

Gender, Sexuality and Journalism Education: Expanding the Horizon of Media Educators and Trainees

OKUGO, C. Uzoma, *Ph.D.*

Department of Mass Communication
University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

&

ONWUKWE, D. Chima, *Ph.D.*

Department of Linguistics & Communication Studies
Abia State University, Uturu, Nigeria

&

NWEKE, Joan Chidinma

Department of Mass Communication
University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper examines gender and sexuality in journalism education in Nigeria using Nigeria's National Universities Commission Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (NUC BMAS) on gender and sexuality in its undergraduate Mass Communication programme as a case in point. The study analysed the curricula of four purposively selected universities offering Mass Communication in South-East Nigeria to determine the mainstreaming of gender and sexuality studies in the Nigerian media training context. The paper also reviews the views of media educators and trainees on possible curricula reviews to integrate gender and sexuality studies. The methodology and instrumentation involved a combination of survey and documentary analyses and interviews via cell phone, SMS and WhatsApp chat. Key findings indicate that NUC BMAS did not integrate gender and sexuality/diversity in the curricula of the sampled universities. Gender and sexuality were glaringly missing in the course offerings and course descriptions/details. Based on the above, the research participants recommended the redesigning of the Mass Communication in Nigeria to include gender and sexuality/diversity studies in line with UNESCO 2013 revised curricula on journalism education.

Keywords: Gender, Sexuality, Diversity, Journalism Educators, Media Trainees, Curriculum, Mass Communication.

Introduction/Conceptual Framework

Gender and sexuality studies have come to the global front burner that UNESCO reviewed its 2007 curricula for journalism education and included gender and journalism in 2013 revised edition. This has drawn the attention of many societies and their media on the issue of gender and sexuality. In Nigeria for instance, the culture of patriarchy has made it a gendered society. This is despite what Section 16 2D of the Nigerian Constitution directs as a state policy to provide shelter, food, jobs, minimum wage, equal work and equal pay irrespective of gender.

Instanced here on gendered nature of Nigeria society is the classic response of President Muhammadu Buhari to his wife's comment that she may not support him if he runs for election come 2019. "I don't know which party my wife belongs to, but she belongs to my kitchen and my living room and the other room". This comment to reporters in Germany on October 14, 2016 drew a short glare and laughter from the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel ("I don't know", 2016).

The imagined damaging role gender played in Hilary Clinton's bid to shatter the glass ceiling during the 2016 US presidential election is recalled in the words of Alter (2016) thus:

It turns out the glass ceiling is reinforced with steel beams.... It is impossible to know how much Clinton's gender contributed to her loss.... Yet the stench of sexism engulfed Clinton's quixotic bid for the Presidency, magnifying her flaws and minimizing her considerable strength. It is possible that a male candidate with Clinton's political baggage would have been able to transcend his mistakes. It's possible that a male candidate would not have the same scrutiny and suspicion, or have been held to the same impossible standard.... We don't know how Clinton's gender affected her campaign, but we do know how Trump's affected his (Paras. 3-4).

The observation above represents another classic example of gendered response by advanced democracy.

On the other hand, sexuality captures sex orientation of an individual such as homosexuality, heterosexuality, etc. This, no doubt is one of the issues in the media and public front burner. Issues regarding sexuality have assumed a central position in global discourse in all spheres including journalism education. Journalism education is therefore vital in the drive to report issues of gender and sexuality from an informed perspective. This is essentially so because the mass media are generally seen as purveyors of culture. Sexuality and its perceptions have cultural inclinations (Sexuality Resource Centre for Parents, SRCP 2017).

The area of journalism education which the issue of gender and sexuality touches is in the curricula of the journalism training institutions and position of ancillary agencies such as National Universities Commission (NUC). This is apt and will expand the horizon of media educators and trainees on the subject of gender and

sexuality. Hence an analysis of the Nigeria's National Universities Commission Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (NUC BMAS) and the curricula of some journalism training institutions like universities in Nigeria in order to find out whether gender and sexuality issues are captured or reflected.

What is Gender and Sexuality?

Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (1999); CIRDDOC (as cited in Okunna 2002); WHO (2017); and Sport and dev.org (2017) believe that:

Sex depicts male and female, and gender depicts masculine and feminine. In essence, sex refers to the biological differences, chromosomes, hormonal profiles, internal and external sex organs. Gender describes the characteristics that a society or culture delineates as masculine or feminine. So while your sex as male or female is a biological fact that is the same in any culture, what that sex in terms of your gender role as a 'man' or a 'woman' in society can be quite different cross culturally.... In sociological terms 'gender role' refers to the characteristics and behaviours that different cultures attribute to the sexes (p.34)

By the same token, sexuality is viewed by Options for Sexual Health (2016); Sexuality Resource Centre for Parents, SRCP (2017); Terrence Higgins Trust (2017); LGBT Foundation (2017), as including sexual orientation (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, etc.). Also, sexuality is seen by these authors as a conscious behaviour. For example a person may express his/her feelings or emotions through hetero sex, homo sex, bi sex, lithe sex, pan sex, auto sex, demisex, skolik sex or asexual.

Why Gender/Sexuality Studies?

Gender and Sexuality are centrally important forces that shape every aspect of our lives in some ways worth mentioning. First, we know our bodies, minds and life through our sex. Secondly, as a society, legal definitions and social expectations about women and men, sex and reproduction organise our medical, legal, educational and political systems. Thirdly, in the creative arts and culture, artists and writers move us through powerful images of masculinity, femininity, sex & desire. Therefore, it becomes imperative to ask questions about gender and sexuality in Nigeria (transnational) and make attempts at answers using research tools from humanities and social sciences as well as feminist, masculinity, LGBT and queer studies (www.gendersexuality.northwestern.edu).

Statement of the Problem

Globalisation is a highly influential force that is not only increasing the interrelatedness between nation states, but also redefining organisations, institutions and individuals' everyday lives. In addition, societies are changing as they find

themselves increasingly characterised by their levels of diversity and heterogeneous ways of living. This raises the question for social, political, economic and educational actors of how they can best deal with growing change in societal attitudes in areas of gender and sexuality and the challenges they bring.

While it is seen that some western societies have reflected gender and sexuality issues in their journalism education as evidenced in the introduction of gender and journalism in the revised UNESCO curricula for journalism education of 2013, it leaves to be seen the extent sexuality and gender issues are represented in the curricula of the journalism education as well as the position of regulatory bodies like the National Universities Commission through the National Universities Commission Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (NUC BMAS) in developing and culturally conservative societies such as Nigeria. With these in mind, what did NUC BMAS for the undergraduate programme in mass communication decide on gender and sexuality? What did curricula of universities offering mass communication programme decide on gender and sexuality? What are the views of media educators/trainees on expansion of the curricula to address such emerging realities?

Objectives of the Study

1. To determine what NUC BMAS undergraduate programme for mass communication decided on gender and sexuality studies.
2. To ascertain if the curricula of the universities offering mass communication mainstreamed sexuality and gender studies.
3. To determine the views of media educators and trainees on the possible review of the Mass Communication curricula to integrate gender and sexuality studies.

Research Questions

1. What is the decision of NUC BMAS for undergraduate programme in mass communication on gender and sexuality studies?
2. What did the curricula of universities offering mass communication decide on gender and sexuality?
3. What are the views of media educators and trainees on the possible review of the Mass Communication curricula to integrate gender and sexuality studies?

Literature Review

Writing on gender and sexuality, Made (2009) reports that gender issues have been recognised world over as an indispensable part of journalism education in view of the global recurrent issues involving gender. More recently, as observed by Made (2009),

training and development programmes to build the media's capacity to mainstream gender into workplace policies and editorial content has emerged as a key recommendation in both the 2003 Women and Men Make the News, Southern Africa Gender and Media Baseline Study (GMBS), the most comprehensive study on gender in editorial content in the Southern Africa media and in the 2008 study, Glass Ceilings, Women and Men in Southern Africa Media, which has gathered the most extensive baseline data on the institutional make up and practices of the media from a gender perspective.

In terms of empirical studies, in their 2001 assessment of training needs in Southern Africa, Morna and Khan (2001) as cited in Made (2009), documented the media's increasing awareness of the need to incorporate gender into training. Editors interviewed recognised the gender biases in reporting and editing, and that the media needed training on gender issues in order to cover the changes in society. And while the study found that some regional training institutions such as the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ) in South Africa and the former Nordic-SADC Journalism (NSJ) in Mozambique, did offer courses on covering gender issues, most journalism and media training approaches to integrating gender into training were ad-hoc and attracted more women journalists than men.

In her own study, Made (2009) submits that “By incorporating gender in media education and journalism training, new journalists and journalists already in the profession who are studying become gender aware and began to see the gender disparities in the newsroom and the gender stereotypes in editorial content and advertising copy for themselves,” said Emily Brown, a lecturer and HOD of Media Technology at PON.

In a study conducted by the North West University in 2013, (in www.gendersexuality.northwestern.edu), it is noted that our female or male sex, our feminine or masculine gender, our straight or gay desires to some extent are regulated by culture. Again, it is held that these can be found in the clothing we wear, the popular culture we create or consume, the family structure we inhabit, the laws and public policies we obey or defy and even the words we use. The questions posed from the study were: what are the navigational tools that can be used to unravel the paradox whereby gender and sexuality are natural but also profoundly cultural? Is there a possibility of identifying or altering the social inequalities built into these ways of thinking and being? In other words, is there a possibility to understand gender, sexuality and the complex relations between them as malleable products of culture changing tremendously overtime and across different societies? The study recommends that gender and sexuality studies should try to answer these questions from the standpoint of humanities and social sciences. It further holds that courses should emphasise sexuality (diversities) and gender as applied through fields like Sociology, Anthropology and Media Studies.

Geertsema-Sligh (2014, p.1) reports thus: “In a time of swift technological

changes in the news media, much of journalism education is focused on preparing students for careers in a new media landscape instead of focusing on gender or other diversity issues". For example, Pavlik (2013, p.213) (cited in Geertsema-Sligh, 2014) argues that a curriculum that 'emphasised innovation and digital media entrepreneurship is one of the keys to a robust professional future for the field and students seeking a media career'. Even so, Pavlik (2013, p.217) recognises that most programmes in media education are holding on to an outdated professional model of journalism and mass communication, which he described as 'a nostalgic journey to the past,' and 'a view aligned to the mostly white, male and gray-bearded titans of old-school media'. Pavlik (2013) states, though, that entrepreneurial journalism education, as compared to traditional journalism education, provides the opportunity for more diversity in news content".

The picture that emerges from the brief literature review is that the need for gender and sexuality studies to be included in the curricula of journalism education has been identified. However, much of this need has been seen and implemented in some climes. Other societies are still grappling with this situation. It has therefore become imperative to ascertain this situation in some developing climes like Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study hinges on the social construction model of two sociologists, Peter and Thomas (1966), tagged "Social Construction of Reality Model". The model assumes that knowledge and people's conceptions (and beliefs) of what reality is, become embedded in the institutional fabric of society. Reality is, therefore, socially constructed. The model further assumes that it is a 'social reality' that societies embody identities for various groups of individuals and these identities are framed by the thoughts, behavioural and strategies of people or 'forces' in society. These thoughts and behaviours change overtime as a result of the contestation that occurs around the identities.

The major tenet of this model which relates to this study is that it assumes that the mass media are part of the 'forces' that construct society's realities. Therefore, in relation to this study, the inclusion or non-inclusion of gender and sexuality studies in the curricula of journalism education becomes a function of the contestations of identities constructed by active and subjective participants such as the media educators and trainees as in the case of gender and sexuality.

Methodology

The methodology adopted is the combination of survey and documentary research methods. This method is justified on the premise of Baily, Payne and Payne (as cited in Ahmed, 2010, p.2) that:

Documentary research method refers to the analysis of documents that contains information about the phenomenon

we wish to study. The documentary research method is used in categorizing physical sources, most commonly written documents whether in private or public domain. This research method is just as good as and sometimes even more cost effective than the social surveys, in-depth interviews or participant observation.

Also, survey is employed because it has been found very apt in studies aimed at eliciting responses from a sample after which results are generalised (Cothari, 1992).

The study was delimited to four purposively sampled Universities selected on the basis of spread in the South east geo-political zone and for the fact that they have full mass communication departments, namely: University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka; Abia State University, Uturu; and Imo State University, Owerri. Again, NUC BMAS on undergraduate programme in mass communication formed part of the delimitation. Included in the scope was a purposive sample of 20 media educators and eight media trainees from the various universities chosen solely on the researchers' assessment of them as qualified and able to elicit relevant responses for the study.

Current undergraduate NUC BMAS and departmental hand books of the sampled institutions were analyzed totalling four in number selected purposively on the basis of reach. The synopses of the courses provided were examined to find out whether or not they reflect gender and sexuality studies. Interviews were conducted involving the 20 purposively selected Media Educators and eight trainees via cell phones, SMS and WhatsApp.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study are presented and discussed based on the research questions that guided the study. They are presented as follows:

Research Question 1: What is the decision of NUC BMAS for undergraduate programme in mass communication on gender and sexuality studies?

Documentary analyses of current NUC BMAS for undergraduate programme in mass communication indicate an absence of gender and sexuality courses. It was not mainstreamed into the Basic Minimum Academic Standards. In fact, under 2.6.3 with the heading, Learning outcomes and sub section (a) with sub-heading Regime of Subject Knowledge, the NUC BMAS speaks to the competence, skills and knowledge which qualified mass communication graduates require (literacy in gender and sexuality are not among them). Also, a documentary analysis of the synopses of the courses provided in the NUC BMAS shows that gender and sexuality is not a theme or sub-theme. Gender-sensitive reporting has so far played merely a minor role in journalism education. Unlike economic reporting or even sports, gender sensitivity is not a compulsory part of the curricula in most journalism

schools around the world. Therefore gender-biased media coverage is common even among young, up-and-coming journalists (Alhin, Prue, et al, 2012). This finding corroborates Geertsema-Sligh (2014) who identified that gender mainstreaming is not required and remains unknown in journalism education in most parts of the world. Alhin, Prue et al (2012) paint a picture that could be instructive. They observe thus:

Despite a rising number of female journalists, women continue to be neglected in the media around the world. The preference of male sources over female ones holds true for newspapers, cable television, network news and the online world. Many topics which are relevant from a female perspective are thus excluded from media coverage or do not reach the relevant target groups. Predominantly simplified stories either on sexual abuse and domestic violence or on family life and fashion shows are reported, which are far from providing a comprehensive picture of women's role in society.

They further recommend thus:

In order to reduce this gender gap, journalists need to be familiarised with gender-sensitive reporting from the outset. Training must focus more on raising awareness for gender issues as a most relevant aspect of political, socio-economic and environmental life in society. This is of particular importance for developing countries, in which women are often the driving change agents on the ground. But it also holds true for the developed world (p.1).

Research Question 2: What did the curricula of universities offering mass communication decide on gender and sexuality?

From the documentary analyses of the departmental handbooks, the curricula of the universities under sample did not integrate gender and sexuality studies. The finding is not surprising considering the misogynistic nature of the Nigerian society. Again, the findings support the study of Sarikakis (2014) in 13 African countries, 25 institutions that gender remains largely absent from the curricula. To further substantiate the findings, the synopses of the courses provided in the curricula were examined. It was discovered that gender and sexuality was not part of sub-topics and focus of the courses suggesting that the importance of such inclusion is not known by the designers of the curricula.

As observed earlier, curriculum design and re-designing is usually influenced by developments in the society. So, curriculum designers must be in tune with events, developments and issues in the society which could be tackled through their inclusion in the curriculum (Curriculum Organization of Nigeria Report, 2014). Gender issues and their integration into journalism education in developing societies, to a large extent rely on the awareness of curriculum designers in such societies (Alhin, Prue et'al, 2012).

Research Question Three: What are the views of media educators and trainees on the possible review of the Mass Communication curricula to integrate gender and sexuality studies?

Findings from the interviews conducted indicate that all the research respondents 28 (100%) were of the view that there should be a curricula upgrade in areas of gender and sexuality (diversity) studies. As S. Ogbonna stated in an SMS (September 16, 2017) that “Gender and sexuality should be contained in the academic curriculum taught in schools because of certain contentious issues within the subject matters, gender and sexuality and its legality in the Nigerian clime(sic)”. Corroborating, Onwukwe (personal communication, October 16, 2017) observed, “I understand it as diversity in gender. Why? Because, world over, developments, positive or negative, trigger curriculum review. Like in Europe now, terrorism has been included in teaching module. So the issue of gender diversity has become one of such (sic)”.

The views expressed by the media educators and trainees sampled in the study have been corroborated by some studies. For instance, in partnership with UNESCO, Gender Links (GL) hosted a syndicate session on Media Training, Journalism Education and Gender Equality in 2010. The working session explored the key findings of the Audit of Gender in Media Education (GIME) in Southern Africa conducted by GL with support from the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and UNESCO. The survey revealed significant gaps in curriculum development, institutional policies, and capacity building needs of media trainers, resource materials development, and networking (www.media-training-journalism-education-and-gender-equality.pdf).

Furthermore, a summary of some views were captured thus: “Very few institutions have adopted the gender module outlined in the UNESCO model curriculum. Participants noted that gender should actually be a pre-determinant for any school or department to be considered a UNESCO Centre of Excellence. Qualifications Authorities should also be lobbied to consider gender, as they are responsible for determining national qualifications” (p.4). Also, Wang (2014) observes that media educators in Taiwan view that enough has not been done in integrating gender issues in media education and identified mass awareness and sensitization of all stakeholders in order to achieve this integration.

Conclusion

There's a lacuna between the subject-knowledge regime of National Universities Commission Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards and emerging social realities in areas of gender, diversity and sexuality. It is further concluded that NUC, as the standard-bearer of university programmes regulation in Nigeria through accreditation exercises should give a directional antenna in terms of Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards upgrade to integrate aforementioned areas like gender and diversity studies in mass communication programmes.

Recommendations

In addition to the course “gender and journalism” recommended by the revised model curricula for journalism education in 2013 by UNESCO which can be offered at the undergraduate level as part of a related course on writing and reporting, the following courses are additionally recommended to be taught at the undergraduate levels: Introduction to sexuality (diversity) and the media, Media, sexuality (diversity) and society, and Media, gender and society. Each of these courses will introduce students to key issues and approaches to the study of gender and sexuality in the humanities and social sciences, with two credit units each.

References

- Alhin, P. et'al (2012).Gender in Journalism Education and Training. Assessed from <http://www.dw.com/en/gender-in-journalism-education-and-training/a-15785050>. 16th April, 2018.
- Ahmed, J. (2010). Research method: New dimension. *Indus Journal of Management Social Sciences* . 4(I), 1-14. Retrieved October 29, 2017, from <http://ideas.repec.org/s/iij/journal>
- Alter, C. (2016, November 9). Hilary Clinton collides again with highest glass ceiling. *Time.com*. Retrieved October 29, 2017, from Time.com/4564142/hilary-clinton-gender
- Department of Mass Communication, Abia State University, Uturu. (2015). Departmental handbook. (Brochure). Department of Mass Communication
- Department of Mass Communication, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. (2017). Departmental handbook. (Brochure). Department of Mass Communication
- Department of Mass Communication, Imo State University, Owerri. (2012). Departmental handbook. (Brochure). Department of Mass Communication
- Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. (2014). Departmental handbook. (Brochure). Department of Mass Communication
- Fackson, B. (Ed.). (2013). UNESCO series on journalism education model curricula for journalism education. Retrieved August 17, 2017, from unesdoc.org
- Geertsema-Sligh, M. (2014) Gender Mainstreaming in Journalism Education. *Scholarship and Professional Work Communication*. 74. https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/ccom_papers/74
- I don't know which party my wife belongs. (2016, October 14). Retrieved October 20, 2017, from <https://www.vanguardngr.com>.
- LGBT foundation. (2017). What is sexuality? Retrieved October 16, 2017, from lgbt.foundation/information-advice/coming-outsupport
- Little, D. (2008). Understanding society innovative thinking about a global world. Retrieved January 17, 2018, from <https://understandingsociety.blogspot.com.ng>
- Made, P.A (2009). Audit of Gender in media education and Journalism Training.

- Namibia: Gender and Media studies center.
- Geertsema-Sligh, M. (2014). Gender Mainstreaming in Journalism Education. Scholarship and Professional Work-Communication. 74. https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/ccom_papers/74
- Made, P.A. (2009). Audit of Gender in Media Education and Journalism Training. Namibia: Namibia Country Report.
- National Universities Commission. (2017) Benchmark minimum academic standards for undergraduate programmes in social sciences in nigerian universities. Retrieved October 12, 2017, from eprints.convenantuniversity.edu.org.
- Northwestern University. (2017). Program in gender and sexuality studies. Retrieved January 17, 2018, from www.gender.sexuality.northwestern.edu
- Okunna, S. (2002). Gender and communication in Nigeria: Is this the twenty-first century? Retrieved August 17, 2017, from www.portalcommunication.com
- Options for Sexual Health. (2016). Sexuality Retrieved August 20, 2017, from www.optionsforsexualhealth.org/sexual-health/sexuality
- Pavlik, J.V. (2013). Innovation and the Future of Journalism. Assessed from <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2012.756666>. on 16th April, 2018.
- Sarikakis, K. (2014). Power, patriarchy, profit: Barriers to gender mainstreaming in media policy (e-book). Retrieved August 22, 2017 from <http://books.com.ngbooks>
- Sexuality Resource Center for Parents. (2017). Sexuality. Retrieved August 22, 2017, from www.srcp.org/forallparents/definition.html.
- Sport and Development Organization. (2017). What is gender? Retrieved August 22, 2017, from www.sportanddev.org/en/learn-more.
- Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation. (1999). Sexuality? Retrieved August 23, 2017, from www.gender.cawater-info.net
- Terrence, H. T. (2017). What is Sexuality? Retrieved August 23, 2017, from www.tht.org.uk/sex-health/young-people/sexuality.
- Wang, H.L (2014). Impact of Journalism Educators on Media Performance and Journalism Practice in Taiwan. *International Education Research*. 2, (3), PP 53-65
- World Health Organization. (2017). Gender equity and human rights. Retrieved August 23, 2017, from www.who.int/gender-equity-rights