

Adaptation to a New Course of Study: A Survey of Pioneer Students of Information and Media Studies, Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria

ALIYU, Ruqayyah Yusuf
Department of Information and Media Studies
Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria

Abstract

The rapid advancement of technology has revolutionised communication and its processes resulting in the review of the existing mass communication curriculum to address the new media/new technological demands in communication pedagogy. This has led Bayero University, Kano to take the bold step in creating a Department dealing in new media called Information and Media Studies. Being a new course of study, pioneer students of the department had different feelings and impressions of the course when they were offered admission to study it. This study therefore attempts to look at the students' perception of the course, how they have been adapting as well as their understanding of its philosophy and career opportunities upon graduation. Theory of Cognitive Adaptation to Threat was adopted as the theoretical framework for the study. The entire pioneer students of the Department were surveyed to ascertain their perception and attitude towards the course. Findings indicate that even though a good number of the students were disappointed when they were offered admission to study Information and Media Studies; most of them are now appreciative of the course, understand its philosophy and see various career opportunities post graduation.

Keywords: Adaptation, New Media, Media Studies, Communication, Pedagogy, Technology.

Introduction

Advancement in technology has imposed challenges to many fields of study, particularly, communication related courses. Communication became one of the most important keywords in the study supported by information technology and transformation of the media will inevitably affect the education, especially the efficiency of teaching strategies according to He and He (2015). Technological advancement has revolutionised media in terms of the forms, contents and reception. This development has forced stakeholders in communication education to define a new pedagogy to fill the gap created by this development. In the words of Emma-

Okoroafor (2016, p.19), “the web and its related technologies have significantly influenced not only the ways in which news is consumed, but also how journalism education and the ongoing training of news professionals are undertaken”. Odunlami (2014, p.45) also writes that,

The intervention of technology in media operations has altered, albeit in a positive way, the ecology of mass communication across the globe. However, the speed of the adoption and diffusion of innovations in the contemporary media industry is posing a great challenge to media educators, as the newsroom appears to be constantly ahead of the classroom, especially in the developing world. In Nigeria, like other developing nations, Journalism/Mass Communication educators grapple with the challenge of ever-increasing innovations and try to incorporate such realities in the curriculum.

Emphasising the need for journalism education to meet up the challenges posed by advancement in technology, Jun (2014) states that the advancement in technology means advances in all forms of communication, which automatically translates to changes in journalism, resulting from the plethora of gadgets and high-end technology hitting the market so rapidly. She adds that it is more important than ever for journalism curricula in higher education to evolve with the times. There is no doubt that the revolution in communication process automatically calls for a continuous review of the curriculum and even introduction of new courses as Knight (2012, p. 62) observed that journalism education “is a reflexive process, and one that has a close relationship with the industry and society that the products work in. This relationship demands a constant interaction between media institutions and the industry to fashion out the nature of acceptable exchanges both in terms of output (personnel) and the effect of this on media content”.

Considering the challenging needs for an academic platform to train and equip professionals in Information and Media Studies with a view of meeting the challenges posed by the rapid growth and advancement in technology, Bayero University, Kano (BUK) deemed it necessary to establish the Department of Information and Media Studies. The Department was created during the 2015/2016 academic session. It is one of the three departments that form the newly established Faculty of Communication in the University.

As contained in the Course Description, the B.Sc. programme is structured to provide a synergy between the study of information as a science and mediated communication as a practice. It emphasises new media, which it defined as products and services that provide information or entertainment by looking at how computers in multimedia has opened a wide range of possibilities by combining different types of digital media such as text, graphics, audio, and video. This is in recognition that New Media play an increasingly important role in the global economy, politics and therefore attaining qualifications in this area offer opportunities to become part of this

exciting and growing field of engagement, especially in Nigeria. The programme thus focuses more towards multimedia platforms, rather than information and news dissemination. The intention is to help prepare students to pursue career in the new media, which offers a fascinating combination of creativity and business strategies and at the same time combining research, planning and management skills with imagination and innovation.

It is based on the above that this study attempts to find out how the pioneer students of the Department are adapting to the new course and assess their perception and understanding of what benefits and career opportunities the course offers them.

Statement of the Problem

The Department of Mass Communication, Bayero University, Kano has grown into a faculty with Mass Communication, Theatre Arts and a newly introduced course of study, Information and Media Studies as Departments in the faculty. Being an entirely new course and unknown, no candidate applied for the course. Students were drawn from the list of applicants for Mass Communication and other courses.

Taking into cognizance that the pioneer students of the department did not apply for the course but were offered admission, there seemed to be mixed feelings about the course. Sixty-five out of the 67 admitted candidates turned up, registered and commenced lectures as the pioneer set of the Department. Although it is not uncommon for universities to admit students to study a course against their choice, the peculiarity here is Information and Media Studies is “an unknown course” which the students did not know about (being entirely a new one). They have never heard of it, hardly could they find anyone around to tell them about it, yet were offered admission to study it. The justification for this study is therefore to find out how the students perceive the course and also find out if they derive any fulfilment studying it or otherwise. As Ion (2012, p.718) argues, “attending university is supposed to be a very challenging experience which could change life-course for students, providing real satisfaction”.

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out the perception of the students on Information and Media Studies as a course of study at Bayero University
2. To find out the understanding of the students about the philosophy of the course
3. To find out to what extent the students understand the career opportunities that abound to them as graduates of Information and Media Studies.

Research Questions

1. How do the students perceive Information and Media Studies as a course of study?

2. Do the students understand the philosophy of the course?
3. To what extent do the students understand the career opportunities available to them for studying Information and Media Studies?

Literature Review

The term adjustment is often used as a synonym for accommodation and adaptation (Monroe, 2007). It is used to emphasise individual's struggle to survive in social and physical environment (Julia and Veni, 2012). Robinson (2009) explains that the adjustment process is a way in which the individual attempts to deal with stress, tensions, conflict and meet the needs. In this process, the individual also makes efforts to maintain harmonious relationships with the environment. In adjustment, the two crucial factors are the individual and the environment.

University life generally presents to new students challenges in terms of adaptation to the system. First year students face several social problems at the university. The problems emanated from culture, separation from family, disengaging high school friends, finance, dress and food were the main themes that emerged from the study (Mudhovozi, 2012).

Mudhovozi (2012) discussed the two major dimensions of adjustment which are social and academic. *Social Adjustment* in a university according to Mudhovozi (2012) involves the complementary processes of desocialisation and socialisation. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) explain that desocialisation entails the changing or discarding of selected values, beliefs and traits one brings to university in response to the university experience while socialization is the process of being exposed to and taking on some of the new values, attitudes beliefs and perspectives to which one is exposed to in the university. *Academic Adjustment on the other hand entails the transition to university classroom, an adjustment of academic habits and expectations.*

Adjustment in the first year of study at university level has increasingly become recognised as vital to the overall success of students (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak and Cribbie, 2007). First year students, therefore, require adaptive behaviours in areas such as time management, effective study skills, the capacity to complete courses and the ability to see transition as a normative shift and not a crisis (Birnie-Lefcovitch, 2000). Therefore, for a new university student to adapt to the system, he goes through stages of adaptation which involves acculturation, enculturation, cultural shock (cognitive dissonance) and then adaptation. McDaniel, Samovar and Porter (2006) in Jibrilu (2013) write that culture is learned, transmitted, symbolic, dynamic, integrative, adaptive and ethnocentric.

Chong, Elias, Uli and Mahyuddin (2010) studied relationship between coping and university adjustment and academic achievement amongst first year undergraduates in a Malaysian Public University and reported that:

Study has provided evidence that students' efforts and choice of coping has an important impact on their adjustment and

academic achievement in university. Hence, it is important to help students especially first year undergraduates to identify various coping strategies to overcome stressful encounters during the transition period to higher institutions. It would be beneficial for students if relevant authorities and personnel in institutions of higher learning such as policy makers, university administrators, lecturers, counsellors, academic advisors are aware of the importance of coping skills to be acquired by students upon entrance to the university, thus, providing the knowledge of coping to these students before they proceed with their studies.

Dressler, in Smith and Renk (2007) argues that coping can be defined as cognitive and behavioural attempts or effort used to alter events or circumstances that are threatening. Thus, the adaptive ability among new undergraduates depends a lot on their coping effort as well as the coping strategies used to deal with the challenges and demands faced on campus according to Chong *et al* (2010).

Akkoyunlu and Soylu (2008) studied the perception of students in a blended learning environment based on different learning styles. They discovered that, it appears students' in the study group fell into the groups of either divergers or assimilators based on Kolb's categories of academic disciplines. Divergers migrate toward service-type careers, the arts, social sciences, or the humanities and teachers whereas scientists, engineers, technicians and academics are examples of assimilators. Results showed that significant differences in diverger students' views on blended learning were noticed regarding their learning styles when compared the means of those students classified as assimilators. Writing on learning styles, Shell (1991) writes, "today, instructors and researchers have realised the importance of learning styles. Educators have, for many years, noticed that some students prefer certain methods of learning more than others.

Based on the literature reviewed, the study considered the Theory of Cognitive Adaptation to Threat as its theoretical framework. The theory of Cognitive Adaptation was propounded by Taylor in 1983. It proposed a model that presents human beings as adaptable, self protective, and functional in the face of setbacks. The theory is based on three concepts; search for meaning in the experience, gaining mastery or control over events and one's own life and restoration of self esteem through self enhancement evaluation. According to this theory, meaning is an effort directed to understanding events, that is, why it happened (i.e., causal attributions) and what impact it has on one's life (i.e., gains and benefits found in the experience). Taylor suggested that understanding the cause of an event may help understand the significance of the event and what it symbolises about one's life, and one's attitudes, priorities, and changes that are prompted by the negative event.

Method of Study

This study is quantitative and adopts survey as the method for data collection. Quantitative research is composed of two distinct yet methodologically interconnected research approaches; experimental and survey research (Davis, 2007). Survey is a non-experimental research approach used to gather information about the incidence and distribution of, and the relationship that exist between, variables in a pre-determined population. This is the major reason it is considered the most appropriate method for such related instances.

The population of the study consists of the pioneer students of the Department of Information and Media Studies, Bayero University, Kano. The students are 65 in number and data were collected using a questionnaire administered to all of them. A population survey was considered most appropriate for this research because the population of the study is manageable and data relate to an uncomplicated phenomenon. According to McKenna, Hasson, and Keeney (2006), descriptive survey research is the simplest form of survey. Its uses include gathering data related to attitudes, behaviours and the incidence of events. This type of survey offers a snapshot of the phenomenon being studied and is uncomplicated as it usually only involves single contact with the sample being studied.

Findings

A total of 65 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the study population and

Table 1: Courses Applied for by the Respondents

S/N	RESPONSES	F	%
1	Mass Communication	59	93.6
2	Theatre and Performing Arts	2	3.2
3	Other(s)	2	3.2
4	Total	63	100

Table 1 above indicates that 93.5% of the respondents originally applied for Mass Communication while 2 (3.2%) applied for Theatre and Performing Arts and two (3.2%) applied for Business Administration and Management.

Table 2: Feelings of the Students when Offered Admission to Study IMS

S/N	RESPONSES	F	%
1	Excited/ Happy	30	47.6
2	Disappointed	29	46
3	Indifferent	4	6.35
4	Total	63	100

As seen from Table 2 above, there was mixed feelings when the students learnt they were offered admission to study Information and Media Studies (IMS).

Table 3: The Students' Knowledge of the IMS as a Course of Study before being admitted

S/N	RESPONSES	F	%
1	Prior Knowledge of the Course	60	95.2
2	No Knowledge of the Course	3	4.8
3	Total	63	100

The data as presented on Table 3 above show that 95 percent of the students had no prior knowledge of the new Department before they were admitted into the programme.

Responses of the students on their initial perception of Information and Media Studies as a course of study show that 74.6% of them initially perceived the course to be closely related to Mass Communication but with emphasis on new media and online journalism. Thirty of the respondents (20.6%) reported to have perceived the course as merely a good one while 4.8% of the respondents had no idea of what the course could offer at the initial stage.

Table 4: The Students' Expectations of the Course when Admitted

S/N	RESPONSES	F	%
1	Social Networking and Online Journalism	32	50.8
2	Not Sure of What to Expect	19	30.2
3	Others	12	19
4	Total	63	100

Thirty-Two of the respondents (50.8%) had expected to be taught courses relating to social networking and online journalism while 30.2% were not sure of what to expect when admitted to study it and 19% reported having exceptions ranging from graduating successfully, optimistic that it will be popular in few years to come and even not sure of what to expect initially.

Table 5: Responses on if the Students' Expectations of the Course are Being Met

S/N	RESPONSES	F	%
1	Expectations being met	45	71.4
2	Expectations not met	17	27
3	No Response	1	1.6
4	Total	63	100

On whether the students' expectations are being met, 71.4% reported having their expectations of the course being met while 27% reported negative.

Table 6: Responses on Willingness of Students' to Change their Course of Study

S/N	Responses	F	%
1	Yes	6	9.5
2	No	55	87.3
3	Indifferent	2	3.2
4	Total	63	100

Table 6 above shows that majority of the students (87%) are unwilling to change their course before graduation.

Table 7: Department of Choice in case of Transfer to other Departments

S/N	Responses	F	%
1	Mass Comm.	4	66.7
2	Theatre and Performing Arts	0	0
3	Others	2	33.3
4	Total	6	100

Table 7 shows that about 67 percent of the students still think Mass Communication is their preferred course of study, thus, supporting the earlier position of having applied for the course before admission.

Table 7: Relationship between IMS and Mass Communication

S/N	RESPONSES	F	%
1	Yes	57	90.5
2	No	4	6.3
3	Indifferent	2	3.2
4	Total	63	100

Table 7 shows that 90.5% of the students perceive a relationship exists between Mass Communication and IMS while 6.3% do not see any relationship between the two courses.

Table 8: The Students' Understanding of the Advantages of IMS over Related Courses

S/N	RESPONSES	F	%
1	Yes	53	84.1
2	No	3	4.8
3	Not Sure	7	11.1
4	Total	63	100

Table 8 above shows that 84.1% of the respondents said they understand they have advantage over people studying related courses like Mass Communication while three said they do not perceive having any advantage over other students studying related courses.

Table 9: Responses on whether the students will recommend the course for other people

S/N	RESPONSES	F	%
1	Yes	60	95.2
2	No	1	1.6
3	Indifferent	2	3.2
4	Total	63	100

Majority of the students (95%) are positive that they will recommend others to read IMS as a course in the University. See table 9 above for further details.

Table 10: Knowledge of Job Opportunities in the Labour Market among the Students

S/N	RESPONSES	F	%
1	Yes	49	77.8
2	No	10	15.9
3	Indifferent	4	6.3
4	Total	63	100

Majority of the students (77.8%), as presented on Table 10 above, have a positive outlook about employment opportunities after graduation.

Table 11: Knowledge of Career Opportunities after Graduation

S/N	RESPONSES	F	%
1	Aware	51	81
2	Not Aware	12	19
3	Total	63	100

Responding to a question on whether they are aware of specific career opportunities, 81% of the respondents reported being aware of various career opportunities they could venture into after graduation. They listed a number of career opportunities to include, graphic designing, online journalism, Computer programming, creative writing, conventional reporting, entrepreneur journalism, multimedia journalism, blogging, computer aided designing, and online advertising among others.

Discussion of Findings

Findings of the study are hereby discussed using the research questions as guide.

Research Question 1: How do the students perceive Information and Media Studies as a course of study?

Findings indicate that the pioneer students of the Department of Information Studies, Bayero University, Kano perceive their course of study as an advancement of conventional Mass Communication. They understand that it was created to cater for the needs to train online journalists to fill the gap created by the rapid advancement in technology which has changed the way media content is packaged and received. This indicates that the students have an understanding of the philosophy of the course. Even though only 30 of them felt happy and excited when admitted to study the course, majority (55 or 87.3%) of the respondents indicated interest in retaining their course to graduation while only 6 (9.5%) want a change of course while two of the respondents were indifferent about remaining in Information and Media Studies till graduation. Despite the disappointment of the students when admitted to study the course, they have begun to appreciate the course and hope to recommend to others.

Research Question 2: Do the students understand the philosophy of the course?

On satisfaction derived from studying the course, results indicate that even though the students didn't apply for the course, they consider themselves lucky and ahead of students of Mass Communication (the initial course of choice for many) as they see

themselves as the “modern journalists” with added advantage of ability to do the work of a conventional journalists and also as online journalists, programmers, web designers among other things. They believe the “blended” learning process they are made to go through gives them an edge over students that are not given such opportunities. In essence, the students understand the philosophy of the programme and see a lot of career opportunities post graduation.

Research Question 3: To what extent do the students understand the career opportunities available to them for studying Information and Media Studies?

Results from the question regarding career opportunities in Information and Media Studies reveal that the students have a grasp of career opportunities awaiting them upon graduation, majority responded in the affirmative, indicating that they will be absorbed by the labour market considering the advantages of studying the course. The students also perceive themselves to have potentials of entrepreneurship and an added advantage of fitting into so many other organisations apart from media organisations.

Integrating findings of this study within the theoretical framework which is the theory of Cognitive Adaptation to Threat, it suggests that the theory rightly explains the findings of the study. The theory proposes a model that presents human beings as adaptable, self protective, and functional in the face of setbacks and it is based on three concepts; search for meaning in the experience, gaining mastery or control over events and one's own life and restoration of self esteem through self enhancement evaluation. Findings of the study indicate that the students are adaptive as they tried to understand the new course they found themselves studying; they are gradually gaining mastery of it as they affirm their readiness to encourage others to apply for the course when seeking admission into the university. It also indicates that they have gained back their self esteem compared to the initial stage when they found themselves with admission letters of a new programme different from the popular Mass Communication most of them applied.

Conclusion

This study concludes that majority of the pioneer students of the Department of Information and Media Studies, Bayero University, Kano have an understanding of the philosophy of the course. Results indicate that the students are excited offering the course as they see themselves as “the future of communication”. Considering the ages of the respondents, it correlates with Coomes and DeBard's (2004) assertion that, today's incoming students and entry level professionals are from the generation known as “Millennial”, born between 1982 and 2002. Findings also indicate an appreciable level of understanding of the course philosophy as well as career opportunities in Information and Media Studies. On the whole, it indicates that the students are adaptive to the course as they progress.

These positives could be exploited by other universities wishing to expand the

scope of communication education in Nigeria to begin to address the continuous sophistication and application of new media technologies in the communication process. Truth that mass communication narrows what happens in the communication scene today, necessitating the calls for curricula reviews which are ongoing. Bayero University should therefore be commended for taking the giant step and pioneering efforts to address this concern. It is now hoped the National Universities Commission (NUC) will become proactive in moving forward and sanctioning a new curricula for communication education in Nigeria.

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