



PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF BROADCASTING EDUCATIONAL CONTENT DURING PANDEMICS IN KWARA STATE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

The incidence of pandemics across the globe, especially COVID-19 brought with it obvious challenges across different sectors of the global economy. Nigeria, as a country, was highly and negatively impacted by this ugly situation. In the educational sector, academic activities were disrupted as schools across the different levels of education: basic, senior secondary and tertiary institutions were shut down. The impact of this is felt till date as the nation continues to grapple with the challenge of evolving a uniform academic calendar. The pandemic disrupted the traditional modes of teaching and learning; thus, necessitating a paradigm shift in the teaching-learning process. Employing analytic approach, the study examines the prospects and challenges of broadcasting educational content during pandemics in Kwara State, depicting the strategies employed by the Ministry of Education in Kwara State in coping with the disruptions brought about by the pandemic. Findings indicate that educational broadcasting held sway albeit on a lower scale during pandemics in Kwara State. Recommendations include the need for education managers in Kwara State to be flexible in their approach to education content delivery for more impact. Furthermore, teachers and staff of the Ministry of Education should undergo periodic training in modern means and methods of pedagogy leaning on technological innovation.

Keywords: educational content, pandemics, COVID-19, challenges, educational broadcasting.

Introduction

Education is so crucial that it has been identified as one of the major means of achieving national development (Sanusi, Talabi, Adelabu & Alade, 2021). In a dynamic world such as ours, the need for alternative means and methods of education delivery cannot be overemphasized. This need became pronounced with the outbreak of epidemics and pandemics such as Ebola, and COVID-19. Given limited resources, human, technical and digital, coupled with socio-economic disparities and inadequate infrastructure such as enough classrooms, broadcasting of educational content has become a *sine qua non*. Broadcasting via radio and television thus surfaced and became critical tools for the dissemination of educational content during crises (Okafor, 2020).

According to Anaeto (2006), educational broadcasting can be described as the act of learning and imbibing knowledge through the broadcast media. Among the media are radio



and television (Anaeto, 2006). Ogunmilade in Ijeh and Shoki (2012) define educational broadcasting as the process of using radio and television including recorded audio and video materials to promote teaching and learning. Teaching of concepts and specific skills to a given audience via the broadcast media are described as educational broadcasting. It specifically refers to the use of television and radio to teach pupils and students subjects as prescribed in the school curriculum (Nkwam-Uwaoma & Onu, 2017; Schryer 2014).

It has indeed been noted that the deployment of radio and television for the teaching of school subjects can be in three settings: firstly, the learners can be in a classroom setting while listening and or viewing the broadcast with the instructor. This implies that the educational broadcast would fall within school hours. Conversely, it could be recorded and played back at any convenient time for the learners. Secondly, there could be a viewing centre or listening post where the learners gather for a particular period for the purposes of learning. There would be certainty of broadcast signal reception at such designated places. This period for this kind of learning might not be during school hours. A recorded version could also be transmitted to the audience. Reasons for this setting and level of broadcast include crisis situation, non-availability of competent and enough human resources, insufficient and poor teaching facilities and underdevelopment. Thirdly, the educational broadcast content could be consumed in people's homes either as individuals or small groups. This kind of broadcast complements the formal classroom educational setting. Here, education is seen as enhancing the delivery of formal education since broadcasting is a veritable tool for social control that impacts an audience in various ways (Schryer 2014; Akpan, Udeze & Asogwa, 2014; Nkwam-Uwaoma & Onu, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

The benefits of education cannot be overemphasized. However, education is often hampered during crises. One such crisis moment was the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. The result was a disruption in academic activities in the school system across all levels of education. Kwara State in North-central Nigeria was not spared of this onslaught. It therefore becomes imperative to determine what the state did as regards teaching and learning of its citizens. Were they just complacent watching helplessly as the pandemic ravaged the education sector? If not, what did the state do through its Ministry of Education to mitigate the effect of the pandemic on the sector? What strategies did it put in place? What challenges were they confronted with? Are there prospects for the state which seem to a great extent challenged because of the multiplicity of ethnic nationalities?

Objectives of the Study

This paper has the following objectives:



1. To determine the challenges faced by the Kwara State Education Ministry during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. To determine the specific measures put in place to ensure that broadcast educational content reaches pupils/students in rural areas of Kwara State.
3. To unveil the role radio and television played in the delivery of educational content during the pandemic in Kwara State.

Arising from the objectives are the following research questions which are to guide the study:

1. What are the challenges faced by the Kwara State Education Ministry during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What are the specific measures put in place to ensure that broadcast educational content reaches pupils/students in rural areas of Kwara State?
3. What role did radio and television play in delivering educational content during the pandemic in Kwara State?

Situating the Nigerian Education Landscape

It is a truism to state that Nigeria, though the most populous black nation in the world, still grapples with various and varied challenges in its educational sector. These challenges span across, infrastructure, manpower, enrolment rates, and curricula. Furthermore, there are disparities in terms of access to quality education, technology especially internet connectivity and ICTs, which is a result of the digital divide (Ogunkola & Alege, 2021; Okwilagwe, 2020).

The broadcasting of educational content helps in bridging the gap in accessing education, especially for the marginalized ones whose parents or guardians fail to enrol in formal education due to limited funds occasioned by poverty or outright wickedness.

According to Ijeh and Ojebode (2015), through educational broadcasting, content is available and dispersed widely simultaneously to learners in a quick, efficient, cheap and in high volume and quality. The duo also posits that educational broadcasts are no recent phenomenon in Nigeria. Right from the onset of broadcasting in Nigeria, radio and television programming was done in such a way that it could facilitate and enhance the teaching and learning of different subject areas with topics spanning the cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains.

Transiting from the traditional mode of teaching and learning to the broadcasting of educational content during pandemics, especially the COVID-19 era brought with it several challenges. First was the issue of coverage of remote areas where there was little or no



reception of broadcast signals. This situation led to the cutting off of a significant portion of the population as they became marginalized communities. Second was the lack of interpersonal interaction and engagement which were the main characteristics of classroom situations. This hampered the impact and hence, diminished the effectiveness of broadcasting as a tool for teaching and learning. Third, pupils and students with disabilities especially hearing impairment were more or less cut off from the learning process (Adewale & Amoo, 2020; Ekanem, 2020; Osunwoke, 2021).

Challenges of Educational Broadcasting in Nigeria

Educational broadcasting is not without its challenges. Some of these include:

Paucity of facilities: admitted there are in existence broadcast stations across Nigeria, some of these stations still battle with infrastructural constraints and deficits. The non-availability of a steady electricity supply often mars the programme broadcast. Just as the broadcast is ongoing, a sudden power surge disrupts the teaching-learning process.

Aside from the above, broadcast signals are often not strong in remote villages where some pupils and students live. This is because of the low bandwidth/strength of the transmitters in use.

Inadequate manpower: there is also the challenge of adequately trained manpower for educational broadcasting in the state. Often, some teachers are too shy to face the camera. They prefer to do their duties undisturbed. Some become self-conscious and nervous when they notice that they are being recorded either through audio or video for transmission. This makes it sometimes difficult to get teachers who are enthused and ready to be available for educational broadcasts.

The problem of commercialization: most broadcast stations are not ready to offer free services even when they are government-owned. Today, there is the matter of news commercialization and so forth. The managers often complain of poor subventions from the state government which has left them with no choice but to seek ways and means of generating revenue internally (IGR) in order to stay afloat. This has often resulted in little or no cooperation with the ministry officials who might want the stations to cover and equally transmit educational content.

Prospects of Formal Educational Broadcasting in Nigeria

There are some prospects of educational broadcasting in Nigeria; some of which include relatively low cost of delivery as one instructor can get across several scattered, heterogeneous and diversified learners in the state at the same time. This when compared



with the funds to be spent erecting school buildings and engaging teachers can be better imagined especially in the present economic hardship with rising inflation in the country. The cost of building materials especially cement and roofing sheets are out of the reach of most Nigerians.

It is also noted that a single television or radio programme can reach pupils and students in different locations of the state irrespective of the difficult terrain and distance (Ijeh, 2019; Chandar & Sharma, 2003; Onabajo, 2000).

Through educational broadcasting, content can be delivered to remote areas that teachers often find difficult to go to or are sceptical of going to even when posted because of poor access roads, insecurity, and outbreak of diseases just like during the COVID-19 pandemic. Educational broadcasting can significantly increase the teachers/learners ratio without necessarily raising the salary of teachers as an educational broadcast can be distributed conveniently at any time in both audio and video formats for the consumption of a group or a particular individual (Ijeh & Ojebode, 2015; Abuli & Odera, 2013).

A benefit of using educational broadcasting to deliver formal education in developing countries (including Nigeria) is increased public access to education, especially in societies where a dearth of educational infrastructure persists because of population explosion and rising demand for formal education. (Abuli and Odera 2013).

Highly qualified and competent instructors and teachers are often engaged in educational broadcasting thus making available to learners high-quality education. These learners are privileged to access education from professionals in different subject areas and thus gain new knowledge and skills that equip them for future endeavours (Agbamuche 2015; Onabajo, 2000).

Strategies for Effective Broadcasting of Educational Content

Admitted that several factors militated against educational broadcasting, some strategies were deployed to ensure its effectiveness during the pandemic. These strategies include leveraging existing radio and television broadcasts and packing educational programme content across the stations especially the national radio and television stations such as the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) and the National Television Authority-NTA (Agwu & Agbaeze, 2021). Educational institutions were also partnered alongside content developers who produced tailor-made programmes of diverse sorts including quizzes, call-in sessions, and assignments (Mordi & Ojo, 2020; Ezenwoke & Ogbodo, 2021; Adeoye & Akande, 2020).



Existing Broadcasting Educational Programmes in Kwara State

Some broadcast stations in Kwara State run educational programmes some of which include: Radio Kwara Midland 99.1 F.M and Harmony 103.5 F.M Idofian. The former runs a radio educational programme called Lessons on Radio which is aired every Tuesday at 7:00 PM. The programme centres on different subjects. This programme helps to increase the knowledge of the audience on different subjects that are taught in school. The School Challenge aired every Wednesday at 7:00 PM. Legal Right airs on Fridays at 4.30 PM. Legal Right helps the audience to know what rights they have and how to avoid flouting the law of the land. English Teacher airs on Thursday at 7:00 PM.

The English Teacher is not just for students but for the entire family. The programme aimed at improving the English language proficiency of the learners saw a presenter read out some sentences before asking the audience to identify errors in any of the sentences. The programme was structured as a call-in programme to ensure interactivity thereby enhancing a wider participation. It further mimicked a classroom situation where an instructor interacts with students. The educational broadcast was usually aired during the evening belt at about 5:30 to 6:00 PM.

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by the social responsibility theory of the press. The Social responsibility theory of the press posits that media institution has ethical responsibility towards society. The genesis of the theory is traced back to the 1942 Hutchins Commission tagged the Commission on the Freedom of the Press in the United States. The commission published a seminal report titled "A Free and Responsible Press," in 1947. This gave birth to the Social Responsibility Theory. Proponents of the theory include Siebert, Peterson, Schramm, Wilbur Schramm, Edwin Emery, Michael Emery, James Curran, and Jean Seaton. The theory avers that the press has to act responsibly by giving unbiased and accurate information to society. This theory originated from the concerns about the possible negative influence that an unchecked media can wield. Therefore, the media should operate for the greater good of all. The key tenets of the theory include truthfulness, accountability, fairness, watchfulness over society, cultural promotion, accessibility to diverse voices, avoidance of harm and social development all aimed at the public interest.

The above theory is in line with the issue of educational broadcasting since the media has a responsibility to act in the best interest of society for the greater good. Broadcasting educational content during periods of pandemic is a social responsibility that the media owe the Nigerian society since the media can transmit signals to diversified and heterogeneous audiences simultaneously.



Study Design/Methodology

The study design for this paper is analytic. Utilizing an in-depth interview guide, it accessed information from officials of the Kwara State Ministry of Education on their response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic as it relates to educational broadcasting. The in-depth interview was recorded and later transcribed and analysed in this study.

Data Analysis

To analyse the data gathered through in-depth interviews, the three research questions were recalled and presented below:

RQ 1: What are the challenges faced by the Kwara State Education ministry during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The pandemic period presented several formidable challenges all over the world; for countries, states, and individuals. So, it was not just for Kwara State or the Ministry of Education. There were challenges that became pressing concern such as restriction of movements, and physical gatherings, sudden closure of schools and ensuring uninterrupted access to education. The traditional classroom form of education; that is the usual classroom where students go to schools and everybody mingles was displaced. The abrupt transition from traditional classroom to remote learning environment disrupted the continuity of education for many students.

RQ 2: What are the specific measures put in place to ensure that broadcast educational content reaches pupils/students in rural areas of Kwara State?

Measures implemented to curb the disruption occasioned by the pandemic included the development and deployment of online learning platforms tailored to the needs of the Kwara State students. Simultaneously, the ministry initiated a comprehensive distribution of educational and instructional materials such as textbooks, workbooks and digital resources to facilitate remote learning. It collaborated with various stakeholders including educators, parents, and technology providers. These technology providers whose help was sought helped to further bolster remote learning initiatives and ensure their effectiveness. Community engagement initiatives were also launched to foster a supportive learning environment outside of traditional classroom settings with an emphasis on parental involvement and students' participation.

RQ 3: What role did radio and television play in delivering educational content during the pandemic in Kwara State?



Radio and television became essential tools for delivering educational content, particularly in rural areas where internet access and electronic devices are limited. The ministry utilized the extensive reach of radio and television broadcasting to provide lessons, educational programs, and instructional materials to students throughout the state. By relying on these traditional media, the ministry ensured that educational content remained accessible to all students, regardless of their technological capabilities.

Reaching rural areas was challenging, requiring efforts to engage with remote communities unfamiliar with technology. To bridge the digital divide, targeted measures were implemented. These included strategic partnerships with local radio stations to broadcast educational content and the establishment of learning content centres in remote villages. These centres provided students with a conducive environment for learning and access to educational resources. Collaborative efforts with community leaders and non-governmental organizations further supported the dissemination of educational materials and remote learning tailored to the unique needs of rural areas in Kwara State.

Educational programs were broadcast on various stations, with cooperation from both government and privately owned radio stations. One notable station was Harmony 103.5 FM Idofian, which partnered with the Kwara State Ministry of Education to air educational content even beyond the pandemic period. Their program aimed at improving English language proficiency involved a presenter reading sentences and asking the audience to identify any errors. This call-in program ensured interactivity, mimicking a classroom setting where an instructor interacts with students. The educational broadcasts were typically aired during the evening hours.

Discussion of Findings

Findings indicate that radio and television emerged as indispensable tools for delivering educational content due to the limitation of internet access and electronic devices particularly in rural areas. This finding agrees with Ijeh and Ojebode's (2015) position that through educational broadcasting, contents are made available and distributed widely to learners in a cheap, quick and efficient manner.

In Kwara State, educational broadcasting held sway albeit on a lower scale during pandemics. Broadcast stations in a state with a massive land mass like Kwara State need high and powerful transmitters that can cover a long distance in order to reach the audience. Frequency-modulated (FM) stations that are available are not meant for a very long-distance transmission like the Amplitude modulated (AM) band.

It was equally noted that the ministry devised multi-faceted strategies to mitigate the adverse effect of the lockdown during the pandemic on the learning and teaching process.



Some of these strategies included extensive teacher-training programmes designed to equip educators with the skills needed for effective online instruction. Additionally, the ministry facilitated the broad distribution of educational resources, such as digital learning materials and offline resources, to support students' learning at home.

It was also found that other measures included strategic partnerships with local radio stations to broadcast educational content. The above scenario is in line with the postulations of some communication experts that radio breaks the barrier of illiteracy and is capable of reaching people in remote areas (Okunna & Omenugha, 2012; Opubor, 2007; Okunna, 1992). Radio is portable and relatively cheap to acquire. And these days most phones have radio reception facilities in them including the low-cost ones which are not internet enabled.

Summary/Conclusion

This paper on the prospects and challenges of broadcasting educational content during pandemics in Kwara State aims to provide valuable insights and recommendations for stakeholders in the education sector. Educational broadcasting in Kwara State has the potential to enhance access to education in spite of the challenges bedevilling it. Opportunities exist for enhanced usage with the liberalization of the ownership structure, and expansion of the broadcast spectrum, including campus community radio stations. Nonetheless, addressing digital disparities, infrastructural constraints and retraining of education managers and teachers remain a matter to be addressed. This will ensure equitable and inclusive education delivery (Ukeje & Azuh, 2021). It therefore calls for concerted efforts to leverage technology, strengthen broadcasting infrastructure, and develop innovative pedagogical approaches to build an enduring education in Kwara State and in Nigeria as a whole.

Recommendations

1. There should be a deliberate policy to integrate modern technological equipment especially internet infrastructure into the teaching and learning process.
2. Educational broadcasting should be employed across all levels of education which would enhance education delivery and widen the education frontiers.
3. Since the world is dynamic, education managers in Kwara State should also be flexible in their approach to education content delivery for more impact.
4. Teachers and staff of the Ministry of Education should be made to undergo periodic training in modern means and methods of pedagogy leaning on technology innovation.



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