



Readership Pattern of Indigenous Language Newspapers Among Selected Nigerian Undergraduates

LES MOTIFS LECTORAT DES JOURNAUX EN LANGUE INDIGENE ET CERTAINES DE PREMIER CYCLE DU NIGERIA

O.F. ALABI^{1,*}

¹Ph.D. Department of Communication & Media Studies, Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, Nigeria

*Corresponding author.

Email: wole4helpzycom@yahoo.co.uk

Received 5 September 2011; accepted 25 November 2011

Abstract

Indigenous language press which was the harbinger of journalism in Nigeria is suffering serious neglect. The neglect reflects in a number of ways among which is poor readership. Although, the fact of poor readership of indigenous language newspapers is a common knowledge, but it lacks empirical documentation as many researches on readership of newspapers were concentrated on newspapers written in English. This research attempt therefore examined the readership pattern of Indigenous language newspapers among selected university undergraduates and compared the pattern of readership of English and Indigenous language newspapers. The study is a survey of 150 students of Ajayi Crowther University selected through purposive sampling. Data were generated with Indigenous language Newspaper Readership Pattern Instrument (ILNRPI). The results reveal poor readership pattern of Indigenous Language newspaper with the readership pattern of English Language newspapers faring better. On the basis of the findings, useful suggestions were made.

Key words: Indigenous; Language; Readership pattern; Undergraduates

Résumé

Presse en langue indigène qui a été le signe avant-coureur du journalisme au Nigeria souffre de grave négligence. La négligence se reflète dans un certain nombre de façons dont le lectorat est faible. Bien que, du fait du lectorat des journaux mauvaise langue autochtone est une connaissance commune, mais il manque de la

documentation empirique de nombreuses recherches sur le lectorat des journaux ont été concentrés sur les journaux écrits en anglais. Cette tentative de recherche a donc étudié le modèle le lectorat des journaux de langue chez les étudiants autochtones universitaires sélectionnés et comparés le modèle du lectorat des journaux de langue anglaise et autochtones. L'étude est une enquête auprès de 150 étudiants de l'Université d'Ajayi Crowther sélectionnés par échantillonnage raisonné. Les données ont été générées avec l'Instrument journal en langue indigène lectorat Pattern (ILNRPI). Les résultats révèlent profil des lecteurs du journal de mauvaise langues autochtones avec le motif lectorat de journaux de langue anglaise obtiennent de meilleurs résultats. Sur la base des conclusions, des suggestions utiles ont été faites.

Mots-clés: Autochtones; Langue; Motif de lectorat; étudiants de premier cycle

O.F. ALABI (2011). Readership Pattern of Indigenous Language Newspapers Among Selected Nigerian Undergraduates. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 7(4), 121-126. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/j.ccc.1923670020110704.284> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.ccc.1923670020110704.284>

INTRODUCTION

Writing and printing are the notable forerunners of journalism globally. In Nigeria, the development of these two harbingers of journalistic exploits could be traced to the efforts of colonial masters and various religious missions. For example, the first indigenous language newspaper in Africa and of course, the first newspaper in Nigeria was established by Rev Henry Townsend, an Anglican missionary in 1859. Rev Henry Townsend had earlier established a printing press in 1854. Apart from Hope Waddell press established by the Presbyterian Church in 1846, some of the subsequent newspapers that

came after *Iwe Irohin* also started with printing press. For example, when Richard Blaize lunched Lagos and Gold coast Advertiser in 1880, he first established Caxton press.

Nigerian journalism had its root in the indigenous language press pioneered by Iwe Irohin. Although, *Iwe Irohin* served as a necessary spur and impetus to other newspapers that came after, it could have been a perfect model for indigenous language media if subsequent publishers had taken a clue from it in this respect. Unfortunately, many of the pioneering journalist did less than desirable in this respect because they saw themselves as “English blackmen” as such, in their journalistic exploits, many of the educated elites of 19th century adopted English language as the language of the media. Besides, indigenous language lost its supremacy to English language as the language of journalism when English supplement was introduced to *Iwe Irohin* in 1866. The introduction of English supplement, according to Duyile (1987, p.3) was a response to the growing interest and enthusiasm of the literate class in the newspaper. Eventually, the English supplement which was originally intended as an abridged version of the Yoruba section gained dominance over the Yoruba section of the paper. This mistake served as the foundation for further decision to neglect the use of indigenous language by the newspapermen.

However, attempts were made by some early journalists to establish indigenous language newspapers during pre-independence era. After *Iwe Irohin* which opened the door for other Yoruba and indeed, indigenous language newspapers, other newspapers included: *Irohin Eko* which commenced publication in 1888, *Eko Akete*, founded in 1922, *Eletu Ofe*, founded in 1923, *Iwe Irohin Osose* by Thomas Horatio Jackson in 1924, *Eko Igbehin* by Awoliyi in 1925 and *Akede Eko* by I.B. Thomas in 1927. (Alabi. S., 2003, pp.18-34) unfortunately most of these attempts did not last long as many of the newspapers died as soon as they were born. The non-Yoruba indigenous language newspapers that also featured in the era were: *Unwana Efik* and *Obukpon Efik*. In 1939, *Gaskiya Tafi Kwabo* was established by the Northern Literature Bureau. *Gaskiya Tafi Kwabo* served as a training ground for the technical staff for the twelve provincial newspapers that were later introduced in the northern region.

The post-independence era also witnessed commendable efforts at indigenous language newspapering in Nigeria. According to Salawu (2006), *Iroyin Yoruba*, which is on the stable of African Newspaper of Nigeria PLC, the publisher of Tribune titles; *Gbohunbohun*, a publication of the distressed Sketch Press Limited and *Isokan, Amana* and *Udoka*, which were on the stable of Concord Press of Nigeria Limited made debut in this era. The late 1990s witnessed new wave in the publication of some vibrant Yoruba newspapers like *Alaroye, Isokan, Akede, Yoruba Ronu* and *Ajoro*.

From the foregoing, it is evident that indigenous

language newspaper has a long history of existence in Nigeria and it has co-existed with its English counterpart right from the beginning of Nigerian journalism. However, unlike its English counterpart, it has suffered lack of attention by mass media scholars. As observed by Alabi (2003), much academic searchlight has not been beamed on this area. Among other reasons adduced for this perceived lack of academic interest are that: indigenous language newspapers are not as many as English language newspapers, unlike English language newspapers, indigenous language newspapers are published weekly, that heterogeneous linguistic nature of the Nigerian makes indigenous language newspapers less journalistically important and as such induces less scholarly interest and; lastly, many academic scholars cannot read indigenous language newspapers.

Although indigenous language newspaper is a carved out breed for a specific and less sophisticated audience, this notwithstanding, the apathy on the side of academic scholars and audience to it is undesirable. The general lack of interest on the side of academic scholars has not only aided significantly, the unprecedented poor readership and negative attitude of the audience but also led to scarcity of literature in this regard. This development which has been decried by some concerned scholars (Salawu.A., 2006; Alabi.S., 2003) requires intervention strategies. Although from general observation, the elite class and of course, the people that indigenous language newspapers are meant to serve (the less sophisticated audience) hardly read them, there is no empirical documentation to give credence to this claim. This is the challenge that this paper it out to address. The study: “Readership Pattern of English and Indigenous Language Newspapers among selected Nigerian undergraduates” is an attempt not only to create empirical documentation of readership pattern of Indigenous language newspapers but also to compare such readership pattern with the readership pattern for English language newspapers.

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE MEDIA

Scholars have noted the symbiotic relationship between communication and development, just as they observed inter-relationship between media and society. As asserted by Salawu (2006), if the media through which communication is done can be considered important, then, the mass media that use indigenous languages are very important for the purpose of information, mobilization and continuity.

The language of any community is the most suitable language for the conveyance of messages to such a community. This underscores the importance of languages, by extension, indigenous language media. Indigenous language media do not only uphold, promote and preserve

indigenous languages but also serve as a veritable tool for the transmission and preservation of cultural heritage. Since language is an important part of culture, the values and the norms are automatically transmitted whenever language is transmitted.

The inadvertent adoption of English as the language of the press in Nigeria is one development that has furthered the wide gap between the information rich and the information poor in Nigeria. In most cases, the information poor are the illiterate as far as the use of English language is concerned. This large heterogeneous group of people in our society have consistently remained information poor because for a long period of time they have been unwittingly ex-communicated by the English language dependent mass media. This ever-widening gap can only be bridged through conscious and deliberate promotion of indigenous languages by the media.

Indigenous language media serve as appropriate channels for social and political mobilization, and dissemination of development messages. It necessarily provides the link between the government and the people. Since greater percentage of Nigerian populace resides in villages, to effectively carry them along and keep them informed about things that will make life better for them, the need to adopt indigenous language media becomes imperative. Messages on HIV/Aids campaign, Roll back malaria, of course, Rebranding Nigeria campaign can only reach local people and make meaning to them when such messages are relayed in the language they can actually relate with.

In spite of its numerous potentialities, Indigenous language media are laden with serious difficulties that have made it a terrain that rational investors dread like plague. Situating indigenous language media within Nigeria economic context, Lai Oso(2006) observed that the greatest problem confronting Indigenous language media is its perceived lack of economic viability. Generally, media thrive on commercials. Since indigenous language cannot boast of large audience, the media lack the necessary advert appeal. Advertisers often opt for medium that can capture and present their messages to the intended audience. As observed by Lai Oso (2006) throughout year 2004, none of the editions of Iroyin Yoruba by African Newspapers Limited, carried any advertisement. To worsen the situation the papers cannot boast of good sales volume to stay afloat simply because many potential buyers lack purchasing power. If the situation is so bad for indigenous language newspapers, the chance of survival is dim unless newspaper business is no longer a commercial venture.

Another major problem confronting indigenous language media is the problem of attitude of Nigerian elites. The attitude of many Nigerians to anything indigenous is highly disgusting. Much value is placed on foreign culture, including language to the detriment of indigenous culture and languages. Many there are

among educated Nigerians whose children cannot even speak a syllable in their parents' languages. This attitudinal orientation has extended negative effect on the development of local languages. As such, many people lack linguistic competence to read indigenous language newspapers. The implication is not limited to the dwindling level of readership of indigenous language newspapers alone; it has also decimated the level of competent manpower for the existing indigenous language media. The situation is more serious with the print than broadcast media because print requires high level of literacy and standard orthography.

The Problem

Although Nigerian journalism has its root in Indigenous language press pioneered by Iwe Irohin fun awon Egba ati Yoruba, the indigenous language press which once occupied a pride of place in journalism in Nigeria has been utterly neglected. While it consistently suffers lack of attention in the hand of mass media scholars, the audiences it is meant to serve have shown disinterestedness in it. Hence, this important aspect of the media requires salvaging. The fact of declining readership for indigenous language newspapers is a common knowledge to media observers and scholars but it lacks proper empirical documentation. It is in this respect that the present study examines indigenous language newspaper readership pattern among selected Nigerian University Undergraduates. The study also compares the readership patterns of English language and Indigenous language newspapers.

Research Questions

To effectively address the focus of this study, the study will provide answers to the following research questions:

RQ 1: How regular do Nigerian University Undergraduates read indigenous newspapers?

RQ 2: Are undergraduate male students different from undergraduate female students in the pattern of indigenous language newspaper reading?

Hypothesis

H₀: There will be no significant difference in the pattern of Indigenous and English language newspaper readership among university undergraduates?

METHOD

The study made use of survey research design. All Yoruba speaking undergraduate students of Ajayi Crowther University in Oyo, Oyo state, Nigeria constitute the target population for the study. The focus on Yoruba speaking students was borne out of the fact that, the school is in the heart of Yoruba land. Moreover, the available indigenous language newspapers within the geographical location of the school are majorly written in Yoruba Language. Although the students of the university are from different

ethnic nationalities and languages, majority of them are from Yoruba speaking states.

Purposive sampling was employed in the selection of Yoruba speaking students. The school is naturally stratified into three different faculties. So, sample was drawn from the three Faculties of the University (Faculty of Humanities, Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, Faculty of Natural Sciences) through purposive sampling procedure. From each of the three faculties, fifty (50) Yoruba speaking students were randomly selected for participation in the study. In all, the research instrument was administered on one hundred and fifty (150) students. Data were generated with Indigenous Language Newspaper Reading Pattern Instrument (ILNRI) which was developed and validated by the researcher. The instrument yielded reliability co-efficient of 0.75 with Cronbach Alpha. The data collection instrument has two sections. The first section consists of items requesting for the personal data of respondents. The second contains the main items structured in four-point Likert Scale format of Very often, Often, Occasionally and Rarely. Dichotomous responses of ‘Yes’ of ‘No’ on the scale were given discrete value of 1 (Yes) and 2 (No). Items asking respondents to tick ‘Very often’, ‘Often’, ‘Occasionally’, and ‘Rarely’ were scored 4 to 1. Data generated with the research instrument was analyzed using simple descriptive statistics– frequency count, percentages and cross tabulation. T-test was employed to test the only hypothesis for the study.

RESULTS

RQ 1: How regular do Nigerian University undergraduates read indigenous newspapers?

Table 1 below provides answer to the research question

Table 1
Table Indicating the Reading Pattern of Indigenous Language Newspapers by Undergraduates

Regularity	Frequency	Percentage
Very often	3	2.0
Often	9	6.0
Occasionally	19	12.7
Rarely	119	79.3
Total	150	100

Table 3
Paired Sample T-test Indicating in the Readership Pattern of Indigenous and English Language Newspapers Among Undergraduates

Newspaper Readership Patterns	Mean	No	Standard Deviation	t-Observed	Df	P-Value	Remark
Readership pattern of Indigenous Lang Newspapers	1.3067	150	.67503	.077	149	.000	S
Readership pattern of Eng. Lang Newspapers	2.2200	150	.88893				

S: Significant at 0.05 alpha level

The table shows the undergraduates rarely read Indigenous Language newspapers. As evident in the table, 119 students which constitute 79.3% of the respondents indicated that they rarely read indigenous language newspapers.

RQ 2: Are undergraduate male students different from undergraduate female students in the pattern of indigenous language newspaper reading?

Tables 2 and 3 provide answer to this research question.

Table 2
Cross Tabulation of the Regularity of Indigenous Language Newspaper Readership Among University Undergraduates by Gender

Readership Pattern	MALE		FEMALE	
	Freq	Percentage	Freq	Percentage
Very often	1	2.2%	2	1.9%
Often	2	4.3%	7	6.7%
Occasionally	7	15.2%	12	11.5%
Rarely	36	78.3%	83	79.8%
Total	46	100%	104	100%

As shown in table 1, University undergraduate rarely read indigenous language newspapers. Table 2 however reveals the pattern of readership among male and female students. Table 2 shows that 78.3% of male students rarely read indigenous language newspapers while 79.8% of female respondents rarely read indigenous language newspapers. This difference, although, not subjected to further statistical test may not amount to any significance when one considers the fact the number of respondents in each of the categories differ.

Hypothesis

H₀: There will be no statistically significant difference in the pattern of Indigenous and English language newspaper readership among university undergraduates?

The stated hypothesis was subjected to Paired-sample t-test. It was tested at 0.05 level of significance. Table 3 presents the result of the test.

Table 3 shows that the paired t-test observed value indicating the difference in the pattern of Indigenous and English Language newspapers readership among university undergraduates is .077 (t-observed) $P > 0.05$. With the mean score of students on English language newspapers at .88893 and that of Indigenous Language newspapers at .67503, the difference is statistically significant. The implication is that university undergraduates read English language newspapers more than they read Indigenous language newspapers; therefore, the null hypothesis that presupposes no significant difference in students' readership pattern for the two types of newspaper is rejected.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Based on the information obtained from tables 1 and 2 above, university undergraduates rarely read indigenous language newspapers. Evidently, those who claim to read Indigenous language newspapers among the respondents read circumstantially and not as a result of real patronage of indigenous language press. Therefore, it may not amount to overgeneralization to assume that since the subjects of this study represent the elitist society in Nigeria, the finding also reflects the poor attitude of educated elites in our society to anything and everything indigenous. This is in line with the observation of Salawu (2004) that Nigerian elites possess poor attitude towards the patronage of indigenous language press in terms of readership and advertisement placement. As noted earlier, Alabi (2003) also expressed concern over poor attitude of media scholars to indigenous language press.

The result of paired t-test as shown in table 3 reveals the difference in the readership patterns of English and Indigenous language newspapers among undergraduates. The result shows that University undergraduates read English language newspapers more than they read Indigenous language newspapers. Generally, studies have confirmed newspapers reading apathy among university undergraduates (Soganumu.I., 2001, Ndukauba. O., 2009), however, comparatively, this study has shown that the degree of apathy or poor readership of indigenous language newspapers is higher than that of English language newspapers. This observation is explainable by the fact that many Nigerians tend to be favourably disposed to foreign things than to Indigenous or "local" things. Besides, the supremacy of English language and unrestricted preference for it among Nigerian elites is one important factor accountable.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study have further confirmed, with empirical basis, the observation of some concerned scholars about the general level of apathy among Nigerian

elites towards Indigenous language press.

Although, it may be argued that Indigenous language press is a genre for the less sophisticated audience in our society, but this does not provide admissible justification for the general societal disinterestedness in anything indigenous, including Indigenous language press. Indigenous language media hold great potentialities for the overall development of our nation. Since language is a purveyor and conveyor of culture, the centrality of Indigenous language media cannot be jettisoned. Indigenous language media is not only capable of promoting but also perpetuating languages. They serve as vehicle for the transmission and promotion of cultural values; serve as appropriate channels for social and political mobilization, dissemination of development messages; serve to bridge the wide information gap between the rich and the poor, and serve as the necessary bridge that links the government with the governed.

Unarguably, there are many factors responsible for the general poor reading culture among Nigerian students. Essentially, many students do not read newspapers, particularly, indigenous language newspapers, not just because of lack of purchasing power but for sheer poor attitudinal orientation to anything indigenous. If this trend will change, something drastic, in form of intervention by the government, private individuals, scholars and researchers must be done. For Nigerians to put aside our euro-centric mentality and embrace, support the growth and development of indigenous language media is one unique step that will not only help in promoting our cultural values and heritage but also give us and promote our unmistakable identity in the comity of nations

Government and private individuals should invest more in indigenous language media, not minding the long gestation nature of the business. Potential private investors who want the business to break even quickly can take a clue from the aggressive promotional and marketing strategies of Alaroye newspaper. Public and private investors who are also interested in Indigenous broadcasting station have a ready example in Orisun F.M, a radio station in Osun state, Nigeria that produces and presents all its programmes in Yoruba language.

In conclusion, scholars and researchers need to be awakened to the reality of those factors currently threatening the survival of Indigenous language press, the forerunner of Nigerian journalism. The paucity of literature on this important aspect of Nigerian press calls for serious concern. The concern should not be limited to the intensification of research interest in this important area, but as a way of giving life line to indigenous language media, the proposal for the inclusion of Indigenous Language Media in the Mass Communication curriculum of Nigerian universities by Salawu (2009) should be given urgent consideration.

REFERENCES

- Alabi, S. (2003). The Development of Indigenous Language Publications in Nigerian Journalism. In R.A, Akinfeleye and I.E. Okoye (Eds.), *Issues in Nigerian Media History: 1900-2000 AD*, (pp. 33-50). Lagos, Nigeria: Malthouse Press Limited.
- Duyile, D. (1987). *Makers of Nigerian Press*. Lagos, Nigeria: Gong Communication (Nig) Limited.
- Lai Oso (2006). A Political Economy of Indigenous Language Press in Nigeria. In Abiodun Salawu (Ed.), *Indigenous Language Media in Africa*, (pp. 28-36). Lagos, Nigeria: Concept Publications.
- Indukauba, O. (2009). *Newspaper Readership Pattern Among Science and Humanities Students in Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo. B.Sc Project*. Ajayi Crowther University, Nigeria.
- Salawu, A. (2004). The Yoruba Language Newspapers: Origin, Nature, Problems and Prospects. *Studies of Tribes and Tribals*, 2(2), 66-74.
- Salawu, A. (2006). Paradox of Milieu: Communicating in African Indigenous Languages in the Age of Globalization. In Salawu.A. (Ed), *Indigenous Language Media in Africa*, (pp. 44 - 52). Lagos, Nigeria: Concept Publications.
- Salawu, A. (2007). An Advocacy for Indigenous Language and the Study of Indigenous Language Media in Mass Communication Curriculum in Nigeria. *Babcock Journal of Mass Communication*, 3, 17-27.
- Soganumu, I. (2001). *Readership Pattern of Nigeria Newspapers among University of Lagos Students. B.Sc. Project*. University of Lagos, Nigeria.