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AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF SOLUTIONS JOURNALISM AMONG STUDENTS IN SELECTED UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH-WEST NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the awareness and knowledge of solutions journalism among the undergraduate students of selected universities in South-West Nigeria. It was driven by the concerns concern that although solutions journalism is gaining global acceptance as an evidence-based approach to reporting societal responses to problems, its introduction into journalism education and students' understanding of the concept in Nigeria are still limited. The study investigated students' level of awareness and knowledge of the principles and practices of solutions journalism. The study was anchored on the Diffusion of Innovations and the Constructive Journalism Theories. These theories describe the diffusion of innovative journalistic practices and the growing focus on constructive news reporting. The survey method was employed, and structured questionnaires were administered to a sample of 356 undergraduate students drawn from selected federal, state and private universities in South-West Nigeria. It was found that students had moderate to low awareness of solutions journalism and there were significant differences between the institutional types. The study also revealed that the respondents had a very limited and incomplete knowledge of the concept. While many students understood that solutions journalism was an evidence-based approach to reporting that is about solutions in society, they struggled to differentiate it from traditional journalism. The study finds that solutions journalism has reached a certain level of conceptual awareness among undergraduate students, but their knowledge and skills in the practice of solutions journalism are still limited. The study calls for the incorporation of solutions journalism in the curriculum of journalism and mass communication, provision of more institutional support for teaching solutions journalism, and capacity building programmes for lecturers, as well as the creation of locally relevant teaching materials to improve students' awareness, knowledge and practical competence in solutions journalism.

Keywords: Solutions Journalism, Awareness, Knowledge, Undergraduate Students, Journalism Education

INTRODUCTION

In an era characterised by persistent social, economic, and political uncertainties, societies across the globe face increasingly complex challenges that require informed public discourse and collective action. Journalism remains central to this process because it shapes public understanding of societal issues, influences responses to crises, and facilitates democratic participation. As a watchdog and mirror of society, journalism performs the crucial functions of informing citizens, promoting transparency, and fostering accountability within governance systems (McNair, 2017). Nevertheless, declining trust in news institutions, growing audience disengagement, and concerns about the effectiveness of journalism in addressing societal problems have generated renewed debates about the role and relevance of contemporary journalism.

Traditionally, journalism has been dominated by narratives centred on conflict, crises, scandals, and societal failures. While such reporting performs an important democratic function by exposing wrongdoing and drawing attention to public problems, scholars argue that excessive emphasis on negative

events may contribute to audience fatigue, cynicism, declining trust in news media, and reduced civic engagement (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; Hanitzsch et al., 2019). Consequently, criticism has emerged that conventional journalism often informs audiences about problems without sufficiently examining credible responses to those problems. These concerns have stimulated interest in alternative reporting approaches capable of enhancing journalism's contribution to public problem-solving. One such approach is Solutions Journalism, defined as rigorous and evidence-based reporting that investigates responses to social problems and evaluates their effectiveness while adhering to the professional principles of accuracy, objectivity, and accountability (Curry & Hammonds, 2014). Rather than focusing exclusively on problems, Solutions Journalism examines how individuals, communities, organisations, and governments respond to societal challenges. Studies conducted primarily in the United States and Europe suggest that solutions-oriented reporting can improve audience engagement, strengthen trust in news media, and encourage constructive civic participation (McIntyre, Dahmen, & Abdenour, 2018; Thier, 2016).

The growing interest in Solutions Journalism has extended beyond Western media systems. In Africa, scholars have increasingly discussed its potential for addressing developmental challenges, public health issues, governance concerns, and community development initiatives (Oso & Pate, 2017; Ufuophu-Biri & Idowu, 2019). In Nigeria, media organisations such as Premium Times and Nigeria Health Watch have incorporated solutions-oriented reporting into aspects of their coverage, particularly in areas relating to health, governance, and development communication (Nigeria Health Watch, 2025). However, despite this emerging interest, the integration of Solutions Journalism into journalism education remains limited. Existing studies identify barriers such as inadequate training opportunities, insufficient institutional support, resource constraints, and the continued dominance of conflict-oriented reporting traditions within journalism practice and education (Ufuophu-Biri & Idowu, 2019).

Despite the growing body of literature on Solutions Journalism, important gaps remain. A review of relevant studies published between 2010 and 2025 and indexed in Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and African Journals Online (AJOL), using search terms including solutions journalism, constructive journalism, journalism education, journalism students, and Nigeria, indicates that most empirical research has been conducted in North America and Europe. Consequently, there is limited evidence regarding how Solutions Journalism is understood, taught, and received within African journalism education contexts. Furthermore, existing studies have focused predominantly on newsroom practices, media content, audience effects, and journalists' perceptions, with comparatively little attention devoted to undergraduate journalism students who constitute the future workforce of the media industry. Methodologically, much of the literature has relied on qualitative approaches such as content analysis, interviews, focus groups, and case studies, thereby creating a need for survey-based studies capable of generating broader empirical evidence.

Theoretical perspectives such as Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 2003) and Constructive Journalism Theory (Gyldensted, 2015) have been employed in previous studies to explain the emergence, acceptance, and application of innovative journalistic practices. However, their application to understanding awareness and knowledge of Solutions Journalism among journalism students remains limited, particularly in Nigeria. The review of available literature further revealed no empirical study specifically examining undergraduate students' awareness and knowledge of Solutions Journalism across federal, state, and private universities in South-West Nigeria, a region that hosts some of the country's most prominent journalism and media studies programmes.

According to Rogers' (2003) Diffusion of Innovations Theory, awareness or knowledge of an innovation represents the first stage in the innovation-decision process and influences subsequent persuasion, adoption, and implementation. Assessing students' awareness and knowledge of Solutions Journalism is therefore essential for understanding the readiness of future journalists to engage with emerging approaches to news reporting. Against this background, this study examines awareness and knowledge of Solutions Journalism among undergraduate students in selected federal, state, and private universities in South-West Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to determine students' level of awareness of Solutions Journalism, assess their knowledge of its principles and practices, and examine variations in awareness and knowledge across different institutional types.

The study provides evidence that will assist journalism curriculum developers, journalism educators, university administrators, accreditation agencies, professional journalism bodies, and media training organisations in strengthening the integration of Solutions Journalism into journalism education and professional development programmes. The study will also contribute to scholarly understanding of

innovation diffusion and constructive journalism within the context of journalism education in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Solutions Journalism

Solutions journalism is a type of journalism that looks at solutions to social issues, but also explores how and why the solutions are working. It is based on a solid foundation of rigorous, evidence-based reporting (McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017). According to the Solutions Journalism Network (2017), it is a "rigorous, evidence-based approach to reporting that focuses on how people and institutions are addressing societal challenges. The Solutions Journalism Network (2022) outlines four essential elements of solutions journalism: Response Focus: The story must be about a response to a social problem and how that response is working. Evidence: The story should show evidence of the impact of the response, including strengths and weaknesses. Insight: The story should discuss lessons learned and implications, and how the response could be replicated, scaled or adapted.

Scholars have established connections between solutions journalism and other journalistic traditions. It has some common characteristics with civic journalism, especially with regard to citizen engagement (Loizzo, Midberry & Dahmen, 2017), and shares some elements with constructive journalism, which draws on principles of positive psychology in news reporting (McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2018). Similarities have also been drawn to peace journalism, which questions the patterns of conflict journalism (Midberry & Dahmen, 2017). Davies (1999) likens solutions journalism to investigative journalism, both of which use rigorous approaches to investigate systemic issues and responses.

Awareness of Solutions Journalism

Awareness is defined as students' knowledge of the existence and the basic concept of solutions journalism. In this study, awareness is defined as the first phase of exposure to the innovation, in which people become aware that solutions journalism is a unique type of journalism that involves evidence-based reporting of societal responses to problems (Solutions Journalism Network, 2017; McIntyre, 2019). It does not necessarily mean that they know the term and the concept well, but rather that they recognise it and the concept as an alternative to traditional problem-centred reporting.

In Nigerian Journalism education, awareness is the first step in the diffusion process, as it determines whether the paradigm will enter into the cognitive space of the students or not before any meaningful knowledge is acquired. Solutions Journalism Network's focus on awareness-raising through training programmes, workshops and educational resources has played a key role in bringing the concept to journalism communities around the world (Solutions Journalism Network, 2023).

Knowledge of Solutions Journalism

Knowledge is not just awareness; it's the depth of understanding of the principles, pillars and operational criteria of solutions journalism. This variable is measured by the degree of students' understanding of the defining characteristics of solutions journalism: responses, evidence of effectiveness, insight into implementation, and recognition of limitations (Solutions Journalism Network, 2022; McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017).

In this study, knowledge is defined as declarative knowledge (knowing what solutions journalism is) and procedural knowledge (understanding the difference between solutions journalism and traditional journalism, and how it is done). In South-West Nigerian universities, the unevenness in knowledge levels is an early stage of conceptual diffusion, where there is a basic level of knowledge but not a deep level of methods. McIntyre and Lough (2019) point out that solutions journalism is not just about the principles, but also how to apply them in reporting situations.

Avoiding the confusion between Solutions Journalism and other types of journalism.

To grasp the role of solutions journalism in the media landscape, it is important to differentiate it from other forms of journalism. Solutions journalism is different from traditional reporting, which tends to focus on problems without offering any solutions, because it offers in-depth coverage of the work done to solve a societal problem.

First, solutions journalism is not "good news" journalism. The latter tends to be uplifting stories that elicit positive emotions, but these stories are often not of wider societal importance (SJN, 2023). In contrast, solutions journalism assesses responses that can be replicated or adapted to solve similar problems in other places. Second, solutions journalism is not advocacy journalism. Advocacy journalism can also be

defined as promoting a cause or being partisan to sway public opinion. Advocacy journalists can try to make a difference by promoting certain viewpoints, but solutions journalism takes a more neutral approach. It thoroughly examines and documents responses to social problems, but does not advocate or reject any policies or organisations (McIntyre et al., 2022). Third, solutions journalism is different from development journalism. Development journalism focuses on the long-term development of society within the framework of national or regional development, and aims to bring the gap between the policymakers and the citizens closer by focusing on development issues like poverty alleviation, education and health (Shah, 1996). Solutions journalism is more expansive, and sometimes it goes beyond geographical boundaries and focuses on specific interventions that tackle a variety of issues.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Solutions journalism has become a unique reaction to the negativity bias, sensationalism and problem-centric framing that have long plagued the mainstream news media in recent years. Solutions journalism is defined as "rigorous reporting on solutions to social issues, which goes beyond simply describing a problem and looks for evidence-based solutions, interventions and initiatives that can help solve the problem" (McIntyre & Lough, 2019).

Initial research was directed at learning more about the fundamental effects of solutions journalism on audiences. McIntyre and Sobel (2017) conducted a randomised experiment with 755 U.S. adults recruited via an online panel. The studies were either problem-oriented or solution-oriented. The study, based on theories of constructive journalism and media effects, revealed that readers of solutions journalism were more optimistic, more effective, and more relevant about news content. The results confirm that solutions journalism can re-engage audiences who are tired of negative news cycles. Likewise, McIntyre (2019) conducted a survey experiment with 392 undergraduate students in the U.S. and found that readers' intentions to share articles and seek more information were significantly improved when they read a solutions journalism piece. Interestingly, solutions journalism did not always lead to greater policy support, indicating a more complex impact on civic behaviours, while it did lead to greater perceived hope.

In addition to studying solutions journalism at the individual level, researchers also examined the potential of solutions journalism to impact the broader community. Using social constructionism, Wenzel, Gerson, and Moreno (2016) conducted six focus groups with 48 African-American and Latino participants. They discovered that the traditional problem-centred reporting style perpetuated stereotypes and did not accurately reflect community life, whereas solutions-oriented reporting did. The results highlight the potential of solutions journalism to disrupt dominant narratives and create more inclusive media representations. Some scholars have suggested that theoretical framework is key to understanding the impact of solutions journalism on public discourse. In the context of survey research, Nelson and Wilkins (2017) found that agenda-setting theory can be used to raise public awareness of issues, but also for solutions-focused stories to raise public awareness of solutions rather than social problems. Based on positive psychology, Gyldensted (2015) claimed that solutions journalism can contribute to the formation of collective resilience and social discourse. McIntyre (2018) used social constructionism in a content analysis of solutions-oriented articles, and found that solutions journalism constructs reality in ways that emphasize human agency and problem solving, supporting its potential as a constructive force.

These claims were also supported by other empirical studies. Weaver and Wilhoit (2012) conducted a survey of 500 U.S. adults and discovered that readers who were engaged and optimistic in response to the stories were more likely to take civic action. Farr and Schäfer (2014) used an experimental design with 200 German readers to test how solutions journalism affects media credibility. Their findings showed that solution-oriented reporting had a positive impact on trust, fairness and credibility of news media. Likewise, Kim (2015) reported that solutions journalism triggered hope, inspiration and agency, which are emotions that are directly associated with engagement and pro-social behaviour.

More recently, Weaver and Wilhoit (2017) showed that solutions journalism increased political efficacy in a large-scale survey of 600 U.S. adults, which resulted in an increase in engagement in democratic processes, including voting and volunteering. In a study of the emotional aspects of solutions journalism, Farr and Schäfer (2018) conducted focus group discussions with German citizens and discovered a broad range of emotions that surfaced in response to solutions journalism, ranging from hope to sadness to frustration, and that influenced the willingness to act. Kim and Weaver (2019) experimented with 180 participants and found that solution-oriented content was more effective than problem-only reporting in terms of information retention and comprehension.

Although there has been great progress in the knowledge of audience engagement, emotional response, and media credibility, research on the incorporation of solutions journalism into formal education is still limited, especially in developing regions. The majority of the studies that have been conducted are experimental or qualitative studies that target audiences and practitioners, and there is limited application of survey-based studies that would be able to more broadly investigate awareness and knowledge of solutions journalism among students. Moreover, the literature is dominated by the Western context, and there is a lack of information in other parts of the world, such as Nigeria. Given the above, it would be important to explore the perception and understanding of solutions journalism among students and to gain insights into how solutions journalism can be adapted to address the local needs and realities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory was anchored on Diffusion of Innovations Theory and the Constructive Journalism Theory. Theories provide insights into how new ideas and practices such as solutions journalism can be spread in communities and influence societal change.

Diffusion of Innovations Theory

The Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) Theory was introduced by Everett M. Rogers in 1962. This theory aims to describe how new ideas and technologies spread through cultures and social systems (Rogers, 2003). According to the DOI theory, innovations are shared through certain channels over a period of time within a social system. Rogers described five stages of the adoption process: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation. The five assumptions of the theory, namely innovations' relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability and observability, help determine the appeal of an innovation and the likelihood that it will be accepted by a target audience (Rogers, 2003). The concept of solution journalism in this study is an innovation, and students are a social system in which the diffusion process takes place. The theory provides an explanation of how solutions journalism is diffused in the social system of students in selected universities of the South-West region of Nigeria.

Constructive Journalism Theory

Constructive Journalism Theory was developed in 2015 by Cathrine Gyldensted in response to the negative focus of traditional journalism. The theory promotes solution-oriented and future-oriented journalism, based on principles of positive psychology (Gyldensted, 2015). Constructive journalism is designed to give a balanced view by looking at how the challenges are being tackled, to engage and inform the public.

The theory is based on the premise that journalism has the potential to be a powerful enabler of citizen empowerment and a catalyst for action if it is not just about problems, but about solutions. Constructive Journalism Theory serves as the normative and pedagogical foundation for this study to understand the relevance of solutions journalism education, which is the expectation that students should not only identify problems but also explore viable solutions to the problems in society.

METHOD

The study adopted a survey method to examine the awareness and knowledge of Solutions Journalism among undergraduate students studying Mass Communication and related media programmes in selected universities in South-West Nigeria. The study covered three universities representing different ownership categories: the University of Lagos (UNILAG), representing the federal university category; Lagos State University (LASU), representing the state university category; and Fountain University, representing the private university category. These institutions were selected to provide representation of the three major university ownership types within the study area and to enable comparison of students' awareness and knowledge across institutional contexts.

The target population comprised 3,251 undergraduate students enrolled in Mass Communication and Media Studies programmes in the three selected universities. The population figure was obtained from the official departmental records of the participating institutions for the study period. The use of departmental records ensured that the sampling frame was based on the actual enrolment of students in the mass communication programmes rather than an estimated university-wide population.

A sample size of 356 students was determined from the total population of 3,251 using Taro Yamane's formula at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. A multi-stage sampling procedure

was subsequently employed. At the first stage, the three universities were selected to represent federal, state and private university ownership categories. At the second stage, the population of students in the department in each university was identified from departmental records, and the sample was allocated proportionately according to the size of each university's student population. At the third stage, questionnaires were administered to eligible undergraduate students within the selected departments. Because complete and accessible student lists were not available to the researcher at the point of questionnaire administration, convenience sampling was used at the final stage to reach students who were available and willing to participate.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the study in line with the research questions. The data collected were analysed to determine students' level of awareness and knowledge of solutions journalism. Inferential statistics were employed to test the significance of responses.

Research Question One: Level of Awareness of Solutions Journalism

Research Question One examined students' awareness of solutions journalism. Six items were used to measure awareness and responses were analysed using one-sample t-tests against a test value of 3 (neutral).

Table 3: Level of Awareness Among Students by Institution Types

Awareness Items	Institution	N	Mean	SD	95% CI
Heard solutions journalism	Federal University	106	2.47	1.114	2.26-2.69
	State University	198	2.85	1.039	2.71-2.99
	Private University	17	3.88	1.317	3.21-4.56
Understand Solutions Journalism	Federal University	106	3.03	1.238	2.79-3.27
	State University	198	3.22	1.158	3.06-3.38
	Private University	17	3.82	1.074	3.27-4.38
Distinguish from conventional journalism	Federal University	106	2.96	1.187	2.73-3.19
	State University	198	3.13	1.188	2.96-3.29
	Private University	17	3.24	1.091	2.67-3.80
Focuses on responses to problems	Federal University	106	2.97	1.134	2.75-3.19
	State University	198	3.19	1.076	3.04-3.34
	Private University	17	3.94	0.748	3.56-4.33
Differs from advocacy/activism	Federal University	106	3.17	1.183	2.94-3.40
	State University	198	3.37	1.018	3.23-3.51
	Private University	17	4.06	0.659	3.72-4.40
Media organisations practice	Federal University	106	3.32	1.109	3.11-3.53
	State University	198	3.11	1.115	2.95-3.26
	Private University	17	3.06	1.391	2.34-3.77

Source: Researcher's field work, 2026

Data revealed marked differences in awareness by institution type. Students in private universities consistently had the highest awareness on all items. The mean (M) of the federal university students was 2.47, while that of the state university students was slightly higher at 2.85 and the private university students had the highest at 3.88 for "heard solutions journalism". Likewise, the highest mean (M=3.82) was obtained by the private university students and moderate means were obtained by the federal (M=3.03) and state (M=3.22) students in understanding the term. Students' awareness of the difference between solutions journalism and advocacy/activist journalism was the highest, with private university students showing the highest awareness (M=4.06), followed by state (M=3.37) and federal (M=3.17) students. However, the mean (M=3.32) of federal university students for their conceptual awareness of media organisations that practice solutions journalism was the highest, followed by state university students (M=3.11) and private university students (M=3.06), indicating that conceptual awareness does not necessarily lead to knowledge of practical applications.

Research Question Two: Level of Knowledge of Solutions Journalism

Research Question Two examine students' knowledge of solutions journalism. Four items were used to

assess knowledge and responses were analysed using 1-sample t-tests against a test value of 3 (neutral).

Table 4: Level of Knowledge of Solutions Journalism Among Students

Knowledge Items	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% CI
Solutions journalism focuses on evidence-based reporting of societal responses to problems	11.479	320	.001	0.604	0.50-0.71
Solutions journalism is different from traditional journalism because it highlights both challenges and responses	12.006	320	.001	0.648	0.54-0.75
Learnt about solutions journalism before now	-5.200	320	.001	-0.305	-0.42-0.19
Solutions journalism is an essential aspect of modern journalism training	10.253	320	.001	0.514	0.42-0.61

Source: Researcher's field work, 2026

The results reveal a mixed picture of students' knowledge. The majority of respondents indicated that solutions journalism focuses on evidence-based reporting of societal responses to problems (t=11.479, MD=0.604, p<.001). This aligns with one of the pillars of solutions journalism—that journalists should identify solutions people and organisations are proffering to issues, not fixating on problems. Complementing this insight, students strongly agreed that solutions journalism differs from traditional journalism because it highlights both challenges and responses (t=12.006, MD=0.648, p<.001).

However, the results also show that students had not learned solutions journalism before the study (t=-5.200, MD=-0.305, p<.001). The negative mean difference indicates a high level of disagreement, suggesting low prior exposure or awareness of the concept. Despite this gap, students believed that solutions journalism is an essential aspect of modern journalism training (t=10.253, MD=0.514, p<.001), pointing towards possible interest in and support for integrating the approach into journalism curricula.

Table 5: One-Way ANOVA of Level of Knowledge of Solutions Journalism Among Students

Knowledge Items	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Solutions journalism focuses on evidence-based reporting					
Between Groups	0.462	2	0.231	0.258	0.773
Within Groups	284.292	318	0.894		
Solutions journalism is different from traditional journalism					
Between Groups	3.952	2	1.975	2.127	0.121
Within Groups	295.272	318	0.929		
Learnt about solutions journalism before now					
Between Groups	34.725	2	17.362	17.289	.001
Within Groups	319.356	318	1.004		
Solutions journalism is an essential aspect of modern journalism training					
Between Groups	7.329	2	3.665	4.645	.010
Within Groups	250.858	318	0.789		

Source: Researcher's field work, 2026

The one-way ANOVA results indicate significant differences between groups on certain items. For the item "learnt about solutions journalism before now," the variation across groups is statistically significant [F(2,318) =17.289, p<.001], suggesting that students from different institutions had substantially different prior exposure to solutions journalism.

Table 6: Multiple Comparisons of Level of Solutions Journalism Knowledge Among Students

Dependent Variable	(I) Institution Types	(J) Institution Types	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Solutions journalism focuses on evidence-based reporting				
	Federal University	State University	.002	.222
	Federal University	Private University	-.170	.326
	State University	Private University	-.169	.306
Solutions journalism is different from traditional journalism				
	Federal University	State University	-.232*	.046
	Federal University	Private University	-.274	.277
	State University	Private University	-.042	.524
Learnt about solutions journalism before now				
	Federal University	State University	-.045	.225
	Federal University	Private University	-1.392*	.000
	State University	Private University	-1.347*	.000
Solutions journalism is an essential aspect of modern journalism training				
	Federal University	State University	-.212*	.049
	Federal University	Private University	-.651*	.005
	State University	Private University	-.439	.051

Source: Researcher's field work, 2026

Post-hoc comparisons reveal significant differences between private and public university students. For "learnt about solutions journalism before now," private university students reported significantly higher prior exposure than both federal (MD=-1.392, p<.001) and state (MD=-1.347, p<.001) university students, with no significant difference between federal and state universities. Similarly, for "solutions journalism is an essential aspect of modern journalism training," federal university students differed significantly from both state (MD=-0.212, p<.049) and private (MD=-0.651, p<.005) university students. This suggests that students at federal institutions may be less convinced of the importance of solutions journalism compared to their counterparts at state and private universities.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Awareness of Solutions Journalism Among Students

The study reveals that students' awareness of solutions journalism is moderate but uneven, with significant variations across institutional types. The overall mean for students having "heard solutions journalism" was 2.78 (SD=1.122), falling below the midpoint of the scale and indicating low prior exposure. This finding is consistent with Ajibade's (2019) observation that adoption of innovative journalistic practices in Nigerian universities remains uneven and dependent on institutional factors. The disparity across institutional types

is notable. Private university students recorded the highest awareness (M=3.88), followed by state (M=2.85) and federal (M=2.47) university students.

This pattern can be explained through Rogers' (2003) Diffusion of Innovations Theory. Private institutions, with greater curricular autonomy and flexibility, can introduce innovative content without bureaucratic delays. As Ajibade (2019) argued, organisational structures significantly influence the adoption of educational reforms. This finding is consistent with Aina's (2021) observation that universities with stronger engagement and curriculum integration tend to foster better understanding of innovative concepts. The relatively low awareness among federal university students may be attributed to the rigidity of Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) and the predominance of legacy journalism curricula that prioritise traditional watchdog roles. The National Universities Commission's control over curriculum design makes integration of innovative approaches difficult without systemic policy changes. This finding aligns with Schiffrin and Behrman's (2017) assertion that institutional support is crucial for embedding innovative journalistic practices within educational programmes.

Students demonstrated the strongest awareness that solutions journalism differs from advocacy or activism reporting (M=3.34), and they significantly perceived that solutions journalism focuses on reporting responses to social problems (M=3.16). However, their ability to distinguish solutions journalism from conventional journalism remained modest (M=3.08). This finding aligns with McIntyre and Lough's (2019) observation that solutions journalism's conceptual boundaries remain unclear to those without formal training. The students' partial grasp of the response focus pillar but limited internalisation of the insight and evidence pillars reflects what Rogers (2003) described as the "knowledge" stage of diffusion—where individuals become aware of an innovation but lack full understanding of its attributes. The finding that federal university students recorded the highest mean for knowing media organisations that practice solutions journalism (M=3.32) compared to state (M=3.11) and private (M=3.06) students is particularly noteworthy. This suggests that higher conceptual awareness does not necessarily translate into knowledge of practical applications. It may be that federal university students, despite lower overall awareness, have been exposed to more discussions about media organisations through their coursework, even if they have not been formally introduced to the concept of solutions journalism

Knowledge of Solutions Journalism Among Students

The study reveals that students' knowledge of solutions journalism is basic and fragmented. Students expressed high levels of agreement that solutions journalism emphasises evidence-based reporting of societal reactions to problems ($t=11.479$, $MD=0.604$, $p<.001$) and that it is different from traditional journalism because it also involves focus on problems and societal responses ($t=12.006$, $MD=0.648$, $p<.001$). The results, however, were significantly low ($T=-5.200$, $MD=-0.305$, $p<.001$), which means that the students are in the "knowledge" stage, they are aware of an idea, but don't understand it completely (Rogers, 2003).

This is in line with McIntyre (2019) who found that people can learn about principles of solutions journalism without having to attend a formal course. Knowledge is still limited, with the students being aware of the response orientation but not the pillars of insight and evidence; the limited knowledge in these areas indicates that students were not aware of core attributes in an early stage. The attributes that Curry and Hammonds (2014) mentioned above – rigorous evidence and critical analysis – are something that students have not fully absorbed yet in order to practice solutions journalism. This discovery corroborates McIntyre and Lough's (2019) observation that knowledge of solutions journalism must include an understanding of how it is applied in reporting situations.

The significant differences between private and public university students on prior exposure are particularly noteworthy. Prior exposure of private university students was significantly higher than that of federal and state university students. This could be explained by the flexibility of the curriculum, smaller class sizes, and the better ties to industry in private institutions. This finding corroborates earlier studies

conducted by Ajibade (2019) and Aina (2021) which established that institutional flexibility and networking with the profession are important factors that determine the use of innovative journalistic practices. The study's private university, Fountain University, has been mentioned as taking a special interest in infusing solutions journalism into its curriculum by promoting faculty members who have attended the Solutions Journalism Network's trainings.

The students at federal universities were the least confident that solutions journalism is an integral part of contemporary journalism training. This may be a result of the prevalence of traditional journalism courses in federal institutions, which focuses on the watchdog function of journalism and may doubt solutions-oriented journalism, as it is perceived as less journalism and more academic work. Like Graves and Konieczna (2015) noted, journalists often find it difficult to balance reporting solutions with traditional ideas about newsworthiness and professional identity.

As for the development of positive attitudes in the students, from the Constructive Journalism Theory (Gyldensted, 2015) point of view, it indicates that the students intuitively felt that the ethical role of journalism consists of displaying resilience and viable solutions, while they were still restricted in their level of knowledge. Pupils seem to have a grasp of the fact that journalism should not simply inform people about problems, it should also probe answers. But as McIntyre (2019) pointed out, hope-oriented storytelling needs the right conceptual tools, and it is not enough to expose them in fragments to have a deep conceptual change. This implies that students' interest in the concept of solutions journalism is not enough to guarantee that they are able to acquire full knowledge and skills, and therefore need pedagogical interventions; both on the planning and the execution levels.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated students' knowledge and awareness of solutions journalism in some universities in South-West Nigeria. The results show a complicated picture of students' engagement with solutions journalism. Awareness is generally moderate but irregular, with moderate awareness among private university students, while the awareness among state and federal university students is very low. The knowledge is superficial and localized: students can identify the characteristics of solutions journalism, define the difference between solutions journalism and advocacy journalism, and cannot clearly distinguish between solutions journalism and traditional journalism, lack hands-on knowledge of the methods of solutions journalism.

The differences among institutional types indicate that institutional conditions, such as curricular autonomy, resources and faculty skills, are important factors in influencing students' awareness and knowledge of solutions journalism. The limited prior exposure and the lack of practical experience suggest that solutions journalism is an emerging concept in the journalism education sphere in Nigeria.

However, despite the challenges, students show positive attitudes towards solutions journalism; they see it as an important part of training students as journalists today. Such good attitudes and students' apparent openness to new methods are the basis for curriculum reform and pedagogical innovation. The findings of the study reveal that although conceptual recognition of solutions journalism has reached students, their understanding and competence in this practice are still limited, and intentional and systematic interventions are needed to turn awareness into real knowledge and competence in solving problems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered:

1. To improve knowledge, the National Universities Commission (NUC) should revise the Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) to make solutions journalism compulsory, with structured modules covering its four pillars. In addition, universities should strengthen lecturers' capacity through train-the-trainer programmes and professional development in partnership with relevant organisations. Funding agencies like TETFund should support the

development of locally relevant teaching materials, while journalism departments should adopt experiential learning approaches such as project-based learning, newsroom simulations, and student-led reporting to enhance students' practical competence. Furthermore, stronger university–media collaborations should be established to provide internships and mentorship opportunities that bridge the gap between theory and practice.

2. To improve awareness, universities should organize regular seminars, workshops, and orientation programmes to introduce students early to solutions journalism and increase their exposure across all levels of study. Institutional flexibility should also be encouraged in both federal and state universities to allow for easier integration of innovative content into curricula, thereby supporting both awareness and knowledge development. Collectively, these measures will ensure that students not only become more aware of solutions journalism but also develop the necessary conceptual and practical knowledge to apply it effectively.

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