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Bingham University Students' Perception of the Unbundling of Communication Studies in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

This study was carried out to evaluate students' perception of the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities. Perception and expectancy theories provided the framework for the study while survey was employed as the research design and a structured questionnaire was used as the research instrument administered on 400 respondents. Data collected were analysed using inferential statistics. Findings from the study indicated that university students have fair knowledge of the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities. Further findings showed that university students gleaned their information about the unbundling from appropriate and reliable sources. Empirical evidence from the study revealed that the university students not only tagged it a positive development and proactive move, but also perceived the unbundling as an apt and timely decision by the National Universities Commission. Based on these findings, the researchers concluded that the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities enjoys massive support and positive perception from university students. Thus, it was recommended, inter alia, that university students should not only maintain the current positive disposition to the unbundling, but also search for more information about it from appropriate sources to fully appreciate the decision of the National Universities Commission.

Keywords: Communication Studies, Nigeria, Perception, Unbundling, University Students

Introduction

Mass Communication, a degree programme, is offered in many Nigerian Universities, polytechnics and other institutions of higher learning across the world. Olomjobi, Morka & Akintayo (2021) observe that many institutions brand the course with such appellations as Media Studies, Information and Communication Studies, as well as Language and Communication Arts. However, no matter the nomenclature assigned to the course by any institution, it entails the study of many areas including journalism, publishing, radio and television broadcasting, digital media, public relations and

advertising each of which holds a variety of career opportunities for students after their study. Aririah (2022) opines that many educational institutions have difficulties in classifying mass communication as a discipline either in the humanities, arts or the social sciences. Agreeing with that opinion, Akpan (2022) argues that this quagmire has affected the direction and pattern of research and of teaching the course.

The combination of many possible areas of specialisation into one course (Mass Communication) has not only made it difficult for students to choose an area of specialisation, a difficulty Mishra, Ismail & Al Hadabi (2017) likened to choosing a path while at a cross road, but it had also raised concerns among scholars and practitioners of the profession leading to agitations for its unbundling and domestication into a proper Faculty of Communication and Media Studies to extricate it from the nebulous Faculties such as Arts, Humanities or Social Sciences that many universities had dumped it. Indeed, Mishra *et al* (2017) assert that all stakeholders in the sector such as Professors of mass communication, professional bodies like the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), the Nigerian Guild of Editors, Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), Broadcasting Organisations of Nigeria (BON), as well as regulatory agencies like Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON), National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and the Nigerian Press Council were in the forefront of the call for the unbundling of the course. Interestingly, these stakeholders eventually formed the nucleus of the team that successfully midwifed the unbundling after two years of painstaking research and rigorous consultations.

The unbundling of Mass Communication as a single degree programme into several degree programmes by the National Universities Commission is a fulfillment of the desire of the commission to revitalise and reposition the programme in Nigeria to meet global best practices. According to Rasheed (2023), some of the new programmes to be domiciled under the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies include: Journalism and Media Studies, Public Relations, Advertising, Broadcasting, Film and Multi-Media Studies, Development Communication Studies, Information and Media Studies, Mass Communication and Strategic communication. The rationale for the unbundling of communication studies as clearly stated in the curricula of the new programmes shows that:

The objective stated in the curricula pointed that communication and Media Studies training should develop the students' understanding of communicative problems at the various levels of Nigerian and global society and develop in the student the ability for objective and critical judgement and to observe, understand, analyse and synthesise socio-economic, political and environmental problems using communication and media studies methods and techniques (Okeke, 2022, p. 24).

Commenting on the unbundling in its editorial of 4 March, 2020, the *Independent Newspaper* celebrated the development as a welcome, proactive step to deepen professionalism and expertise in strategic areas of mass communication demanded in an emergent, complex world. The paper, like many scholars, argued that the broad,

generalist training under an omnibus mass communication as a single course can no longer serve today's society with maximum, knowledge-based efficiency. While the unbundling of Mass Communication is mainly focused on repositioning the course and opening up the field by creating more professions out of a hitherto one course, the ultimate beneficiaries of the process are the students of the course. However, university students' perception of the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities is uncertain. This study was, therefore, designed to ascertain their perception of the process. It also evaluates their level of knowledge of the unbundling and to determine the benefits they stand to derive from the unbundling of communication studies in their universities.

Objectives of the Study

The study sought to:

1. Find out Bingham university students' level of knowledge about the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities.
2. Ascertain Bingham university students' perception of the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities.
3. Identify the likely benefits Bingham university students stand to gain from the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities.

Public Knowledge of the Unbundling of Communication Studies in Nigerian Universities

The era of studying mass communication as a single degree programme in Nigerian universities officially ended in September, 2021 when the National Universities Commission (NUC), the umbrella body that regulates university education in Nigeria, unbundled the programme. Reporting the development in its editorial of 4th March, 2023, the *Independent Newspaper* wrote that the announcement that mass communication, as a single course in Nigerian universities, is to be split into several degree awarding programmes has elicited reactions from a spectrum of Nigerians. Though many have expressed fear and concerns that mass communication has been scrapped, Mwantok (2020) says experts have allayed those fears saying that the decision is in the best interest of communication students. She quotes Professor Ralph Akinfeleye of the Department of Mass Communication, University of Lagos as saying that the programme was not being phased out but that professionals have demanded for specialisation because mass communication as a single course was too large and what was given the students was a little of everything. In his view, Professor John Illah of the Department of Mass Communication, University of Jos stated that mass communication is a large course that does not allow one to focus on skill cultivation. He, therefore, commended the NUC for doing the right thing adding that with the unbundling, there is anticipation that the society will change in a positive way (Mwantok, 2020).

Perspectives on the Unbundling of Communication Studies in Nigerian Universities

Differing perspectives have been expressed regarding the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian Universities. Babalola (2023) reports that series of arguments have trailed the unbundling among scholars in the field as to whether the universities are really

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prepared for the task. Dr. Lambe of the university of Ilorin in particular, noted that in many universities, the new programme is yet to take off as a result of lack of resources, saying universities need to be strategic about it in the sense that they have to look inward to ascertain the resources on ground for take-off fearing that the current economic situation in the country might undermine the growth of the programmes in some universities (Babalola, 2023).

However, Okeke (2022) quotes Professor Lai Oso of the Lagos State University as saying that what motivated the push for unbundling was the desire to prepare students of communication for the challenges ahead through practical applications, which would make them ready professionals before graduation. He however noted that unbundling the programme will require a lot of resources as more staff to meet the requisite academic and professional skills, particularly technical staff with a lot of experience to take the students in the practical aspects of the programmes will be needed. Youdeowei (2019) cites Henry Omafodezi, Chief Executive Officer of 7gongs Brand and Media Company who expressed the opinion that the unbundling of the course will be in the best interest of university graduates noting however that there is need for appropriate adjustments to be made to reflect the change. He however raised the question if the unbundling will produce better graduates.

Benefits of the Unbundling of Communication Studies in Nigerian Universities

Many stakeholders in the communication field, including students, have expressed concerns about the benefits they stand to derive from the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities. For instance, Olomojobi *et al* (2021) observe that hitherto, mass communication students often found it difficult making a choice when they reach the point of choosing an area of specialisation. This difficulty, the authors note, is a function of the dearth of knowledge and familiarity with the options available to them. Mwantok (2020) cites Akinfeleye who pointed out that with the unbundling, there will be cross fertilisation of ideas as lecturers can go into the newsroom to practice and journalist to go to the classroom to teach. One outstanding benefit that will accrue from the unbundling is deep knowledge of the various programmes that will emerge as candidates will be equipped with relevant knowledge in such areas as print, broadcast, digital media, public relations and development communication as well as the ethics of the profession. Moreover, graduates of media studies bachelor's degree programmes will be prepared for both traditional and non-traditional media careers (Mwantok, 2020).

A remarkable benefit of the unbundling to the society is its positive effect on the quality of aspiring journalists that will be produced from the good formal education that will be engendered. Ojomo (2015) succinctly captures this when he likened the journalist to the physician. Obiorah *et al* (2023) quotes Ojomo (2020) as saying that “the position of the journalist in society is similar to that of a physician. Without good training and professionalism, the clients' lives are in danger of wrong diagnosis and therapy. What this signifies is that unbundling of the omnibus mass communication programme in Nigerian universities will breed a good formal education in all the new courses. To buttress this point, Ojomo (2015, p. 89) asserts that:

... an ill-educated journalist is a liability to the press and to the nation, but a professionally trained journalist, who is armed with a background of sound university education... will transform the practice of journalism into an asset to the credit of our nation.

Moreover, Hoag, Grant & Carpenter (2017) identify some job specifications that graduates of unbundled communication studies will find spaces in to include newsrooms where they will be employed as journalists, editors and correspondents. Another lucrative area in the new programmes is the film industry where they will work as film editors, script writers, producers, cameramen or just content creators. Mwantok (2020, p. 6) adds other job titles in the new communication studies to include public relations, which she describes as a lucrative area in the new programme, advertising account managers, marketing analysts, photo journalists and a range of other exciting career options. From the foregoing, it is crystal clear that the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities holds great promise not only for the stake holders but also for the media industry itself as empirical evidence has shown that both mainstream media and the new media stand to benefit immensely from the unbundling. Above all, the crop of professionals that will emerge from the different programmes will not only positively impact the profession but will also change the society for the better.

Theoretical Framework

Two theories; perception and expectancy theories provided a framework for this study.

Perception Theory

Perception theory was initiated by Berelson & Steiner in 1964. According to the theory, perception is the process by which individuals select, organise and interpret inputs to create a meaningful picture of the world. The theory establishes the paradigm that sensory information processing in human cognition, such as perception, recognition, memory and comprehension, are organised and shaped by our previous experience, expectations, as well as meaningful context.

Additionally, Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso (2008) observe that perception theory has four related selective ideas: selective exposure, selective attention, selective perception and selective retention. According to Iwokwagh (2006), the basic premise of perception theory is that the attitudes, beliefs, culture, values, needs and motivations of audience members have a way of affecting their perceptions and responses to media messages. If the situation orients them, they choose to receive only messages that will be beneficial or helpful to them. In other words, they selectively expose, attend and restrict themselves to only information that will be useful to them. However, Folarin (1998) sees perception theory as the tendency for people to avail themselves to information in their interest that is consistent with their preposition. Demuth (2013) concurs noting that it is the process by which people expose themselves to and retain only messages consistent with their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs. On the other hand, Anaeto *et al* (2008) maintain that individuals prefer exposure, attention and retention to arguments supporting their position over those supporting other positions. As media consumers have more

choices to expose themselves to selected media contents with which they agree, they tend to select content that confirms their own ideas and avoid information that argues against their opinion. People do not want to be told that they are wrong and they do not want their ideas to be challenged either. Therefore, they select different media outlets that agree with their opinions so they do not come in contact with this form of dissonance. Furthermore, these people will select the media sources that agree with their opinions and attitudes on different subjects and then only follow those programmes. Consequently, perception theory designates behaviour that is deliberately performed to attain and sustain perceptual control of particular stimulus events (Zillmann & Bryant, 1985).

Also, Kotler & Keller (2009) explain that in marketing, especially advertising, perceptions are more important than the reality because it is perception that affects the consumer's actual behaviour. They added that people's perception about any object or subject depends not only on the physical stimuli, but also on the stimuli relationship to the surrounding field and conditions within each of us. This means that the students' perception, exposure, attention and retention of information about the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities is based on their world view. The relevance of this theory to this study is evident when viewed against the backdrop of the students' expectation that the unbundling will open up more employment opportunities in communication.

Expectancy Theory

The expectancy theory, which was propounded by Victor Vroom in 1964 is a direct fallout from his theory of motivation in the same year. The realisation that expectations and motivation have a tendency to elicit particular behaviour is the thesis of the expectancy theory. According to Olomjobi *et al* (2021, p. 34), the main assumption of the theory is that people undertake certain actions when there is the likelihood that their behaviors will lead to a good outcome. Other assumptions of the theory as identified by the authors are:

- a. Individuals respond to stimulus based on their needs, motivation and past experience
- b. An individual's behavior is dependent on personal choice and conviction. In other words, people tend to identify choices that meet their needs and they are often intentional in behaving in ways that will actualise their expectations.
- c. Individuals have divergent needs and it is these needs that drive their attitude and behavior to key into a particular action.
- d. From options available to them, individuals tend to choose the ones that best suit their needs and best increase their output or reward.

Citing Myers (1995), Olomjobi *et al* (2021) assert that a person's decision to engage in a particular action is a function of what the person expects to happen following the action and the value the person places on the outcome. This suggests that the determinant of an individual's behaviour is not only the kind of outcome of such behaviour but also the expectation that a particular behavior will result in positive reinforcement. This theory, which was earlier adopted in Olomjobi *et al*'s (2021) study

is relevant to the current study because students' perception of the unbundling of communication studies will be based on their expectation that the unbundling will open up career opportunities in the field.

Methodology

The researchers employed survey research design with questionnaire as the instrument for the collection of the necessary data from the study population. The population of the study is the entire students of the Department of Mass Communication, Bingham University, Karu across four levels (100 to 400). The premise that students of communication will be the most affected by the unbundling informed the choice of the students of communication department as the target population of the study while convenience is the justification for the choice of Bingham University as the area of the study. A structured questionnaire used to garner data from the study population contains multiple choice questions on their demographics, awareness of the unbundling, benefits derivable from the unbundling, and their perception of the unbundling. The instrument was validated using content validity test. Copies of the questionnaire were administered to students of the department of Mass Communication from 100 to 400 levels using googol forms.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	124	32.2
Female	261	67.8
Age Range		
16-20	256	66.3
21-24	110	26.2
25-28	19	4.9
29-32	10	2.6
Level of Study		
100	17	4.4
200	96	24.9
300	206	53.3
400	66	17.1

Table 1 contains demographic information about the respondents. Data in the table indicate that majority of the respondents in this study (67.8%) were female. Data also indicate that the respondents were predominantly young people aged between 16-24 years (92.5%). While, majority of the respondents (53.3%) were in their third year of study, a significant number, (24.9) were in the second year of their study. This implies that the respondents, though relatively young, are educated enough to understand the

issue at stake in this study and properly assess the implication of the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian Universities.

Table 2: Level of Awareness of the Unbundling of Communication Studies in Nigerian Universities

Level of Awareness	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	105	27.3
High	88	22.9
Moderate	171	44.4
Low	11	2.7
Very low	10	2.7

Table 2 contains information on respondents' level of awareness of the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities. Data in the table show that the respondents in this study have appreciable levels of awareness of the unbundling. A total of 94.6%, the majority's level of awareness ranges between moderate to very high. This means that the level of awareness of the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities is high.

Table 3: Length of Time since becoming Aware of the Unbundling of Communication Studies in Nigerian Universities

Length of Time of Awareness	Frequency	Percentage
Two years ago	96	25.1
One year ago	136	35.6
Six months ago	72	18.8
Three months ago	76	20.4

Data in table 3 reveal that the respondents in this study have been fully aware of the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian Universities over an appreciable length of time. This is because while 60.7%, a clear majority, have been aware of the unbundling for at least one year, 39.2% have been aware of the unbundling for at least six months. This indicates that the respondents have been aware of the unbundling long enough for them to fully appreciate what it entails.

Table 4: First Source of Information about the Unbundling of Communication Studies in Nigerian Universities

First Source of Information	Frequency	Percentage
From Lecturers	174	45.7
From Professors in the field	113	29.7
From National News	64	16.8
From the NUC	30	7.9

Data in table 4 reveal that the sources of respondents' first information about the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities include their lectures, professors in the field, national news, as well as the National Universities Commission (NUC). What this implies is that the respondents gleaned their information about the

unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities from credible and reliable sources.

Table 5: New Programmes under Communication and Media Studies

New Programme	Frequency	Percentage
Mass Communication	199	52
Broadcasting	238	62
Development Communication	217	56.7
Public Relations and others	226	59

Data in table 5 indicate that new programmes that emerge from the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian Universities include, but are not limited to Mass Communication, Broadcasting, Development Communication, Journalism and Media Studies, Film and Multi Media Studies. This means that the unbundling of Mass Communication as a single degree programme has split the discipline into several degree programmes that a student can easily choose one for specialisation. It has also opened up some job specifications that graduates of unbundled communication studies will find spaces in to.

Table 6: Respondents' First Reaction to the Unbundling of Communication Studies in Nigerian Universities

First Reaction	Frequency	Percentage
Surprise	157	41.1
Confusion	70	18.3
Anxiety	48	12.6
Happiness	107	28

Table 6 houses information on the first reaction of the respondents to the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian Universities. Data in the table show that the first reactions to the unbundling were varied ranging from surprise, confusion, anxiety to happiness. While 41.1% of the respondents, a clear majority, were surprised, others were confused, anxious or happy. This implies that the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities came as a surprise to many, (41.1%), leading to confusion and anxiety but ultimately culminated in Happiness (28%).

Table 7: Perception of the Unbundling of Communication Studies in Nigerian Universities

Perception of the Unbundling	Frequency	Percentage
A Positive Development	231	60.2
A Proactive Move	158	41.1
The Best Thing that has Happened to Communication Studies	172	44.8
A Welcome Development	170	44.3

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Data in table 7 show that respondents have a favourable disposition to the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities. This is because all the respondents see it as a positive development, the best thing that has happened to communication studies in Nigerian university, a welcome development and a proactive move. What this means is that the unbundling is an adroit move by the National Universities Commission (NUC) to reposition communication studies in Nigerian universities.

Table 8: Value Unbundling Has Added to Communication Studies in Nigeria

Value	Frequency	Percentage
Makes it easy for graduates to realistically adapt to the dynamic Society by specialising in specific areas of communication	182	47.8
Adds depth to contents for graduates of the new programmes	78	20.5
New programmes are skill focused; not employment-centered	73	19.2
Unbundling means more opportunities for degree holders in communication	48	12.6

Data in table 8 which contains information on the value unbundling has added to communication studies in Nigeria reveal that unbundling of communication presents great value additions to communication. For instance, 47.8% of the respondents affirmed that unbundling makes it easy for graduates to realistically adapt to the dynamic society by specialising in specific areas. Unbundling also adds depth to contents for graduates of the new programmes which are now skill focused and that means more opportunities for degree holders in communication. This means that the unbundling of communication is a desirable development to the discipline and a timely decision by the NUC.

Table 9: Sustainability of Communication Studies in Nigerian Universities

Sustainability of Unbundling	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	312	81.9
No	69	18.1

Data in table 9 show clearly that the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities is highly sustainable. This implies that with proper planning and management, Nigerian universities can sustain the unbundling of communication studies.

Table 10: Benefits Accruable from Unbundling of Communication Studies in Nigerian Universities

Benefit	Frequency	Percentage
Reposition the course, open up the field by creating more professions	227	59
Create more employment opportunities for the graduates	202	52.5
Hone the skills of the graduates	117	30.4
Equip graduates with relevant knowledge in print, broadcast, digital media.	209	54.3

Data in table 10 indicate that the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities comes with a lot of benefits. These benefits include repositioning the course and opening up the field by creating more profession, equipping graduates with relevant knowledge in specific areas, creating more employment opportunities for the graduates and honing their skills. This indicates that unbundling benefits both the course and the graduates of the new professions.

Discussion of Findings

This study, which set out to appraise university students' perception of the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities made findings that fulfill the research objectives, answer the research questions and also confirm the postulations and assumptions of the perception and expectancy theories. For instance, objective one ascertained university students' level of knowledge about the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities. Findings revealed that students' level of knowledge about the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities is very high. This is because 82.6% of the respondents who are currently studying communication were in their 200-400 levels and 94.6% of them affirmed that their knowledge of the unbundling is actually very high (Tables1&2). Findings also indicated that the respondents have been aware of the unbundling for at least one year and that they gleaned their information about the unbundling from credible and reliable sources as their first source of information about the unbundling is either from their lecturers or professors in the field. Further findings indicated that the high level of knowledge students have about the unbundled communication studies enables them to easily identify the new programmes the omnibus Mass Communication has been split into. These findings confirmed those of Mwantok (2020) who alluded to the fact that Nigerians are not only fully aware of the unbundling but have also expressed divergent opinions about it with some stakeholders, especially students labelling it a welcome development. The findings also conformed to theoretical postulations that individuals have differing needs and it is these needs that drive their knowledge and behaviour towards a certain phenomenon. However, the findings disagree with those of Olomjobi's (2021) position that there is a dearth of knowledge and familiarity with the new programmes under the unbundled Mass Communication programme.

Objective two gauged university students' perception of the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities. Findings from the study showed that there is positive perception of the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities because it elicited happy reactions from the students who not only tagged it a positive development and proactive move but also described it as the best thing that has happened to communication studies and a welcome development. Further findings indicated that the respondents perceived the unbundling as an apt and timely decision by the NUC. These findings are in tandem with the position of the editorial board of the *Independent Newspaper* that celebrated the development as a welcome, proactive step. The findings also tallied with the tenets of perception theory that people selectively expose, attend and restrict themselves to only information that will be useful to them.

Objective three identified benefits university students stand to derive from the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities. Findings from the study revealed that unbundling benefits both the course and the graduates of the new

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professions by opening up the field by creating more profession, equipping graduates with relevant knowledge in specific areas, creating more employment opportunities for the graduates and honing their skills in broadcasting, advertising, public relations, and other specialised areas in communication. This finding tallies with that of Hoag *et al* (2017) who identified some job specifications that graduates of unbundled communication studies will find spaces in to include newsrooms where they will be employed as journalists, editors and correspondents. The finding also conforms to one of the assumptions of the Expectancy Theory, which holds that the determinant of an individual's behaviour is not only the kind of outcome of such behaviour but also the expectation that a particular behavior will result in positive reinforcement. This is also in tandem with the tenet of perception theory which states that there is a tendency for people to avail themselves to information in their interest that is consistent with their preposition.

Conclusion

The era of Mass Communication as a single degree awarding programme in Nigerian Universities officially ended in 2021 when the National Universities Commission (NUC) unbundled the programme into nine separate disciplines to meet present realities. Communication experts have lauded the decision saying it is a welcome development that is in the best interest of communication students. The bundling has elicited happy reactions from communication students who not only tagged it a positive development and proactive move but also perceive the unbundling as an apt and timely decision by the NUC. To demonstrate their favourably disposition to the unbundling, the students identified some of the benefits ensuing from it to include: creating more professions out of Mass Communication, equipping graduates with relevant knowledge in specific areas, creating more employment opportunities for the graduates and honing their skills in broadcasting, advertising, public relations and other specialised areas in communication. It is, therefore, the position of this study that the unbundling of communication studies in Nigerian universities enjoys massive support and positive perception from university students. Arising from the findings and conclusion reached, the following recommendations are hereby given:

1. Key stakeholders in communication studies such as lecturers, university authorities and the NUC should intensify sensitisation and education of students to drive home the necessity and benefits of the unbundling in order to forestall misinformation from unreliable sources.
2. University students should not only maintain the current positive disposition to the unbundling but also search for more information about it from appropriate sources to fully appreciate the decision of the NUC to unbundling communication studies in Nigerian universities.
3. Given the benefits accruable from the unbundling of communication studiers in Nigerian universities, the NUC should intensify efforts at encouraging those universities that have not keyed in to quickly do that so that their students will also benefit from the fallouts of the unbundling.

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