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CONTENTS

Sr. No.	TITLE & NAME OF THE AUTHOR (S)	Page No.
1.	MANAGEMENT OF NON-PERFORMING ASSETS: A STUDY ON RAS AL KHAIMAH BANK, UNITED ARAB EMIRATIES <i>DR. K. DURGA PRASAD & BANDA RAJANI</i>	1
2.	INVESTIGATING THE KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION IN THE DISTANCE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN IRAN <i>MOHAMMAD LASHKARY, ESMAEIL KHODAI MATIN, BEHZAD HASSANNEZHAD KASHANI & KOLONEL KASRAEI</i>	9
3.	REPORTING EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL MATTERS IN NIGERIAN MEDIA <i>IFEDAYO DARAMOLA</i>	15
4.	EMPLOYEE SELECTION IN ETHIOPIAN CIVIL SERVICE: PREDICTIVE AND CONTENT VALIDITY OF SELECTION INSTRUMENTS: A CASE STUDY IN BUREAU OF CIVIL SERVICE AND CAPACITY BUILDING <i>ABEBE KEBIE HUNENAW</i>	19
5.	CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF HETEROSKEDASTICITY IN TIME SERIES <i>DR. FREDRICK ONYEBUCHI ASOGWA & AMBROSE NNAEMEKA OMEJE</i>	24
6.	EFFECTS OF FRAUD AND FORGERY AND PERFORMANCE IN HOTELS IN NAIROBI, KENYA <i>MOSES MURAYA, JACQUELINE KORIR & KIMELI KORIR</i>	29
7.	MEGHALAYA: SWITZERLAND OF THE EAST? <i>DR. BALWINDER NONGRUM BEDI</i>	34
8.	CORPORATE GOVERNANCE IN EMERGING ECONOMIES IN INDIA - A REVIEW <i>KAISSETTY. BALAJI & DR. Y. VENU GOPALA RAO</i>	38
9.	STUDY OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS SELECTION OF HOTEL MANAGEMENT STUDIES AND THEIR WILLINGNESS TO PURSUE THEIR CAREER IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY AFTER COMPLETION OF THEIR COURSE <i>MILIND A. PESHAVE & DR. RAJASHREE GUJARATHI</i>	42
10.	WOMEN AWARENESS ON CONSUMER RIGHTS – A STUDY WITH REFERENCE TO VELLORE CITY <i>DR. N. SUNDARAM & C. BALARAMALINGAM</i>	51
11.	DETERMINANTS OF DROPOUT OF TODA CHILDREN IN NILGIRIS DISTRICT-AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS <i>DR. R. ANNAPOORANI & K. KRITHIGA</i>	55
12.	IRRIGATION WATER PRICING IN KARNATAKA: TRENDS AND ISSUES <i>GOWRISH P & DR. B. K. TULASIMALA</i>	60
13.	INFLUENCE OF BANKS' DEMANDS FOR SECURITY ON PERCENTAGE OF LOAN SANCTIONED FOR FARMERS UNDER: SERVICE AREA APPROACH (SAA) <i>DR. C. VETHIRAJAN & S. CHANDRASEKAR</i>	66
14.	BUDDING CHAIN OF CO OPERATIVE SOCIETIES IN INDIA-ITS REASONS AND IMPACT (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO JODHPUR AND PALI DISTRICT) <i>DR. PUNITA SONI & DIVYA SHARMA</i>	69
15.	OPEN DISTANCE EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT <i>DR. SHIVAJI BORHADE</i>	72
16.	A STUDY ON HIGHER SECONDARY STUDENTS' FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT IN ECONOMICS IN TIRUNELVELI DISTRICT <i>M. RAJAKUMAR & DR. M. SOUNDARARAJAN</i>	77
17.	GROWTH IN STUDENTS ENROLMENT, NUMBER OF COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN INDIA <i>V. D. DHUMAL & DR. A. J. RAJU</i>	81
18.	ANALYTICAL STUDY ON AWARENESS LEVEL OF ELECTRONIC BANKING IN KADAPA TOWN <i>DR. PADMASREE KARAMALA & DR. BHARATHI DEVI ANCHULA</i>	84
19.	UPLIFTMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH SELF HELP GROUP ACTIVITIES: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY IN KANCHEEPURAM DISTRICT SHGs <i>J. SANKARI & DR. R. NAGARAJAN</i>	89
20.	SOCIO ECONOMIC IMPACT OF CONFLICT: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF YOUTH IN KASHMIR <i>DR. ANISA JAN & UNJUM BASHIR</i>	93
21.	EXTERNAL DEBT OF SRILANKA: GROWTH AND ECONOMIC GROWTH <i>DR. G. JAYACHANDRAN</i>	100
22.	FOOD SECURITY IN INDIA – CHALLENGES AHEAD <i>DARSHINI.J.S</i>	112
23.	THE PERFORMANCE OF SELF HELP GROUPS A STUDY OF DHAN FOUNDATION, JEWARGI TALUK, GULBARGA DIST, KARNATAKA <i>BHIMASHA K. B.</i>	121
24.	BLACK MONEY AND ITS IMPACT ON INDIAN ECONOMY AND COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INDIA AND CHINA <i>JATINDER KUMAR, VINAY KUMAR & ANITA KUMARI</i>	126
25.	INCIDENCE OF POVERTY AND INTRAHOUSEHOLD ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES: A GENDER ANALYSIS <i>P.KANAKARANI</i>	129
26.	PROGRESS OF SHG's AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF WOMEN BENEFICIARIES IN HAVERI DISTRICT (KARNATAK STATE) <i>DR. RAMESH.O.OLEKAR & CHANABASAPPA TALAWAR</i>	139
27.	A STUDY ON ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF CHILD LABOUR: WITH REFERENCE TO GARMENT INDUSTRIES IN BENGALURU <i>KRISHNA MURTHY.Y & S.MANJUNATH</i>	143
28.	STRESS AND COPING BEHAVIOR AMONG HEARING IMPAIRED CHILDREN IN CHITTOOR DISTRICT <i>G. JANARDHANA & V. RAMESH BABU</i>	150
29.	VOLATILITY TRANSMISSION BETWEEN CRUDE OIL PRICES AND INDIAN EQUITY SECTOR RETURNS <i>ANAND.B</i>	157
30.	NEED OF HOUR: ACTION TANKS NOT THINK TANKS <i>NAGURVALI SHAIK, PUJITHA VALLBHANENI & VINOD ADAPALA</i>	161
	REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK	165

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REPORTING EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL MATTERS IN NIGERIAN MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

There is no gainsaying the fact that education reporting, like science and energy reporting is a specialized area that requires extra-ordinary skill and experience. Education itself is a systematic, intellectual and moral training aimed at developing knowledge, abilities, character and mental power. Its major aim is to teach skill and inculcate in the learner, character, knowledge and ability to fit into any society. The growth and development of education over the years has made it complex that it requires specialized handler to report all facets of education. The education reporter therefore should see the thick and thin layers covering education, in the rural areas when compared with education in the cities. The reporter should also understand new government policy that could uplift or mar the sector and be able to report it adequately. The management structure of every level of institution from primary to university level should be on the tip of fingers of the education reporter. While hurrying up to beat the deadline, the education reporter should not forget the media social responsibility of disseminating accurate, fair and objective stories which would go a long way to assisting the institution. It is against this background that the paper examines education reporting.

KEYWORDS

News, Education Reporting, Journalism, News Values, Reporter, Objectivity, Nigerian Media.

INTRODUCTION

 ewsgathering and news reporting are the twin sisters that distinguish journalism profession from other professions. Reporting is fundamental to Journalism profession. Based on this understanding Siegfried (1962) has noted that the first newspapers were actually news letters in which an interested observer was stimulated to write an account of occurrences which he believed to be of interest to other or, perhaps significantly, in which he might interest others. From this evolved the modern newspaper which purports to give a periodic and interpretative account of the happening of the day selected from among many on the basis of certain news value.

Reporting is a basic skill required not only in newspaper work but also in radio, television, the movies and especially the news reels. Reporting may therefore be defined as recounting of news worthy events to inform or educate as comprehensively and accurately as possible to those who were not at the scene of the event. For a reporter to recount events successfully he must himself be fully informed about it and to be fully informed, he must have all the facts about the event. A reporter that is not guided by facts, accuracy and objectivity cannot make a good journalist.

In Journalism, facts are sacred. All information must be verified to ensure that they contain facts. Similarly, the reporter must not get carried away by his or her own values or biases. Facts are simply, "what is" and not "what ought to be".

NATURE OF NEWS AND NEWS VALUE

Many authorities in Mass Communication and other social sciences have attempted a definition of the term, news. The attempt has always been an exercise in multiplicity. This is because news is generally conceived differently by different people. As a result, there is a plethora of definition of news or what news is. Even the layman on the street can readily come up with acceptable definition of news. The same thing applies to journalists, public relations, advertising practitioners and other social scientists. The basic fact is that everything around us or about other people is news.

In general term, news depends on what any one think is news. It thus lacks a universal definition. The famous definition attributed to Lord Northcliffe, "If a dog bites a man it is not news, but if a man bites a dog it is news", appears to have been oversimplified if not useless.

Siegfried (Ibid) has aptly told us that news is not concerned only with actual happenings. It is also concerned with what is going to happen or with what people are thinking. What may be news to one man or one group may not be news to another.

Walter Lippman, a renowned American columnist summed up his view about news in his book, **Public Opinion** thus, "it is precisely the absence of any exact test of what is and what is not news that accounts for the character of the (journalistic) profession, as nothing else dies". In the same book, Lippman writes, "every newspaper is the result of a whole series of selections as to what shall be printed in what position, how much space, and what emphasis each shall have. There are no standards. There are only conventions" (Lippman cited in Siegfried).

A working definition has been provided by (Siegfried, 1962), he says news is the record of current events of interest to the local community, the state, the country, or the world. The best news is that which interests the largest number of persons. Lippman explains that events become news when "private affairs touch public authority". Sociologists would simply say news is pure factual information.

However, a consensus definition would be provided here that news is an accurate and an unbiased account of the significant facts of a timely occurrence of interest that is communicated to an audience. For the Radio, the audience is the listener, for the Television, the audience is the viewer and for the newspaper or magazine, the audience is the reader. The quest for news has made many readers to want to read newspapers wherever they are. Many read newspapers and magazines in trains, at lunch counters, at ball games, in homes and event at street corners (Siegfried, 1962).

They hear newscasts in automobiles, at the sea shore, and in barber shops. As a result news has been described as indeed history in a hurry, and the hurry refers to the speed at which it is written, read, and understood – or missed.

Every moment, millions of events occur simultaneously throughout the world. For example, someone may die, another may be born, a president, or a governor may be delivering a speech in an occasion, and war may have broken out somewhere. Riot, peaceful demonstration, violent protests among others are daily occurrences, and are potentially news,

What is news therefore can be any event that is occurring as in the case of a president taking oath of office, or occurred as with the World Trade Centre disaster of September 11, 2002 or may occur as with the fear with possible attack by Al Qaeda anywhere in the world.

What matters is for the news managers or editors to choose what they consider the most significant, attractive or interesting to their audience.

No wonder then that sociologist, Hess Beth et al (1988) defines news from the perspective of what the editors and reporters say news is. Hence they say: what finally emerge as the "news" is a negotiated reality: the end product of decision made by reporters and their editors concerning what is news worthy, what people want to hear about, where the news crews are, and what information has been given by sources. In conclusion they say "news is what those who control the media decide is news".

The popular snag in journalism is that not until a reporter gives an account of an event or communicate his finding to an audience it cannot be said to be news. In other words, news is an account of event, and not the event itself. Hence newspaper men define news as what the editor says is news and one may add that news is what the reporter says is news.

There are two kinds of news. Hard news and spot (or soft) news. Hard news is the reporting of important events that have taken place. Spot news is the news of a more informational nature and not as immediate or, in the opinion of a news editor, as important as hard news. Features and news stories that appear in magazines are more of spot news.

NEWS VALUES

The decision as to what will make news or which, news event should be covered or which will be published or aired is usually influenced by certain news values or elements. Some of these are: timeliness, proximity or geographical location, the magnitude of the event or numbers involved, unusualness or oddity, human interest, prominence and personality, accuracy, consequence or effect of an event, media policy, ownership factor among others.

Since this paper is strictly on reporting educational stories, an elaborate explanation of the determinants or value of news will not be necessary.

EDUCATION REPORTING

Usually, the news editor or the editor assigns reporters to specific areas for news coverage. He can do this by making the reporter a roving one or make him have his beat (area or place of permanent coverage).

Assigning beat to reporters has made many reporters become specialized in their area of coverage. Some are assigned to such beats for upward of ten to fifteen years. It is common to see that reporters assigned to courts or police stations tend to behave like judges, lawyers or police men respectively. A mastery of terminologies, lifestyle, and slang in those professions make them imitate experts correctly. The reporter too would have developed a lot of contacts where to source for news in that beat. Most universities and polytechnics have public relation offices that manage their information and relate with the Press especially education reporters.

Aside from weather and war, education, politics, crime and court proceedings are believed to attract higher readership than do any other type of stories. Education story is also attractive. As a matter of fact education reporting is a specialized reporting.

Without education today, it may become increasingly difficult to realize the Nigerian dream of climbing the social ladder, achieving business success, and finding the richer and more rewarding life.

Like in America, the school means much to Nigerian hopes, while education represents an open sesame "to occupational success in all fields". Education, in a nutshell is central to the nation's future and well-being.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on against setting theory.

AGENDA-SETTING THEORY

Agenda-setting theory holds the assumption that there is relationship between news coverage and public perception of the importance of issues. It is the ability of the media to influence the salience or importance of events in the public mind, sharpen awareness and action. In agenda-setting, the mass media decide what they (audience) think should be in the priority consideration of people. The media emphasis on an event, organization or personality, influence the audience to view the event as important to consider it as a topic of discussion while noting the angle from which the media report it.

The agenda-setting theory resides in the space devoted to story and its placement on the newspaper pages, and to which story it has given prominence in its reportage. The media easily elevate an issue to prominence, just as they also play down on another significant issue (Daramola, 2003).

Agenda-setting studies have developed evidences that the press selects certain issues to play up at times when they are not significant in the public mind and they then become part of the accepted agenda. No wonder it is said that the press has the ability to mentally order and organize the world for people.

Many scholars have tried to prove the validity of agenda-setting power of the media. One of the first scholars was Walter Lippman. He believed that society responded to the pseudo environment around them. McCombs and Shaw (1972) found that the agenda setting establishes the salient issues or images in the minds of the public.

Sweeney and Hollifield (2000) state that "the media are a factor in shaping of the public's perception of important issues and in helping to place specific issues on the nation's political agenda" (p. 26).

MEANING OF EDUCATION

An economist, Michael Todaro defines education as the principal instructional mechanism for developing human skills and knowledge (Todaro, 1977). Most economists agree that it is the human resources, not its capital nor its material resources, which ultimately determine the character and pace of its economic and social development.

Harbinson (1973) shares the same position when he writes:

Human resources constitutes the ultimate basis for the wealth of nations. Capital and natural resources are passive factors of production, human beings are the active agents who accumulate capital, exploit natural resources, build social, economic and political organizations and carry forward national development. Clearly, a country which is unable to develop the skills and knowledge of its people and to utilize them effectively in the national economy will be unable to develop anything.

Education has been variously defined by various scholars. To some, it is a means by which a society transmits its norms, morals, customs and traditions from one generation to other. To other scholars education is a means by which an individual becomes a useful member of the society and by extension integrated into his immediate environment.

There are three major types of education – informal education, non-formal education and formal education.

INFORMAL EDUCATION

This is an incidental education in that it is not deliberate and planned but an inflating process by which every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experiences and from the educative influences and resources on his or her environment. Life in the family, work or play, rites, ceremonies, market place and the mass media are all day-to-day avenues for informal education.

Informal education setting also includes listening to talks told by the elders, chants folklore and poetry.

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

This is more or less vocational in nature. It takes place outside the established formal system and not structured, and not certificate oriented. The major objective is skill acquisition which can be acquired over a period of time through observation and practice.

FORMAL EDUCATION

This is hierarchally structured, chronologically graded educational system that takes place within the four walls of the classroom (Daramola, 2005). It runs from pre-primary, primary school through secondary and culminating at the university level. It involves general academic studies, a variety of specialized programmes and institutions for full time academic, technical and professional training. One common feature of formal education is that it is certificate-oriented, compartmentalized and systematic.

Education therefore is a systematic, intellectual and moral training to develop knowledge, abilities, character and mental power. This sector (education) without doubt, requires adequate coverage by the media.

Educational reporting is one area of specialization in media news coverage. It takes a reporter with a special training in education to appreciate the mechanics of handling educational report and related events.

The education reporter takes interest in schools: universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, primary and secondary schools, parents, students, government policies and potential programmes as they affect education. As a specialized reporter, the reporter should understand that the school is a social institution established by governments or members of a society for the purpose of transmitting their culture from one generation to another and helps the child to develop the desired moral values by the society and provides the child with skills necessary for survival in life. In addition, the school helps to develop the child's social and civic consciousness. The education reporter, like any other specialized reporter, is faced with the duty of simplifying complex terms or explaining difficult issues to the news consumers. Educational news stories include educational personnels, courses, achievements, equipments, inventions, crisis methods and elections of academic officers or academic board.

Despite the importance of education and the fact that many newspapers and magazines now have education desk with education editor and correspondents, not much attention is usually paid to it in daily stories. This is why many Nigerian newspapers have special page(s) and days assigned for the publication of education stories. Below are the few Nigerian newspapers and days and pages assigned to education stories.

NEWSPAPERS	DAY ASSIGNED	PAGE
The Guardian	Thursday & Sunday	45 - 47
Daily Champion	Wednesday	14
The Punch	Tuesday	40
National Mirror	Thursday	43
Vanguard	Thursday	36 – 38
Nigerian Tribune	Thursday	25 – 26 & 34

What usually attracts the media are stories of crises in one institution or the other. For instance, where there is crisis orchestrated by cult groups resulting in killing, bloodshedding or decapitation of rival groups or innocent students, it would take the front page in newspapers and lead stories in newscasts. Whereas there is more news value in day-to-day education than is reflected in news stories. In the small communities or villages, a new teacher or headmaster is definitely newsworthy. The problem in our educational system in Nigeria today is not only newsworthy but also demands further interpretation by education reporters. Today, the Nigerian education system is beset by a myriad of problems such as cultism, unemployment of graduates, exam malpractices, population explosion, inadequate facilities and lack of dynamism by Nigeria University Commission (NUC) and National Board for Technical Education (NBTE). This is a major problem in that the two Education regulatory agencies have not once considered the number, of eligible candidates to university and polytechnic in Nigeria by increasing the carrying capacity of the institutions. Today, the NUC limits admission for each programme at 40, the same thing for NBTE. The bodies are also taking drastic actions at universities and polytechnics for running part time programmes. The question is where do they want eligible candidates to go? An education reporter will realize that provision is made for this teeming population; the implication is that the girls will go into prostitution while the male candidates may take to hooliganism. As a result of the problems they may start engaging in crimes which may be difficult if not impossible for law enforcement agents to curtail. The education reporter should beat it to the ears of management of NUC and NBTE that the carrying capacity in operation now is no longer realistic or feasible in view of the number of those seeking admission into tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

There is no doubt that Nigerian educational system is in trouble today. Many students are in schools not for the sake of learning but because of certificates which of course is unorthodoxly acquired.

Besides knowledge and skills which formal education is expected to provide, it also imparts values, ideas, attitudes and aspirations which may or may not be in the nation's best developmental interests (Todaro, 1977).

These are challenges for education reporters in Nigeria. The education reporters should not only be good in writing and reporting but should be able to analyze and interpret these negative developments in feature and featurette.

Hard news stories can not do this magic. There is need for detailed analysis of these problems. Alternative solutions should also be suggested. Any education reporter or news media that stops at hard news stories is not doing this country any good. There is need to heal the wound that has been inflicted on the educational system once and for all or gradually.

As a reporter, stressing the public interest is paramount. Therefore, the education reporter must be conversant with the private and public institutions as well as government regulatory agencies and various trade unions such as ASUU, ASUP, NUT and the most of others from which information of all kinds can be obtained.

The reporter must be in a position to alert readers and general public on the consequence of and developments in education sector.

Happily, *The Guardian* newspaper once conducted a survey with the instrumentation of questionnaire into whether parents and the general public would support the idea of Post JAMB candidates who have passed the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) examinations by their respective universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. A large percentage of respondents agreed to the idea. This is a very good effort by *The Guardian*. The effort of the newspaper has probably led to post-JAMB test being conducted for successful candidates in JAMB.

However, for any educational programme to be called educational, it must meet the following criteria:

- It must add to the significant knowledge of the audience. The knowledge so acquire should be such that can be applied.
- It should involve some form of training and improvement in skills.
- It should extend the range of the audience's cultural experience, by improving their understanding and ultimately appreciation of their cultures.
- It should involve the audiences' social and physical values with a view to helping them contribute to the socio-political development of the society.

TYPES OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME

- Direct classroom teaching:** This type of programme come in form of class room teaching. This method is common in all schools where learners are taught face-to-face by teachers or lecturers as the case may be.
- Supplementary Classroom Teaching:** Radio and television are often used as a supplement to regular classroom instruction. Up till today pupils and teachers still feature on radio as if they are in classroom for teaching. This programme is expected to enrich the educational experience of the pupils.
- In order to integrate various class activities some schools broadcast educational materials that can be received in all organization designated classrooms in the school. This is common with open university programmes.

Radio and television carry a lot of information on education, and initiate more educational programmes than the newspapers and magazines. The electronic media particularly radio has been readily available for educational broadcasting. The characteristic of the electronic media make this easily possible.

Radio, for instance is portable, it can be carried from one place to other especially the miniaturized transistor radio. Beside this radio does not necessarily need electricity to function. With cell batteries, radio can work and can therefore transmit educational programmes. It is relatively cheap to establish and operate.

Both radio and television are flexible in terms of programming because it can programme for a small group of adults desiring to learn certain things. It helps for audience segmentation. It has the power to integrate other media especially the indigenous communication form and extend the reach of the traditional form of communication. Radio appeals to all segment, all strata of the society. Radio is ubiquitous meaning that the signal is everywhere and so reception is possible anywhere. Television has another advantage of sight and sound, one can hear formal programme and also see.

Although, much has been said about the role the electronic media could and have been playing in education matters, it is a truism that developments in the world of communication have opened new vistas for the linkages between the media, especially the electronic media and education. Education itself is a useful tool in improving the communication skills of individuals. All these cannot substitute for reporting education by reporters or newsmen. The focus is the regular coverage of educational matters and schools. It involves applauding the good things or good policies towards improving education. It also involves condemning bad policies and those things emanating from the schools which are inimical to the progress of our country. For instance, the manner and ways our university and polytechnic undergraduates dress today have attracted criticisms from the media and individuals. These types of dressing are believed to be imitation of

foreign culture. As a result, many higher institutions have prescribed dressing codes. The churches too are spawning those dresses which they believe are not only alien to the African culture, but also ungodly.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I suggest certain measures which are people's expectations from reporters particularly education reporters.

1. The reporter must be sufficiently interested in looking for news as to see news possibility in any event or situation. A good reporter should, if need be, "squeeze water out of stone".
2. The reporter must be at alert. This is because news can emerge from anywhere. He has to be a good listener and have a nose for news.
3. The reporter must be extremely patient and tolerant. Major news can come any time and it is only a patient and ever alert newsman that will get it.
4. The reporter must be objective and avoid sentiments. A good reporter is one, who is fair to people and to his conscience.
5. The reporter should be above board. Low self-esteem should be avoided. There should not be any inferiority complex. Complex of any kind can prevent a fresh reporter or an established one from getting at some of the important news items that are likely to come his way.
6. Journalism is a leveler, the reporter must learn to reduce himself to the lowest in the community and sincerely, rise to high level in his news coverage. He must learn to adapt to both situations.
7. The reporter must ensure that his stories are as complete as possible. No reporter must rush to the press with stories that have not been thoroughly investigated or verified.
8. A reporter must know when to ask questions or not to do so. For example, there are occasions when the interviewee may not be in a suitable disposition. In this case, you allow him and probably book an appointment with him for some other time.
9. A good reporter does follow-up stories to make the public have confidence in him.
10. The reporter can get more facts through interviews, that is, speaking with at least one of the teachers, principals, provost, vice-chancellors or rectors.
11. The reporter must take notes or jottings while covering an assignment or interview. This is important because anything can happen. Over reliance on midgets (tape recorder) may not be the best. Such tape recorder could disappoint.
12. Educational reporter should be conversant with titles in schools and higher institutions. He should also be conversant with information flow therein and hierarchical structure in institutions of higher learning. He should have good rapport with Public Relations Officer of the institution.

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