to N150,000	12	15.5	76.1
N151,000 to N200,000	18	23.9	100.0
N201,000 & more	0	0	
Total	77	100.0	

Results from the questionnaire

TABLE 4: MEDIA EDUCATORS' AND MEDIA PRACTITIONERS' VIEWS ON THE ADEQUACY OF JOURNALISM EDUCATION

Media Job/Role	Are your journalists well-trained for today's media challenges?		Total
	Yes	No	
Media Educator	28	21	49
Media Practitioner	30	47	77
Total	58	68	126

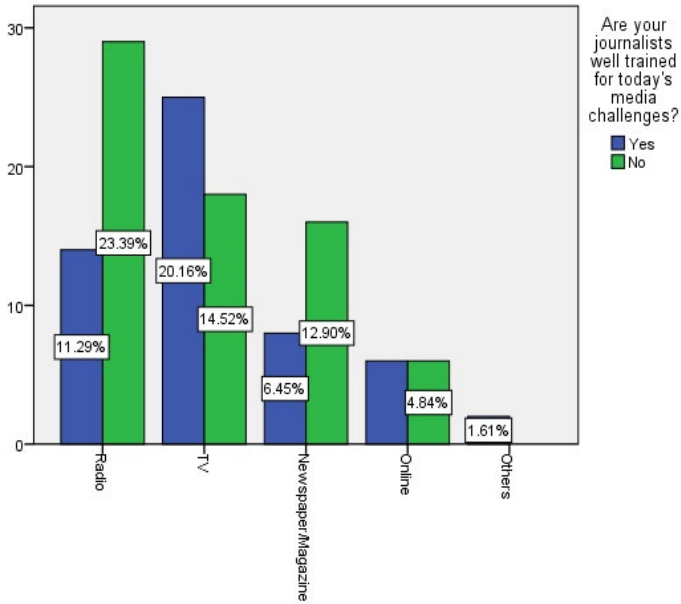


FIGURE 1: MEDIA PRACTITIONERS' VIEWS ON THE ADEQUACY OF JOURNALISM EDUCATION PER MEDIA TYPE

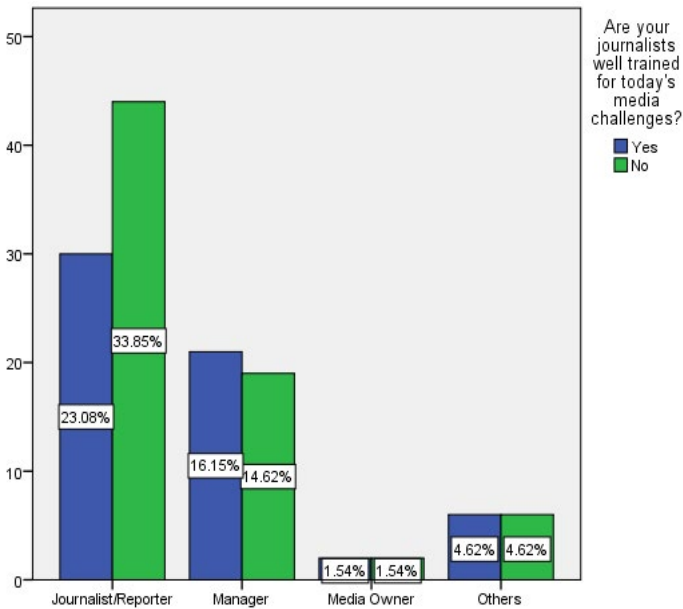


FIGURE 2: MEDIA PRACTITIONERS' VIEW ON THE ADEQUACY OF JOURNALISM EDUCATION PER POSITION

Table 4 illustrates the views of media practitioners and media educators on the adequacy of journalism education. More media educators view journalism education as adequate (57%) compared to media practitioners (39%). In other words, 61% (n=47) of media practitioners (n=77) consider journalism education from Nigerian higher education institutions as inadequate preparation for the industry. Figure 1 illustrates the differences in opinion between media types in terms of how adequate journalism education is. Figure 2 presents the results of media practitioners' view on the adequacy of journalism education per position. Of the 77 media practitioners, 56.93% indicated their role as that of journalist/reporter (n=43). Of these 43 journalists, 26 (60%) indicated that journalists are not well-trained for today's media challenges. Of the 77 media practitioners, 30.77% indicated their role as that of media manager. Of these 23 media managers, 12 (52%) indicated that media managers are well-trained for today's media challenges, with 11 (48%) of the opinion that media managers are not well-trained.

TABLE 5: MEDIA PRACTITIONERS' VIEWS ON GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN THE MEDIA INDUSTRY

	Is there male/female inequality?				Total
	Very much	Much	I don't know	Not much	
Male	29	11	2	3	45
Female	21	11	0	0	32
Total	50	22	2	3	77

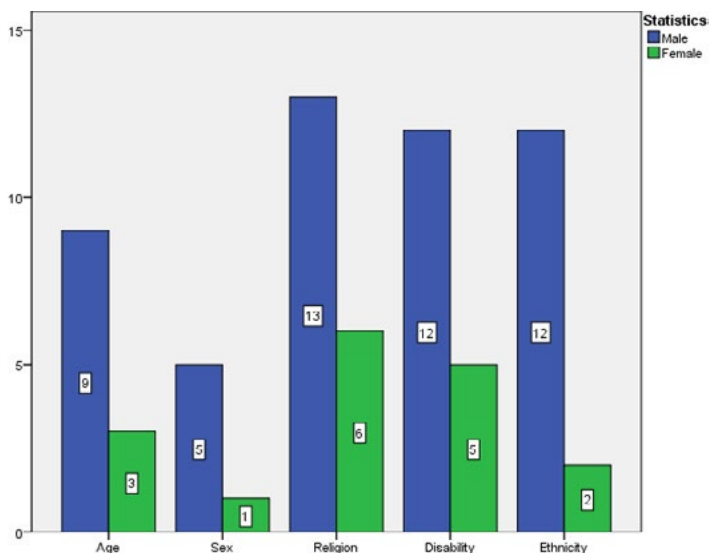


FIGURE 3: MEDIA PRACTITIONERS' VIEW ON TYPES OF DISCRIMINATION EXPERIENCED IN THE MEDIA INDUSTRY

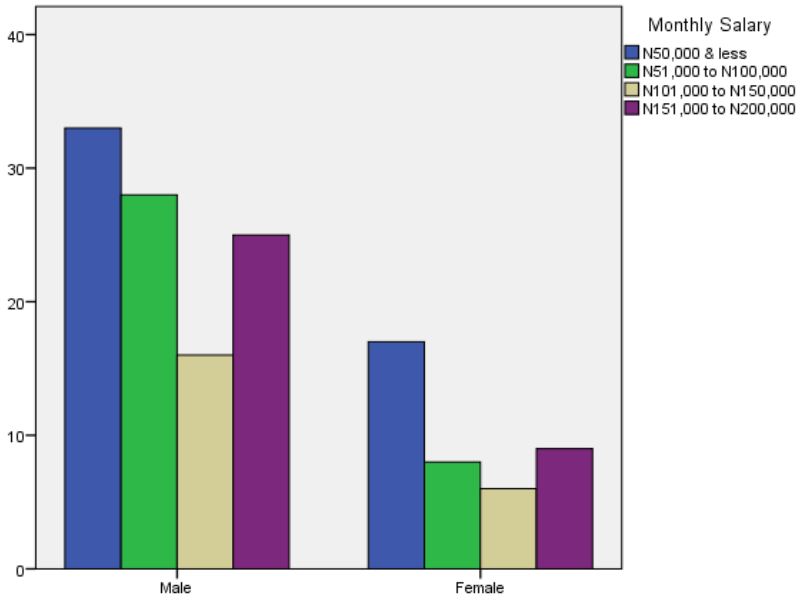


FIGURE 4: MEDIA PRACTITIONERS' AVERAGE MONTHLY SALARY BASED ON GENDER

Table 5 illustrates media practitioners' views on gender discrimination in the media industry in Nigeria. Of the total number of female media practitioners ($n=32$), 100% indicated that there is much ($n=11$) and very much ($n=21$) inequality between males and females in the Nigerian media industry. This view is shared by male media practitioners ($n=45$), with 88% indicating that there is much ($n=11$) and very much ($n=29$) inequality. Figure 3 shows the types of discrimination as indicated by media practitioners ($n=77$). The questionnaire presented five types of discrimination (age, gender, religion, disability, ethnicity) and respondents were asked to indicate all the types that they have experienced or are aware of in the media industry. Discrimination based on religion (24.7%), disability (22.1%), and ethnicity (18.18%) were indicated as most prevalent. In terms of financial disparity, Figure 5 indicates that the female media practitioners receive a lower monthly salary compared to their male counterparts. On average, a male media practitioner earns N116,000 per month compared to a female media practitioner, who earns N108,000.

TABLE 6: MEDIA PRACTITIONERS' VIEW ON THEIR MEDIA ORGANISATION'S COVERAGE OF MARGINALISED VOICES

	Does your media organisation report on marginalised voices?		Total
	Yes	No	
Radio journalists	19	6	25
TV journalists	12	14	26
Newspaper/Magazine	7	8	15
Online journalists	6	2	8
Others	2	1	3
Total	46	31	77

As indicated in Table 6, 59.8% (n=47) of the media practitioners indicated that their media organisations covered marginalised groups. Of the 25 media practitioners who work in radio, 19 (76%) indicated that their organisation covered marginalised groups. However, the split was more equal, and slightly less positive, in terms of responses from media practitioners who work in television and print media, with 12 positive responses (46%) and 14 negative responses (54%) from media practitioners in the field of television, and 7 positive responses (47%) and 8 negative responses (53%) from media practitioners in print media.

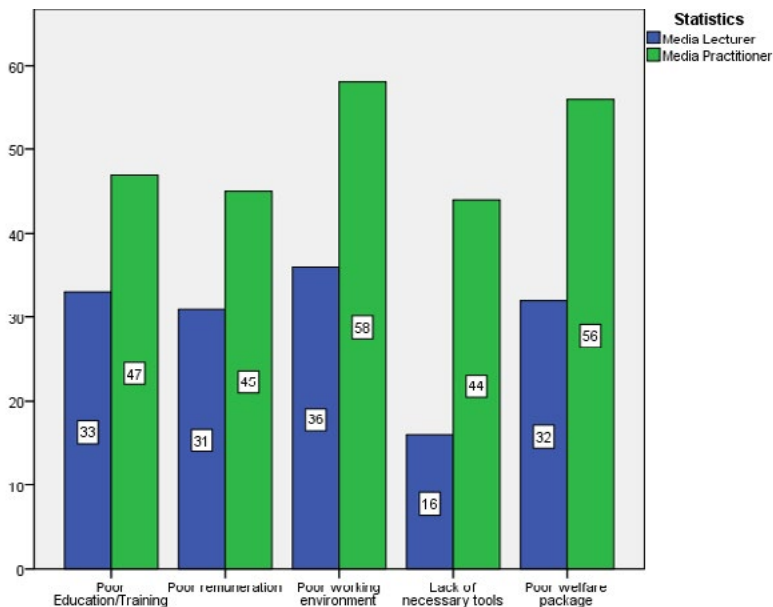


FIGURE 5: MEDIA PRACTITIONERS' VIEW OF CHALLENGES FACED IN EXECUTING THEIR TASKS

The questionnaire included five challenges faced by media practitioners and media educators in executing their tasks. Respondents were asked to indicate all the challenges that influence the execution of their tasks. A poor working environment was the biggest challenge. For media educators (n=49), 36 respondents (73.5%) indicated a poor working environment as a challenge, with 58 (75%) of media practitioners (n=77) sharing this view. For media educators (n=49), poor education/training was the second biggest challenge (n=33, 67.4%). For media practitioners (n=77), the second biggest challenge is poor welfare packages (n=56, 72%). Only 16 (33%) out of 49 media educators indicated lack of necessary tools as a challenge. While lack of necessary tools was also the challenge selected least by media practitioners, it remains a bigger challenge (57%) compared to educators (33%).

Results from the focus group

The results pertaining to the focus group conducted with 21 final-year undergraduate students are presented in clusters.

Adequacy of skills acquired

A total of 90.5% of the respondents (n=19) said that their journalism education does not meet the expectations they had at the start of their education:

I had expected to meet more practicals but am seeing more of theory. (Respondent 1)

There are some skills I was thinking of acquiring upon admission, but they are missing from the study. (Respondent 10)

Challenges experienced in the media industry

A total of 86% of the respondents (n=18) indicated that they perceive the challenges facing the media industry, as experienced during their internship phase, as overwhelming:

I experienced sexual harassment while I did an internship in a media organisation, and for me, it's a turn-off. (Respondent 2)

There is a sense of "you are not welcome here"; nobody wants to tell you anything, nobody wants to teach you anything, simply put, there is no mentorship programme in place for new entrants. I experienced that in my last place of internship. (Respondent 7)

Future job perspectives

A total of 76% of the respondents (n=16) indicated that they had low expectations for future employment:

I do not see any future after graduation because older graduates are not finding jobs. (Respondent 16)

Rather than wait for a media job forever, I will go and do something else, like acquire other skills such as hairdressing, tailoring, etc. (Respondent 19)

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study indicate that both media practitioners and media educators view current journalism education as inadequate for the challenges of the Nigerian media industry. It is interesting to note that 43% (n=21) of the media educators (n=49) who participated in the study, and who are responsible for training journalists, agree that the training does not adequately prepare students for the industry, a view espoused by Emmanuel (2021) that Nigerian journalists' education is inadequate and does not provide students with the tools and skills necessary to perform well in 21st century journalism. In addition, 61% (n=47) of media practitioners who participated in the study indicated that they did not receive adequate training, despite 40.8% of the total number of media practitioners (n=77) holding a Bachelor's degree.

The female media practitioners indicated that they experience more discrimination than their male counterparts, especially based on religion, disability, and ethnicity. The average salary of a Nigerian media practitioner is N110,000 (\$157), with the female media practitioners receiving an average monthly salary of N108,000 (\$154) and the male media practitioners N116,000 (\$166).

In addition, the study indicated that more media practitioners experience challenges in the media industry than media educators. This is to be expected, given their first-hand experience. The media practitioners were particularly concerned with poor working environments and poor welfare packages, while the media educators were also concerned with poor working environments. They also indicated concerns about the education/training of their students, pointing to the fact that their students' training might not meet the industry's demands. This might be due to what Odozi (2014) referred to as a journalism curriculum skewed towards Western practices, with little bearing on the context of Nigerian society. This opinion was also supported by Aikulola (2023).

The majority of the journalism students who participated in the study indicated that the curriculum did not meet their expectations, similar to the findings of Emmanuel *et al.* (2021). Many of the students indicated that they looked forward to acquiring skills such as those listed by Wenger and Owens (2013), including writing skills, news judgement, nonlinear editing skills, and the ability to be a team player. Yet they indicated that these were missing from the curriculum. The findings of this study fit within the space of interactions theory, in which human development influences human behaviour. In this study, the advancement of human society, as well as the speed of such inventions as the internet, makes the skills required by future journalists more difficult to achieve.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that both media practitioners and media lecturers find the present education and training of future journalists inadequate. Based on the findings, this study recommends that the journalism studies curriculum at Nigerian higher institutions should be reviewed and overhauled to reflect the current reality and demands of the industry and to serve society's needs. The reality of the workplace in the media industry includes discrimination, including

remuneration disparity based on gender, which students found overwhelming during their internships. It is further recommended that students, as future media practitioners/journalists, should be consulted to determine their expectations and that these findings should be integrated into their training/education.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest in the study and its findings and declares that the study was research conducted independently by the researcher.

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