

IMPACT OF STUDENTS' INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE ON THEIR PERCEPTION OF JOURNALISM ETHICS



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ABSTRACT

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How journalists keep the ethics of their profession has always been a subject of interest to scholars. This is because journalism, as a profession, has much impact on the development of society and when its ethical codes are violated; a great deal of damage could be done. However, most studies on the issue of keeping ethics by journalists focused on practising journalists and not much on trainee-journalists. This is where the present study is significant in the sense that it has contributed to the growing knowledge on student-journalist's perception of ethics. The study seeks to ascertain the extent internship experience makes journalism ethics credible to the student-journalist. Questionnaire copies were administered on two sets of graduating students of the Department of Mass Communication, Taraba State, University, Jalingo, Nigeria at different times. The result shows that the students were knowledgeable about journalism ethics through classroom teaching before embarking on internship. Although trainee-journalists in this study observed some unethical conduct among older journalists they worked with, that did not dampen the belief of such students in the importance of ethics to journalism practice. The study recommends that practising journalists should recognize that they are role models to the younger generation in terms of exemplary professional conduct.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature on professional conduct of journalists. The study is one of very few studies which have investigated how trainee-journalists perceive the ethics of journalism in Nigeria. Trainee-journalists perception of ethics could be a significant reflection of the kind of journalism to expect in future.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ethics are meant to guide practitioners of any profession and for a profession to gain societal recognition, it must have codes of conduct formulated and adopted by its members as a check on their behaviour. The members are equally expected to subscribe to such laid down canons as a demonstration of their acceptability of same. Journalism profession is not an exception in this case even though the extent to which its ethics are kept by the practitioners still remains controversial. Journalism ethics define the role expectation that society has of those in the pen and paper trade. It could be said then that ethics primarily give orientation to the journalist on his professional responsibilities according to the socio-cultural norms of the society he serves (Mohammed and Hanwa, 2011).

Ethics are taught in journalism training institutions in Nigeria. The objective is to sensitize the student-journalist to the demands of the profession he intends to join on completion of training. This is a good start for entry level journalists who may be vulnerable to professional misconduct owing to the vagaries of their socio-cultural orientations which may be at variance with standard journalistic ethos. This is where the interest of this study lies in the impact that exposure of trainee-journalists to realities in the work environment through internship experience has on their understanding of ethics. In most training institutions in Nigeria, student-journalists compulsorily undergo a six-month internship experience (called media/industrial attachment) in any media organization or their adjuncts as a practical complement to the teaching they had received in school. This is planned in collaboration with the industry in form of partnership as an extension of the town and gown relationship. The industry provides the training environment while the student parent institution monitors the training and level of participation of the student.

In fact, the National Universities Commission (NUC), the body that regulates university education in Nigeria, has specifically mandated journalism training departments in universities to release their students on industrial attachment in various media organizations and related establishments for a period of six months before graduation. This is contained in a policy document entitled Benchmark for Minimum Academic Standards for disciplines offered in Nigerian Universities. It is important to note that the same document is the yardstick for evaluating academic programmes in Nigerian universities during accreditation. It is unfortunate that in spite of the conscription of student-journalists into the industrial attachment scheme, they are not paid by the Industrial Training Fund (ITF), a body that is charged with monitoring the implementation of student-industrial training in Nigeria, on the grounds that the mandate of the organization caters exclusively to the welfare of science students on internship.

It is interesting to note also that internship has become a global best practice as a way tertiary institutions interface with the industry in what is popularly known as town-gown interaction referred to earlier in this discourse. [Yang and Arant \(2014\)](#) note this about internship in the United States:

In regard to internships, in the early 1980s, the U.S.-based Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication added internships to its standards, allowing programs to award academic credit for internships if students and employers evaluated the learning experience. Most journalism programs have taken the opportunity to offer credit for internships, and some even require students to take internship credits.

In Nigeria, students earn credits for their internship and at the Department of Mass Communication, Taraba State University, where this study is based, students are allowed to go on attachment at two different times, first at the end of their second year and the other at the end of their third year. In each case, they are expected to spend three months but may be recalled to school midway into the attachment when the need arises. Students are expected to fill their log books detailing what assignments they carried out during the internship and equally write a report which is presented to the department along with the log book duly signed by the industry-based supervisor. At times, one out of the two documents may suffice. Students are also graded (awarded marks) on presentation of their reports to the department. In fact, internship in Nigerian universities is offered as a credit earning semester course and in the sciences, a whole semester is devoted to this course because science students take their industrial attachment at a stretch.

The importance of internship to a student is well captured by [White \(1996\)](#): “Never pass up a chance to work as an intern for a radio or TV station while you are in school. Such work can be a tremendous advantage because it gives you an opportunity to observe firsthand what you are learning in your classes.” He also comments that one of the greatest advantages of internship is that students have the opportunity of meeting “the people who do the hiring” and through this means, some interns get their first jobs on graduation either by being retained in the stations where they did their attachment or get a recommendation from their industry-based supervisors for jobs

elsewhere if they did well during the period. White (1996) further says, "An internship also allows you to see what broadcast news is really like. You may discover that it is not what you want to pursue as a career. Some students discover during an internship that it's not for them. If you are not 'pushy' by nature and are not comfortable with pressures and deadlines, it is better to discover that as quickly as possible". So, internship is a discovery process for the student as a litmus-test of his fitness into the journalism profession.

This study is set to explore how much internship experience impact on student-journalists in their understanding of ethical issues in journalism. It seeks to evaluate if exposure to internship makes student-journalists have a high regard for ethics of the profession and the extent the behaviour of older colleagues influence the perception of journalism ethics by such students. The essence of doing this is to ascertain the kind of orientation with which journalists come into practice as a platform for evaluating the underlying factors behind their professional (mis)conduct. Such an analysis provides insight into the attitudes of the next generation of journalists, according to Yang and Arant (2014) who also aver that "... perceptions of ethical issues are a response to intellectual development and the social and cultural environments in which people live".

1.1. Statement of Problem

The spate of unethical conduct of journalists these days especially in Nigeria makes one think that ethics of journalism has long outlived its usefulness. Journalists violate ethics with impunity making the integrity of the profession continually susceptible to denigration from other members of society. The journalists defend themselves with alibi hinging mainly on poor conditions of service among other factors. The whole scenario tends to paint a picture of ethics (and by extension, the regulatory bodies to enforce them) becoming toothless bulldogs which can only bark but not bite.

If the misdemeanour of practising journalists has become worrisome, then, it is a call for attention to be beamed on efforts at rescuing the up and coming ones from being infused with the misconduct virus. Yang and Arant (2014) have rightly observed that "Although journalism programs teach their students about these roles and values, how journalism students actually perceive these roles and values remains unclear How today's journalism students view journalistic roles and how they respond when faced with ethical decisions will shape what the public will learn from the news tomorrow". It could be safely hypothesized, therefore, that the current perception of student-journalists about ethics of their profession is a reflection of the shape of tomorrow's journalism.

García-Avilés *et al.* (2014) cite Eberwein *et al.* (2011) who posit that "Journalistic practice is experiencing a dialectical tension between the prevailing social values, which shape journalists' professional standards, and the deontological codes, which contain norms that counteract particular professional practices, which are based on the dominant ethos". García-Avilés *et al.* (2014) however, infer in citing Plaisance *et al.* (2012) that "In order to resolve this tension, it seems important to introduce a thoughtful perspective, based on comparing journalistic cultures, media systems and training programs for journalists". In other words, evaluating the training of journalists could help in explaining the cause(s) of the 'dialectical tension' referred to above.

In this case, how trainee journalists perceive ethics of the profession long before they join the profession as practitioners needs to be explored. This is especially important because having acquired the theoretical knowledge of ethics in the classroom and having gone on media attachment in different media organizations to gain a practical exposure to the dynamics of the media industry, it becomes easy to assess the student-journalist's understanding of ethical issues in journalism as a prelude to the calibre of media practitioners to expect in the years ahead. They must have seen not only how older colleagues go about the job, they, themselves, would have also got first-hand knowledge of how things work in journalism. The core issue underlying this study, therefore, is the need to ascertain the extent media attachment shapes trainee journalists' perception of ethics. In other words, does participation in internship make student-journalists believe ethics of the profession more or discourage them from taking ethics seriously when they eventually get to the field?

1.2. Research Objectives

This study is set to

- i. Evaluate the value attached to ethics of journalism by student-journalists before and after their internship.
- ii. Determine the extent student-journalists are influenced by the behaviour of professional colleagues in relation to keeping ethics of journalism.
- iii. Assess whether student-journalists perceive the newsroom as a conducive place to encourage journalists to keep ethics of the profession.
- iv. Evaluate the extent students' internship experience condition their perception of the relevance of teaching ethics in journalism training.

1.3. Research Questions

- i. How do trainee-journalists perceive journalism ethics before and after their internship experience?
- ii. How does the behaviour of professional colleagues influence interns' perception of journalism ethics?
- iii. How conducive is the newsroom atmosphere to encourage student-journalists to keep ethics of the profession?
- iv. What is student-journalists' perception of the relevance of teaching ethics in journalism training

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The issue of journalistic ethics has always attracted the attention of scholars mainly because how journalism is practised has telling consequences on the entire society. Scholars are often interested in finding out the extent media practitioners keep the codes of the profession. On what ethics mean, [Motlagh et al. \(2013\)](#) write that "Journalism ethics is defined as a species of applied ethics that examines what journalists and news organizations should do, given their role in society". [Sharma \(2002\)](#) cited in [Mohammed and Hanwa \(2011\)](#) states that ethics "is that branch of philosophy that helps journalists determine what is right to do in journalism". These scholars examine ethics from a normative perspective in which case ethics is seen as prescriptive of societal role expectation of journalists. [Ongowo \(2011\)](#) observes that "The word 'ethics' when associated with journalism practice has elicited various definitions including 'a set of principles and norms that, at least to some degree, guided journalistic practice' 'a way of studying morality which allows decisions to be made when individuals face specific cases of moral dilemma' 'the study of the grounds and principles for right and wrong human behaviour'. The bottom line in this array of definitions is that ethics is a moral compass that guides journalists in making critical decisions in the course of duty. Corroborating this claim, [Ongowo \(2011\)](#) writes that "Journalists, in the course of their duty, deal with the choice between what is moral or immoral if published. They even have to deal with moral and legal issues regarding how they obtain information".

[Hasan \(2014\)](#) defines media ethics or journalism ethics as "a branch of philosophy concerned with actions that are morally permissible and those that are not". She adds that "Media ethics assist media workers in determining what is right and how to choose the best from several alternatives. Media ethics constitutes a normative science of conduct and must therefore be applied voluntarily". Here again, the prescriptive nature of ethics is emphasized. Hasan points out the essential fact that ethics does not have universal application; each journalist makes a decision on what to do in a given situation as he thinks best at the moment. This view is also supported by [McCoy \(2004\)](#) cited in [Mohammed and Hanwa \(2011\)](#). What, therefore, is seen as ethically correct to one journalist under certain circumstance may be considered ethically wrong by another given the same scenario. A case in point is the controversy surrounding the appropriateness of a journalist disguising himself to obtain information (not making the subject of the news story aware) to serve public interest. Another quick example is the question of whether a public office holder still enjoys privacy in relation to the extent to which events in his life could make front page news.

Asemah (2011) says “Ethics may be described as the systematic study of the principles and methods for distinguishing right from wrong and good from bad. Ethics is a moral concept”. Asemah (2011) cites Baran (1999) who sees media ethics as specifically referring “to the application of rational thought by media professionals when they are deciding on what should be the right or best answer or response to a challenging professional problem”. Chari (2013) quotes Ward (2008) who defines ethics as “the analysis of conduct, responsible practice and fair human interactions in the light of the best available principles”. Ethical decision making as emphasized in all the definitions sampled above revolves around certain coordinates that Hasan (2014) has outlined as concepts which all journalistic codes usually take into account. These are:

- a. Safeguarding freedom of information.
- b. Freedom of access to information sources.
- c. Objectivity, accuracy, truthfulness or the non-misrepresentation of facts.
- d. Responsibility to the public, and its rights and interests and in relation to national, racial and religious communities, the nation, the State and the maintenance of peace.
- e. The obligation to refrain from calumny, unfounded accusations, slander, violations of privacy.
- f. Integrity and independence.
- g. The right of reply and of correction
- h. Respect of professional confidentiality
- i. Consideration for the cultural, social or ethnic codes of individual countries.

Putting all this in a summary form, Ekeli and Enokbahare (2011) and Leman (2014) assert that ethics of journalism essentially deals with Editorial Independence, Accuracy and Fairness, Privacy, Privilege and non-Disclosure, Decency, Discrimination, Reward and Gratification; Violence; Children and Minors; Access to Information; Social Responsibility; Plagiarism and Copyright. Leman adds that “Under these categories, the code prescribes the right attitudes towards the practice of journalism” and further observes that ethics of journalism need to be seriously considered because:

Journalism is like no other job, and must be guarded jealously. What journalists write and how they write it inevitably touch on the lives of other people. Careless or deliberate or mischievous publications can ruin many lives and properties (sic) as had been witnessed in our present day journalism. It is imperative therefore if ethical considerations are given the required pride of place in the profession. (2014, p.7)

Knowledge of journalism ethics alone may not be the deciding factor on whether media practitioners adhere to the professional canons. This is the view of Yang and Arant (2014) that “While journalism education can improve students’ skills and techniques, it is the larger context of the political and social environments that determine what can be accomplished in the news media”. Simply stated, the external variables in the operational field of the journalist weigh heavily on him more when making ethical decisions than the knowledge of ethics he had acquired in training. This is similar to the findings of Alemoh (2011) that the workplace has a greater influence on the journalist in the course of duty than the knowledge of professional ethics learnt at school.

Journalism ethics as a concept and the way it is implemented in the practice of the profession have come under severe criticisms by scholars. For example, Chari (2013) cites Ward’s (2008) view that “journalism ethics lacks a richer theoretical base and ‘adequate epistemology’, particularly one that explains practices in a multi-media environment”. Chari reiterates the argument of Ward that “journalism ethics too often falls back on simplistic appeals to general concepts such as ‘truth-seeking’, ‘freedom’, ‘serving the public’ and ‘democracy’, terms which are highly contested”. Indeed, some issues in journalism practice open themselves to unending contestations as to their ‘rightness’ or ‘wrongness’, thereby making the profession dwell on the fringes of disputations especially in relation to strategies journalists adopt in ferreting information to serve the public good. Two examples of such controversial issues have earlier been cited in this discourse.

Yang and Arant (2014) have noted that "...unethical practices in the journalism profession have not only eroded the public trust in journalism but also presented a tremendous challenge for journalism educators seeking to teach these budding professionals both the competencies and values of journalism". What this suggests is that the unfolding unpleasant realities in the field of practice in journalism have a direct negative impact on starters in the profession. This should be an issue of concern because the perception of the up and coming journalists about ethics of the profession goes a long way to define the character of the next generation of journalists in any society.

Motlagh *et al.* (2013) in their study on *Role of Education and Work Experience in Journalists' Perception about Journalism Codes of Ethics*, sum up their findings in this way: "The results showed that the more journalists had experience, their perception about journalism ethics become favorable. It means the expert journalists in Malaysia are more aware and responsive about the application, effectiveness and necessity of journalism ethics than juniors". We could infer from this conclusion that the ability of a journalist to keep the ethics of his profession is directly proportional to the length of time he has practised. In other words, adherence to journalistic codes is a function of experience of the journalist in the industry. By implication, unethical conduct might be more prevalent among greenhorns in the profession even though this is another controversy that could only be defused through empirical studies aimed at ascertaining a correlation between years of experience of journalists and the degree of unethical conduct in which they are found culpable. Does this, in any way, suggest that interns who may not have a positive perception of journalism ethics at the moment may have a change of attitude as they venture into practice and grow in it? This line of thought has again provided mental pabulum for scholars to ruminate on through empirical research.

Leman (2014) makes an important observation that some unethical conducts of journalists are calculatedly induced through policy directives of some media organizations. According to him:

Media houses all over the world are subject to pressures by special interest groups. Among these are public relations people who are employed by special interest groups to help them look good, not only in the news but also in-between the news. No media house can ever be sure that none of its staff engages in the distortion or omission of the truth. *For some, the trouble even starts from the top where the owners or their managers pass policies designed to help one group or so against another down the line.* (our emphasis)

The import of this assertion is that to some extent, media organizations approve unethical practices in order to gain undue advantage in retaining the clients of the organization and in so far as such operational strategies remained concealed from the public glare.

The above literature review has brought to the fore the salience of ethics as a vital component of the journalism profession. Ethics provide the rudder with which the journalist navigates the stormy sea of challenging decision making in the course of duty. The necessity of inculcating ethics into the training of prospective journalists has been underscored with particular reference to student-journalists. In spite of the fact that there is no guarantee that ethics would always be adhered to by all practising journalists, there is every need to still lay a firm philosophical grounding for entry-level journalists through the teaching of ethics. How the knowledge obtained in the process of classroom teaching is influenced by exposure to realities in the workplace during internship is the primary concern of this study.

2.1. Method of Study

This study was carried out at Taraba State University, Jalingo, Nigeria. The respondents were mass communication students who had undergone media/industrial attachment. The department allows the students to observe the attachment twice (at 300 & 400 levels) and are at liberty to choose which media organization to go. Lecturers are sent midway into the attachment to supervise the students in their various locations. Two different classes of 400 level students were administered questionnaire copies in a survey at different times based on when

they went on attachment. Chari (2013) cites Wimmer and Dominick (1983) who say, “Scholars argue that the survey method is more efficient when investigating problems in realistic settings or collecting large amount of data than other methods”. Students helped out as research assistants in distributing and retrieving the questionnaire using census sampling in which every member of the class was part of the sample. This was done since the student population was manageable.

2.2. Data Presentation

The survey had a total of 118 students out of which 65 (55%) were female and 52 (44%) male while one respondent did not indicate sex. On level/class of study, 109 (93%) respondents indicated 400 level, two respondents (1%) indicated 300 level (this obviously is an error because the respondents should be in 400 level i.e. graduating class) and seven respondents (6%) gave no response. One hundred and eleven respondents (94%) had undergone media attachment but seven (6%) did not respond to the issue. On number of times the students had gone on attachment, 71 (60%) indicated twice, 43 (37%) indicated once and four (3%) did not respond. Ninety-five respondents (81%) observed their industrial attachment experience in the broadcast media, 13 (12%) had theirs in the print media, five (4%) had it in both print/broadcast media, three (2%) did it in a Public relations/Advertising firm and the No/invalid responses constituted two respondents (1%) respectively. Ninety-nine (84%) respondents spent more than one month on attachment, 14 (12%) one month, one respondent stayed less than one month and four (3%) made no response.

2.3. Answers to Research Questions

Research question 1: How do trainee-journalists perceive journalism ethics before and after their internship experience?

In order to answer the above question, respondents’ knowledge of ethics of journalism was evaluated as shown in the table below. Statistics here presented indicates that majority of the respondents had been taught ethics of journalism before they went on the industrial attachment. This is supported by the number of respondents (90%) who demonstrated ample knowledge of topical issues in journalism ethics. It can, therefore, be safely assumed that the respondents knew what they were talking about with regards to the issues raised in this study.

Table-1. Shows respondents acquaintance with journalism ethics

Were you taught ethics?			Knowledge of ethical issues		
Yes	110	94%	Knowledgeable	106	90%
No	03	2%	Fairly knowledgeable	06	6%
-	-	-	Not knowledgeable	03	2%
No response	05	4%	No response	03	2%
Total	118	100%	-	118	100%

Source: Field survey by authors

Respondents were also requested to give opinion on how they perceived ethics of journalism before they went on attachment and to further state how determined they were to keep ethics of journalism in practice. The respondents were again asked, if in the course of their media attachment, they violated ethics of journalism. The responses as provided are presented in the table below.

Table-2. Shows respondents' opinions on their perception of ethics

Initial perception of ethics				Initial determination to keep ethics			Going against ethics during attachment		
Journalists uphold ethics	54	46%	Yes	100	85%	Yes	33	28%	
It's hard to keep ethics	45	38%	No	07	6%	No	70	60%	
Journalists deliberately go against ethics	13	11%	Undecided	11	9%	Undecided	12	10%	
Any other specify	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
No response	06	5%	-	-	-	No response	03	2%	
Total	118	100%	-	118	100%	-	118	100%	

Source: Field survey by authors

From the table above, trainee-journalists (46%) had the notion before embarking on attachment that practising journalists habitually keep the ethics of their profession. Similarly, the table reveals that 85% of the respondents were determined to keep the ethics of the profession when they eventually get to the field. It could be inferred that the students' thinking that practising journalists abide by the ethics of journalism must have conditioned their minds to view ethics from a favourable perspective as codes that should be obeyed. It is equally expected that this feeling must have been boosted by classroom teaching in which students are admonished to observe ethics of the profession in practice. Day (2000) cited in Mohammed and Hanwa (2011) says "it is advantageous to the college students to first confront the taught ethical courses in the classroom where they can be rationally discussed rather than under deadline pressure later". This, of course, is a sure ideological foundation for trainee-journalists. A demonstration of this resolve is seen in the students' commitment to keeping ethics while on attachment. Sixty per cent of the students did not violate ethics of journalism during their internship even though occasion might have availed itself for them to misbehave. In sum, students' perception of ethics of journalism before going on industrial training is positive according to this survey. On whether this perception changed after their industrial attachment experience, the table below offers an explanation.

Table-3. Respondents' current perception of ethics of journalism

Ethics now more credible to students			Discontinuing teaching ethics	
Yes	69	58%	38	32%
No	43	37%	75	64%
No response	06	5%	05	4%
Total	118	100%	118	100%

Source: Field survey by authors

Not surprising, the student-journalists still maintained this positive perception of ethics after undergoing the industrial attachment experience. Table iii above attests to this claim that 58% of the respondents admit that ethics is now more credible to them after they have undergone media attachment. Because of this, 64% of the respondents would want ethics to be taught in school continually as against 32% who agree that they would discontinue teaching of ethics if they had their way. In answering the research question set above, we could infer that trainee journalists in this survey perceive ethics of journalism positively before and after their industrial attachment experience.

Research question 2: How conducive is the newsroom atmosphere to encourage student-journalists to keep ethics of the profession?

The answer to the above question was obtained through respondents' opinions on whether they found the newsroom of the different media organizations where they did their attachment conducive to enhance journalists'

ability to keep ethics. The responses are provided on the left hand side of the table below. The right hand side gives the responses on how journalists keep ethics as observed by the interns.

Table-4. Respondents' opinions on newsroom influence on journalists keeping of ethics

Newsroom encourages keeping of ethics			Majority of Journalists keep ethics		
Yes	51	43%	Yes	26	22%
No	28	24%	No	64	54%
Not really	33	28%	Undecided	28	24%
No response	06	5%	-	-	-
Total	118	100%	-	118	100%

Source: Field survey by authors

On the surface, it may look as if opinions support the claim that the newsroom is quite conducive for promoting adherence to ethics of journalism (43%) as against 24% that say 'No'. However, when we add the 'Not really' (28%) category to the 'No' category, we would have 52% of the respondents not fully convinced that the newsroom offers an ideal atmosphere to encourage the keeping of ethics of journalism. This point is again buttressed by the views given on the issue of whether majority of journalists keep ethics of the profession as observed by the interns. Here again we see clearly that 54% indicated 'No' as against 22% that say 'yes'. Even if the figures on the negative side ('Yes' and 'Undecided' categories) are merged, this would give 46% short of 54%. Based on this outcome, we could conclude that the newsroom does not offer the right atmosphere for student-journalists to adhere to the ethics of the profession.

Research question 3: How does the behaviour of professional colleagues influence interns' perception of journalism ethics?

The answer to the above research question could be seen as flowing from the answer to research question 2 presented above showing that the newsroom is not an ideal place to encourage journalists to keep the ethics of the profession. Since this is the case, there is no gainsaying the fact that the behaviour of practising journalists must be a key indicator to the student-journalists that it is hard to adhere to the ethics of the profession. Statistics in the table used in answering question 2 shows that 54% of practising journalists do not keep the ethics of journalism as observed by the interns. How then would such trainee-journalists be motivated to abide by the ethics of the profession seeing the misdemeanour of their older professional colleagues? By implication, student-journalists gain the wrong orientation right from observing their senior colleagues' behaviour in the field of practice.

This assertion is supported by the opinions of respondents on the kinds of unethical practices they identified in the behaviour of older colleagues in the profession while the former were on attachment. These include soliciting for and collecting 'brown envelopes' (euphemism for a bribe), Afghanistanism, plagiarism and even late-coming to work as well as indecent dressing. The trainee-journalists' judgement in this matter could be relied on because 94% of them had admitted that they were taught ethics of journalism before proceeding on the media attachment and 90% of the respondents actually demonstrated appreciable understanding of ethical issues in journalism as presented in table 1 above. Going by this analysis, we could conclude that the misbehaviour of practising journalists does not encourage trainee-journalists to keep ethics of the profession.

Research question 4: What is student-journalists' perception of the relevance of teaching ethics in journalism training?

In generating data to answer the above question, respondents were asked what they would do if they were in a position to decide scrapping the teaching of ethics in journalism curriculum. The responses are provided in the table below.

Table-5. Shows respondents' opinions on relevance of teaching journalism ethics

Internship makes ethics credible			Discontinue teaching of ethics		
Yes	69	59%	Yes	38	32%
No	43	36%	No	75	64%
-	-	-	-	-	-
No response	06	5%	No response	05	4%
Total	118	100%	-	118	100%

Source: Field survey by authors

On the strength of statistics displayed here, majority of opinions (64%) is against scrapping of ethics from journalism curriculum compared to 32% that say otherwise. This is not surprising because 59% of the respondents in the table above still believe that ethics are credible in themselves in spite of the misconduct of some practising journalists. Part of this misconduct is what older journalists display in the newsroom which makes such a place an unhealthy ground to imbibe sound ethical orientation by trainee-journalists. In sum, student-journalists still believe that the teaching of ethics as part of journalism curriculum is necessary.

3. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the data and answers to research questions presented in the foregoing, the following cardinal issues could be gleaned. First, the fact that there are more female students of mass communication in the survey than male students has again reaffirmed the gender imbalance in the training of prospective journalists in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. We need to quickly add that the scenario is not exclusive to Nigeria.

Chari (2013) in his study on *How New Media Technologies are Impacting Ethical Practices: Perception of Zimbabwean Journalists* found that "Sixty-eight percent (68%) of the respondents were male, while thirty-two percent (32%) were female". On the contrary, Yang and Arant (2014) who studied *The Roles and Ethics of Journalism: How Chinese Students and American Students Perceive them Similarly and Differently* observed that "Women make up the overwhelming majority of the journalism students at the U.S. and Chinese universities. While the Chinese sample was 86 percent females and 14 percent males, the U.S. sample was 70 percent females and 30 percent males". This is a clear indication of gender disparity in comparative numerical composition of practising journalists as against trainee-journalists.

Back home in Nigeria, while there are more female student-journalists in the universities and other training institutions, there are more male journalists in the field of practice. This development, of course, refreshes the call for research on why the preponderance of female trainee-journalists in contrast to male dominance in actual practice of the profession.

Another important revelation from the survey is that the respondents (student-journalists) were quite acquainted with issues of ethics of journalism before proceeding on internship. This is commendable because it gives the trainees a sound footing in getting acquainted with the norms that govern the profession they aspire to join. Again, it is equally a right step in the right direction for the students to have been given the opportunity to be exposed to varied practical experiences in different areas of mass communication through internship even though majority of them did their attachment in broadcast organizations. The reason for this lopsidedness is that the Department of Mass Communication, Taraba State University, Jalingo, at the time, restricted the students to nearby locations to the University for ease of supervision taking into consideration the 'crash' academic programme the university ran at the time in question. Taraba State has more of broadcast media outfits than print, especially in Jalingo, the capital city.

The survey shows that trainee journalists had a positive view of ethics of journalism before and after their industrial attachment experience. Before they went on attachment, majority of the respondents believed that practising journalists keep ethics of the profession. This is not unlikely because having been taught ethics in school, the students would naturally think that every journalist would want to uphold the tenets in practice. However, it is somewhat surprising that even when the students observed during their internship the untoward behaviour of some

practising journalists, their belief in ethics still stands. The only plausible explanation one could infer from opinions expressed in this survey is that the misbehaviour of some journalists has not dampen the interns' conviction in the relevance of ethics to the practice of journalism. One could only imagine what the situation would be if ethics were not taught at all during training. It is not surprising, therefore, to note that the respondents still advocated the continual teaching of ethics as part of journalism curriculum in training institutions in Nigeria. It is a well-known fact that the cause(s) of journalists' misdemeanour goes beyond what happens during their training. For instance, some of the journalists never train for the job in the first place and such practitioners would not likely be guided by ethics they know little or nothing about.

However, in spite of the fact that respondents claimed that their belief in the credibility of journalism ethics is not dampened by the misconduct of some erring journalists, they (respondents) on the contrary indicated that such acts of misbehaviour of practising journalists negatively affect the trainee-journalists' perception of ethics of the profession and that the newsroom does not offer the right atmosphere for student-journalists to learn how to adhere to the ethics of the profession. The interpretation that could be given to this claim is that the student-journalist feels discouraged by the actions of practising journalists who should ordinarily be his mentor. By implication, trainee-journalists gain the wrong orientation right from observing their senior colleagues' behaviour in the newsroom and by extension, the field of practice. Barger & Elliot (2000) cited in Hanson (2002) have noted that "entry level journalists are often blinded by the routine of news gathering and the heavy socialization that takes place when they enter into the field". Similarly, Robinson & O'Leary-Kelly (1998) in Hanson (2002) have observed that entry level journalists may adopt the attitudes and standards of the workplace, whether those standards are ethical or not". It would take a strong character not to emulate the older journalists in the field under such circumstances. In essence, there is nothing wrong with ethics of the profession but the practitioners are to blame.

These are findings that must not be glossed over if the profession of journalism in Nigeria is to be rid of unethical practices. The root cause(s) of unethical behaviour of journalists such as has been identified in this study need to be addressed squarely so as to prepare the up-and-coming journalists minds to see ethics as doable all in the best interest of the profession. This point is further buttressed by the respondents' view that they still believe the teaching of ethics as part of journalism curriculum is a necessity. One would expect the respondents to advocate the scrapping of teaching journalism ethics in schools. We could only imagine what would be the case, in view of the magnitude of unethical behaviour of journalists in Nigeria today, if ethics of journalism were not taught at all in tertiary institutions of learning in the country.

4. CONCLUSION

This study notes that in spite of the misconduct by some practising journalists as observed by the interns used in this study, the belief of the latter on the relevance of ethics to journalism practice remains firm. Respondents advocate the continual teaching of journalism ethics in schools obviously to form a strong foundation for the practitioners when they eventually get to the field. This study, therefore, concludes that internship experience has created mixed feelings for ethics of the profession in the trainee-journalists used in this research. On the one hand, the interns believe in the credibility of ethics in itself but on the other, they feel discouraged by the misconduct of some of the older hands in the profession. This is where the present study differs from those of Motlagh *et al.* (2013); Chari (2013) and Yang and Arant (2014) reviewed earlier. Essentially, while these other studies focused on journalists' interpretation of ethics from the perspective of their societal role expectation and new media influence on ethical adherence by journalists, the present study focuses on how experience at the work place affects interns' interpretation of ethics. This marks a shift of attention in studies on journalism and its ethics.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is a need to step up admission of male student-journalists in tertiary institutions in Nigeria since they would eventually form the bulk of the workforce in the field of practice.
- There should be continual teaching of ethics of journalism in schools obviously to form a firm foundation for the practitioners even though some would misbehave eventually. The situation might be worse if ethics are not taught at all.
- Older journalists should be conscious of the fact that their conduct has much influence on the perception of prospective journalists about the profession.
- Untrained hands should not be allowed to practice journalism as this is not just a mockery but brings down the reputation of the profession when such persons misbehave.
- Identified causes of unethical practices among journalists should be addressed decisively by all concerned (government, media owners, regulatory bodies, etc.) in order to make it easy for practitioners to abide by the code of practice.
- Journalists who are found wanting should be penalized accordingly to serve as a deterrent to others and as a boost to the belief of trainee-journalists in the ethics of the profession.
- This is an exploratory study which cannot be generalized to all student-journalists in Nigerian training institutions. More research into the topic is, therefore, needed to establish the validity of findings here.

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