

A Readership Survey of Yoruba Newspapers for Development Messages

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INTRODUCTION

Every human society has a language through which its members communicate. In most developing countries, however, communication in indigenous languages has been adversely affected due to the fact of their colonization. This fact of history has actually affected the sensibility of the people of the developing countries.

Language is used not only in inter-personal communication, but also in the transmission of mass mediated messages. Technology has made possible the emergence of media of mass communication, which have improved communication systems within and among communities. These media of mass communication basically fall into two broad categories. The first category is the print, which comprises, among others, newspapers and magazines. The second category is the electronic, made up of radio, television and film. What is, however, of importance is that these media disseminate messages through the use of language.

In Nigeria, there are newspapers published in indigenous languages, but are critically suffering from low awareness and patronage. Ironically, Coker (1968) says *Iroyin Yoruba*, established in 1945, was the widest read weekly in the 40s. Gradually, the people who are supposed to be the readers became more and more anglicized, and, therefore, jettisoned the reading of the indigenous language newspaper. The situation did not change despite all attempts to induce patronage through the price of the newspapers. For instance, today, while English newspapers, published in Nigeria, sell for between N40 and N80, all Yoruba newspapers carry the cover price of N20, yet they are not considerably patronized.

Thus, the essence of this paper is an assessment of the readership survey of Yoruba newspapers, particularly for development messages. In concise terms, the paper would address the issue of the extent of readership of Yoruba newspapers; the variables of the readers of the newspapers; and the effectiveness of the newspapers for the dissemination of development messages.

DEVELOPMENT

The concept 'development' has undergone a kaleidoscopic treatment over the decades. In the past, development had been largely viewed as economic, with the development of a nation being marked with such indices as Gross National Product (GNP) and income per capita. The assumption was that the benefits of economic advancement, even if initially concentrated in the metropolitan centers, would eventually trickle down to the periphery.

This assumption has been described as being both simplistic and unworkable (Habte, 1983; Hamelink, 1983; Mabogunje, 1980). The underlying point here is that national economic growth does not translate to the well-being of the citizens. Mabogunje (1980) contends that this assumption results in situations where foreign wealth, produced within the shores of an indigent country, was falsely credited to its citizenry when, in fact, such populace continues to wallow in poverty, while international statistics parades them as growing, even developing.

Meanwhile, the whole world has realized the hollowness of this and has, therefore, evolved alternative development paradigms. The indicators of these alternative paradigms are:

Human Development Index (HDI) popularized by the UNDP; its Sustainable Human Development (SHD); people-centered development through people's empowerment, popular participation and 'putting the people first'; bottom-up development from grassroots; environmental accounting; and the restructuring of the world economic and financial system along with the UN system and the Bretton Woods Institutions (Onimode, 1995: 3)

In fact, the kind of development this study is pre-occupied with is one that improves the quality of lives of people and moves the society to desirable ideals. The indicators of this for the

people are appropriate health programmes, increased food production, housing, higher income, environmental health, mass and adult literacy, urban and rural development, population control, youth and child development, justice, democracy, unity and enhancement of culture.

THE YORUBA NEWSPAPERS

Yoruba newspapers are published in Yoruba language. The Yoruba people are found in the South-West of Nigeria.

The first Yoruba newspaper was *Iwe Irohin Fun Awon Ara Egba ati Yoruba*. This newspaper was also historically significant for being the first indigenous language newspapers in Africa (Akinfeleye, 1985: 35; Duyile, 1987: 17) and indeed the first newspaper in Nigeria. *Iwe Irohin* was established by Reverend Henry Townsend, a missionary of the CMS. The maiden issue of the newspaper hit the streets of Abeokuta on December 3, 1885.

The contents of *Iwe Irohin* focused on a wide range of issues: births, deaths, movement of religious ministers; parish activities; baptism and confirmation; politics especially those concerning Abeokuta and its environs, economic matters such as the trade reports-cotton statistics and produce prices. It also included news about colonial administration, some foreign news, advertisements and public announcements.

In its first few years of existence, the newspaper was considered "hard" to read and comprehend (Akinfeleye, 1985: 34-35). The teenagers, for instance, quarreled with the strict moral philosophies espoused in the paper. In contrast, however, the elders took the contents of the newspaper as the gospel truth. Akinfeleye (1985: 33) also notes that its editorials were mostly anti-slavery while it carried no advertisement until five years of its publishing.

Apart from *Iwe Irohin*, there have been other Yoruba newspapers and these include *Iroyin Yoruba* founded in 1945 by the Allied Newspapers of Nigeria Limited (Coker, 1968) and now being published by the Africa Newspapers of Nigeria Plc; *Gbohunghohun*; *Isokan*; *Alaroye*; *Ajoro*; *Alaye* among others.

Salawu (2001) reports that Yoruba newspapers are operated like newspapers-magazine tabloids. They are newspapers, quite all right, but the way their front pages are designed with one big headline dominating the entire space tilts them

also towards the classification of magazine. Magazines are known for putting just types on their covers without any story. However, this is not to say that Yoruba newspapers do not place stories on their front pages; they do, but not much.

Salawu (2001) further notes that Yoruba newspapers usually attempt to be dramatic and sound interesting in their headlines.

THE SURVEY

This study was done in 1997. Expectedly, survey research method was adopted for the study. The method was used to measure respondents' knowledge and attitudes to Yoruba newspapers. It was also used to investigate the social and behavioural characteristics of the sample.

The study population was made of civil servants in the Oyo State Government Secretariat, Ibadan. This population was chosen because it provides a representative picture of the literate population with different levels of education. It was assumed that the population would represent the reading population.

From the population of civil servants in the Secretariat, a sample of 450 respondents across the nine ministries in the Secretariat was taken. The sampling procedure adopted for the study was systematic sampling. The instrument for the Survey Research was a self-administered questionnaire. In accordance with the spirit of the study, the questionnaire was constructed in Yoruba. The people in the sample were Yoruba.

A return rate of 360 of the 450 copies of questionnaire distributed was achieved. The return rate was 80%.

The study revealed that 277 (or 76.9%) of the respondents have a high degree of ability to read Yoruba. With a significance level of .05, it was also revealed that there is no statistically significant relationship between age and the degree of ability to read Yoruba. It was similarly revealed that there is no statistically significant relationship between respondents' level of education and their ability to read Yoruba.

Concerning the respondents' frequency of reading materials published in Yoruba, majority, that is 184 (or 51.1%) of the respondents do not, frequently, read such materials. The analysis also indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between education and frequency

of reading materials that are published in Yoruba, with the significance put at .0039. The higher the level of education, the less frequent the reading of materials published in Yoruba.

A great majority of the respondents (73.6%) are aware of Yoruba newspapers. There is a statistically significant relationship between age and awareness of Yoruba newspapers. Seventy-five percent of respondents in 11-15 age group say "Yes", 57.8% in 16-25 group, 74.8% in 36-45 age group and 80% in the 46 years and above group. The higher the age, the more the respondents were likely to be aware of Yoruba newspaper.

There is also a statistically significant relationship between level of education and awareness of Yoruba newspapers. Precisely, 61.5% of respondents in the Primary group say "Yes", 80.4% in WASC/Technical School group, 74% in OND/NCE group and 67.6% in HND/First Degree and above group.

The next point the study sought to establish was whether the respondents read the newspaper. Majority of the respondents (227 or 63.1%) read Yoruba newspapers while 88 (or 24.4%) do not read them. Again, we examined whether or not variables such as age and educational status are determinants of Yoruba newspapers readership, and it was found out that there is no statistically significant relationship between age and readership of Yoruba newspapers.

There is a statistically significant relationship between education and readership of Yoruba newspapers with the significance level put at .0338. Sixty-five percent of respondents of Primary School level read the newspaper; 64% in the WASC/Technical School category; 68% at OND/First level and 52.7% respondents in the HND/First Degree and above category. The result indicates that the higher the level of education, the lower the readership of newspapers. Naturally, the next issue the study considered was the frequency of the readership by the respondents. Data gathered revealed that most people do not read the newspaper regularly. The newspapers are weeklies, if we take people who read them weekly and, perhaps, once a month, as regular readers, the number we have is 106 (or 29.5%). One hundred and sixty-three (or 45.3%) read them occasionally.

We, then, considered the factor of education whether or not it is a determinant in this response.

The analysis reveals that there is a statistically significant relationship between education and frequency of readership of the newspapers. Twenty-seven percent and 15.9% of respondents at the primary school level read the newspapers weekly and once a month respectively; 22.2% and 10.2% of the WASC/Technical School level; 22% and 8% at the OND/NCE level; and 13.5% and 1.4% at HND, First degree and above level. The inference is that the higher the level of education, the less regular the readership of the newspapers.

A variable such as means of obtaining the newspaper for reading may also give us an insight into the kind of attachment people have to these newspapers. Only 52 (or 14.4%) of the respondents spend their money in the purchase of the newspapers. Eighty-four (or 23.3%) borrow, 88 (or 24.4%) read from a joint, for instance an office, vendors' stands etc, while another 43 (or 11.9%) just read them when they come across them by chance.

But, we needed to consider the variable of income level as a factor in this regard. Analysis reveals a statistically significant relationship between income level and means of obtaining the newspapers. Twenty seven percent of the respondents in the 01-03 income level purchase the newspaper, 15.4% in the 04-06 income level, 13% in the 07-09 income level, and 17% at the 10 and above income level. The observation is that the lower the income level, the greater the chance of respondents to buy the newspapers. What this connotes is that people with less purchasing power purchase the newspapers more. This may sound strange but when we consider the finding about education as a determinant of the readership level of Yoruba newspapers, we find out that people of higher education who are most likely to be in the higher income level read the Yoruba newspapers less and less regularly than the low income earners.

But, what of the people who do not read the newspapers, can we know why they do not? Of the 92 who responded to this question, 24 indicate they do not read the newspapers because they cannot comprehend the language used; 53 say they do not read because the newspapers are not easily available. The remaining 15 say they do not feel good being identified with the newspapers. Of these fifteen, 7 say that they feel reading the newspapers demeans one's status, while the other 8 say they feel ashamed reading the newspapers.

Importantly, it is instructive to know that very many of the respondents did not respond to this particular question. The inference is that they read the newspapers, therefore, they needed not to respond to the question. This has been established already, earlier, in this study.

Meanwhile, variables of age, education and residence at childhood were examined to know whether or not they are factors in the response to this question. The analysis reveals that there is statistically significant relationship between age and why people do not read Yoruba newspapers with the level of significance put at .0151. Two percent and 6.7% of the respondents of 16-25 age group say the Yoruba newspapers demeans their status and make them feel ashamed respectively; 4.2% and 1.0% for 26-35 category; 0.8% and 3.1% for 36-45 group; and 0.2% and nil for 46 and above age group. The observation is that the younger the age, the more likely the respondent not feeling good being identified with the newspapers.

The study, again considered whether or not respondents want the publishing of Yoruba newspapers to continue. An overwhelming majority, 259 (or 71.9%) of the respondents want the publishing of the newspapers to continue. Some 22 (or 6.1%) do not want it continued, while 15 (or 4.2%) are just indifferent and 64 (17.8%) did not respond. A further analysis indicates a statistically significant relationship between education and the desire to have the publishing of the newspaper continued with the significance level put at .0420.

A second leg to this study is the readership of the Yoruba newspapers for development messages. The first question is: do respondents find development messages in the newspapers? Of the 252 who responded to the question, 191 (or 57.4%) said they found development messages in the newspapers, 47 (or 18.8%) could not affirm this, while only 14 (or 5.6%) said "No".

Even for people who claimed to have been finding development messages in the newspapers, how often do they find the messages? Among the 214 respondents who found development messages in the newspapers ("Very Often", "Often" and "Occasionally" group), 140 (38.9%) indicated they found them quite often ("Very Often" and "Often"). Seventy-four (20%), however, said they found them occasionally, while only one of the respondents said he never found development messages in

the newspapers.

In summary, respondents have a positive perception and attitude to Yoruba newspapers. Two hundred and twenty-seven (or 63.1%) of the respondents read Yoruba newspapers. However, the fact that only a few of the respondents (29.5%) said they read the Yoruba newspapers regularly is traceable to the general poor reading habits of people (Nwosu 1990: 91).

Also, the fact that most readers of Yoruba newspapers do not spend their money to buy them is not peculiar to the Yoruba newspapers alone. The economic environment is harsh for publishing in Nigeria and more so for newspaper publishing. As a result, cover prices of newspapers are on the increase. This, coupled with the fact that people only have very weak purchasing power as their incomes do not match the galloping inflation, there is the inability on their part to buy the newspapers. The English titles suffer this low sales as much as their Yoruba counterparts (Obe, 1991: 29; Egbochuku, 1996).

But, the fact that people still go to "joints" to read Yoruba newspapers and borrow from their friends to read attests to the fact that people are very much interested in acquiring information through this medium.

CONCLUSION

In a world, especially the developing countries where there are a myriad of problems confronting humanity, discussing development and ways of facilitating it cannot be over-emphasized.

If the kind of development we are talking about is pro-people, then, how do we get those people informed, and, therefore, mobilize their informed capacities? The answer lies in communication. Information can only be made available through communication. Therefore, communication is a factor in the development process.

Although, the pervasive influence of the mass media has been debunked (Klapper, 1960), the fact still remains that they are potent channels for generating awareness (Soola, 1988: 251) and accelerating information flow. Therefore, they are very relevant in mobilizing people for development efforts.

Broadcast media, radio in particular, have been adjudged to be the most potent in (rural) development communication efforts (Moemeka, 1990: 65). Yet, the print media have their own advantages.

Moemeka (1990:63) notes that the print media have an enduring characteristic which neither the radio nor the television has. He adds that newspaper can be read and re-read at convenience, thus allowing for fuller and better understanding of message contents. The newspaper, according to him, can also be stored away for future use, thus making for the preservation of materials that are considered important for future reference. Nwosu (1990:190-191) also confirms the functions of the print media.

If the print media must continue to offer their benefits, their sustenance must be encouraged. And, if indigenous language newspapers, as a section of these media, going by their perceived potentials for informing and mobilizing people for development efforts must survive, then they must be given a chance. Dare (1990: 8) paints the picture of the pitiable situation of the indigenous language press. According to him the bulk of newspaper advertising goes to the English language newspapers, adding, as a consequence, the indigenous language newspapers are for the most part a miserable adjunct to the English language press. He, further, notes that because it is presumed that there is only a small audience for them, they are produced for the most part on a weekly basis and as a consequence, they attract little advertisements and thus, they are not self-sustaining. And, because they are not self-sustaining, because they are held to constitute a drain on resources, Dare observes that little effort is made to develop them and broaden their appeal. And, because such effort is lacking, the indigenous language newspapers continue to stagnate.

The root of this problem of discrimination against indigenous language newspapers, in favour of their English counterparts is found in the discrimination against the nation's indigenous languages and the preference for English language which, though, foreign is the official language of the nation.

If the indigenous languages and our communities must survive and grow, the media, especially, the print must be encouraged to use them. Print media aid literacy, therefore, the media operating in these languages must be encouraged for it is with these languages that our people can be effectively informed for development purposes (Fafowora, 1995: 469). Banjo (1995: 186) underscores the indispensability of the media and creative writing in this regard.

Based on the foregoing, this study, therefore, recommends the following;

1. Government and development agencies/non-governmental organisations should consider the promotion of a reading culture, especially in indigenous languages, as a development programme that should be pursued vigorously. Media campaigns should be mounted, among other things, while encouragement should be given to creative writing and publishing in indigenous languages.
2. Public and private sectors, including media operators, should also come together to organise seminars and workshops where there can be cross-fertilisation of ideas on how to improve the lot of writings in indigenous languages, in general, and indigenous language newspapers, in particular.
3. Publishers of indigenous language newspapers – government and private – should strive to make the newspapers dailies and easily available. Through this, the newspapers can serve the information needs of the people and become more familiar with them.
4. Publishers of indigenous language newspapers should also continue to make the newspapers affordable in order to encourage purchase and readership.
5. The various institutes and departments of mass communication/journalism across the country should also help in this crusade in their admission policy and curricula. They should make a credit pass in, at least, an indigenous language compulsory for candidates seeking admission into their schools. And, in their curricula, they should make compulsory for the students, the offering of courses in, at least, one of the indigenous languages.

KEYWORDS Adopted; coverages; attitude; perception; education

ABSTRACT The essence of the paper is the readership survey of Yoruba Newspapers, particularly for development messages. In concise terms, the paper addressed the issue of the extent of readership of Yoruba newspapers; the variables of the readers of the newspapers; and the coverage of development messages in the newspapers. The study adopted the survey research method. The study population was made of civil servants in the Oyo State Government Secretariat, Ibadan. The sampling procedure adopted was systematic sampling while the study instrument was a self-administered questionnaire. Among other things, the study revealed

that respondents have a positive perception and attitude to Yoruba Newspapers. Two hundred and twenty-seven (or 63.1%) of the respondents read Yoruba newspapers while only a few of the respondents (29.5%) read them regularly. There is a statistically significant relationship between education and readership of the newspapers with the significance level put at .0338. A good number of the respondents – 191 or 57.4% of those who responded to the particular question said they read development messages in the newspapers. The study concluded by highlighting the importance of communication to development. It, therefore, advocated that if indigenous language newspapers, going by their perceived potentials for informing and mobilizing people for development efforts must survive, then they must be given a chance.

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