

**RADIO NETWORK AS A STRATEGIC MEDIUM OF EDUCATION AND AWARENESS
CREATION IN NIGERIA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ERA: A HISTORICAL
PERSPECTIVE (1956-2020)**

IWUNNA, PETER.U.

UJAH, PPATRICK.N.

Department of Educational Foundations,

University of Nigeria, Nsukka

DIMONYE. SIMEON.C.

Department of Philosophy,

University of Nigeria, Nsukka

&

NKWOCHA, GODWIN.O

Department of Mass Communication,

University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract

The radio network in Nigeria, no doubt, rendered credible services to Nigerians during the Covid-19 pandemic era. Through the services of the radio, Nigeria's populations of listeners received the relevant awareness messages required to escape the lethal infections of the Corona virus, code-named the Covid-19. Through the services of various radio stations, fellow citizens got sensitized about the dangers, patterns of spread, preventive measures and other related healthcare strategies that could curb the spread of the virus. Through the agency of the radio too, the country's school children received periodic school lessons from the comfort of their own homes during the lockdown era when all school closed down. These highlight the great roles played by the radio in Nigeria during the Covid-19 pandemic era, all with the intentions of keeping the populations of listeners safe and alive. It is the primary target of this paper to discuss some of the key roles played by the country's radio networks in tackling the spread of Covid-19 among Nigerians during the pandemic era.

Keywords: Awareness, Covid-19, Education, Medium, Radio, Pandemic, Strategic

Introduction

The discovery of the Covid-19 virus in December, 2019 shook the globe. This unfortunate development which originated from Wuhan, China, literally kept the globe under lock and keys with the effect that all normal human activities shut down. Spreading like wild forest fires, criss-crossing all geographical boundaries, and claiming victims from persons of divergent nationalities, colours and religions, the disease brought the world to her knees. Having disrupted all normal human activities, created inestimable economic losses, and caused the loss of countless lives, the entire world was forced to adapt some 'new normals' designed to curtail its spread, reduce the speed of infections, and save precious human lives (Mohamedbhai, 2020; Ogbonna, & Adigun, 2020).

Confronted with the complications of the virus which spread with great speed across geographical boundaries, Nigeria and the WHO developed strong strategies that fought back the disease from spreading so relentlessly. For them, the project of tackling the virus and blocking its avenues of spreading into human communities became prioritized. This led to the erection of appropriate health-related barriers that checkmated the activities of the virus by different world nations. This led to the introduction of a number of 'new normals' by the WHO and world nations.

For Nigeria, those preventive precautionary measures could have failed if the services of the radio were not engaged. Those healthcare-related preventive measures could have died natural deaths too if the

country's radio networks were left out of the battle. Thus, information about the 'new normals' approved by the WHO and Nigeria's NCDC could have failed too, while more lives could have been lost. Through Nigeria's radio networks, the country's populations numbering more than 200 million could have suffered higher casualties. As a 21st century public media outlet, radio stations in Nigeria provided regular updates on the activities of the Covid-19 virus, its pattern of spread, possible preventive measures, figures of victims around the globe and aggressive education on the 'new normals' (Mohamedhbai, 2020; Ogbonna, & Adigun, 2020; Iwunna, Dimonye, Nwokeji, Abubakar, Okoro, Alison, 2021).

History informs us that radio network arrived Nigeria in the historic year of 1932 when wireless networks were created for the purposes of monitoring and relaying various programmes of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) within this geographical territory. Prior to the attainment of political independence on 1st October, 1960, all radio programmes in Nigeria were designed and packaged from BBC, London. However, all radio programming activities in Nigeria between 1937 and 1955 remained an extension of the BBC, London. In 1951 however, the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS) was inaugurated as a relay station working closely with the BBC, which relayed national news and other programmes from its London offices. Remarkably, the year 1956 witnessed the birth of the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation which was re-named as the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria in 1979 (Fafunwa, 1974; Akpan, 2000).

With the inauguration of the radio broadcast media in Nigeria, the provision of independent and impartial broadcasting services to Nigerians commenced. Detached from the undue influences from Britain, the NBC began to broadcast news and information concerning Nigeria. This paved the way for the radio to begin to play pivotal roles in information dissemination to millions of listeners all over the country. With the creation of more states however, there was massive increase in the numbers of radio stations. This became prominent as each state procured the relevant permits which authorized them to operate their own radio stations which were seen as their information medium to the outside world. Remarkably, with the creation of more new states in Nigeria in 1976, there were already more than 19 state-owned radio stations operational in the country (Federal Ministry of Information & Culture, 1997; Akpan, 2000).

Even in this millennium era when Nigeria now has a total of 36 states, plus Abuja, the numbers of radio stations in the country have gone higher. Each state operates at least one radio station, added to some privately-owned ones. Meanwhile, there are a number of broadcast stations housed under the FRCN located in different states. These are indicators that the radio broadcast media are strategic partners in the dissemination of news and information. Radio outfit has posited itself as a quintessential tool of news coverage, dissemination of messages, education and sensitization of the populations. As an audio media outfit, listeners are provided with up-to-date news on developments, events and activities all over the world. These explain the great roles played by Nigeria's radio stations during the Covid-19 pandemic era (Danbatta, 2017; Akinnaso, 2020; Mohamedhbai, 2020).

Thus, with the increased numbers of radio stations operational in Nigeria, the tasks of conveying the news on the discovery, dangers, and preventive measures associated with the dreaded Covid-19 to Nigerians became feasible. The herculean tasks of reaching out to millions of Nigerians who rely on the radio for information became less cumbersome, most especially as almost every household in the country prides herself with the ownership of this wireless device. Armed with adequate information about the virus through the radio therefore, wider awareness was made about its spread patterns, preventive measures and other precautionary approaches that countered its relentless spread. This saved more lives and minimized its spread patterns. By implication, Nigeria's efforts at cutting down on the

level of its spread among citizens would have failed if the country's radio stations were not brought to the scene to perform their corporate duties to the nation in English language and the local languages.

Radio as Nigeria's Popular Media of Information

The radio network stands as Nigeria's most popular media of information. This iconic public medium is so much popular that the ownership of a radio set is counted as a major asset. As a prized family asset, this wireless electronic device appeals to the hearing senses of its countless listeners all over Nigeria. It is quite different from the print media which require the laborious abilities of reading. For the radio, all information are delivered in English and the local Nigerian languages, all with the intentions of delivering messages and essential information to the people in their own languages and English, without any fear of misinformation and misinterpretation of relayed news (National Teachers' Institute, 1983; Federal Ministry of Information & Culture, 1997; Akpan, 2000).

Thus, there is hardly any Nigerian family that does not own a radio set. The implication is that the greater majority of Nigerians listen to the radio, and rely on it for information, sensitization, and knowledge power. Greater percentage of the country's population glues to the radio for their daily news. Through the agency of the radio, Nigerians gather news about the latest developments and major happenings in the country and elsewhere. Through the agency of radio networks too, citizens are provided impartial broadcasting services and other important informative programmes that impact the wellbeing, good health and the continued sustenance of Nigeria's unity as a single and indivisible nation, made up of a multiplicity of ethno-linguistic cultural units (Lugard, 1922; Federal Ministry of Information & Culture, 1997; Iwunna, 2011; Okoro, 2021).

Currently, the FRCN operates as the national radio station which is licenced with the capacity to cover the entire geographical spheres of Nigeria. Established on 28th February, 1979 the station is empowered with the responsibility of broadcasting to the entire nation on the short wave length, also known as the Medium Wave Band. As a matter of fact, this radio station has the technological capacity that enables its millions of listeners to receive its programmes simultaneously in all states of the federation. For instance, the relay of the national network news nationwide at 7am and 4pm daily is one unique programme that all other radio stations throughout the country mandatorily hook unto. Through the agency of its numerous outstations located in the different states of the country, the FRCN is able to cover the entire nation without much technical hitches. The essence is to cover the entire nation's space with impartial and undiluted radio broadcasting, while taking into cognizance the need to give the country's divergent cultures adequate coverage, as well as create opportunities for the different states of the federation to express their unique opinions on critical issues (Federal Ministry of Information & Culture, 1997).

Furthermore, it is quite notable that the electronic media have grown so wide in Nigeria. It has arrived at the level that states and wealthy individuals could easily establish and operate their own radio stations. The same is the case with the print and television media, which operate in different parts of the country. This is attributable to the press freedom which the media have continued to enjoy in Nigeria. Consequently, investment of funds in the media industry has continued to attract huge patronage. This has encouraged the government to license more media outfits in the country. Popular among the private media outfits in Nigeria include the Ray Power 100 Radio Station and the African Independent Television (AIT), owned by DAAR Communications, Dubai Broadcasting Network (DBN), Channels Television, Muhri International Television (MITV), Lion FM, Nsukka and Clapper Board Television, Lagos (National Teachers' Institute, 1983; Federal Ministry of Information & Culture, 1997).

Remarkably, radios count among the most patronized electronic devices in Nigeria. It is no guess therefore that there is virtually no single household in Nigeria that does not own one two radio sets.

Similarly too, there is no household in Nigeria that does not listen to the radio. Everyone listens to the radio in the local languages and English. This is an indication that parents, children, market men and women, pastors and churchgoers, teachers, pupils and students constitute the large listening public that patronize radio programmes. In view of this development, reaching out to Nigerians during the Covid-19 pandemic era became seamless. Educating Nigerians through the radio network on the dangers of the Covid-19 virus was able to be attained without hitches. Reaching out to Nigerian homes, irrespective of their locations and other physical complications became feasible. Thus, it became a reality to educate Nigerians on those healthcare protocols that kept them safe and well, as well as protected them from the attacks and complications of the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is against these backgrounds that this paper strongly argues that the infrastructures of the radio played crucial roles in the successful execution of the attacks waged against the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. No doubt, the radio counted among the powerful media of mass information dissemination which impacted Nigeria's successful battle against this virus, with the effect that less numbers of deaths were recorded, while infections reduced drastically. It is this strong resilience and strict compliance with the precautionary measures approved against its spread that kept the country's death figures at only 2892 as at October, 2021, while the numbers of infections remained at 211,678. Compared with similar reports from other world nations therefore, this is a huge success story (Nigeria Television Authority, 2021).

Relevance of the Radio during the Pandemic Era

No doubt, Nigeria's radio industry played crucial roles in the dissemination of relevant information to the country's populations during the Covid-19 pandemic era. These shall be discussed under the following subheadings:

Delivery of School Lessons

Radio stations in Nigeria performed credible roles during the pandemic era when schools and educational establishments closed down. With the closure of all school gates, the radio industry in Nigeria turned into strong instruments of educational knowledge. Radio stations, in the spirit of commitment to national cause, delivered classroom lessons on different schools subjects at some long distance at the doorsteps of young learners.

Through their programme of long-distance education also known as the e-learning method of school education, children and young learners received lessons from their teachers. Known by names such as 'study at home,' and 'the home lesson teacher' among others, young learners were kept busy with classroom educational activities. During the lessons, learners received assignments on the lessons taught, all with the intentions of keeping them in touch with normal school activities. Thus, through the services of various radio stations, young learners in primary and secondary schools enjoyed seemingly normal classroom lessons simultaneously, irrespective of differences in location. Consequently, this electronic medium of public outreach supported the sustenance of long-distance educational project in Nigeria, and motivated more families to adapt to the cultures of radio listenership. This encouraged families to invest in this area of the ICT industry during the pandemic era (Odo, 2015; Danbatta, 2017; Akinnsaso, 2020).

Awareness about Disease Spread

Through the agency of the radio, the millions of listeners in Nigeria received were regular updates and information about the activities of the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria and elsewhere. That includes the rising numbers of victims, rates of infections from different countries of the globe and the precautionary measures adopted by advanced nations of the world to reduce spread. Through the radio too, citizens and residents were armed with daily updates on the attempts made by the WHO and other related healthcare agencies in dealing with issues of physical contacts among persons. Behind this initiative was the need to stop the disease from spreading dangerously into several human communities in the

country as well as enable the various healthcare agencies conduct effective contact-tracing activities among persons moving in and out of communities in Nigeria (Pember, & Humbe, 2013; Emorinken, 2020; Oji, 2020).

Thus, it was through the radio that majority of Nigerians got the awareness that the virus respects no geographical boundaries, respects no human colours, capable of attacking persons anywhere, has the capacity to infect any victims who makes contact with an infected person, and has the capacity to move among infected persons who display no signs and symptoms. Through various radio channels in Nigeria too, citizens got daily updates on the numbers of victims, both death and infected ones. For instance, Nigeria's radio stations informed the nation that as at 26th August, 2020, a total of 820,237 Covid-19 deaths had been recorded globally, with about 23,958,200 persons infected, while 16,476,441 infected persons recovered. The situation even became more traumatic as the figures of Covid-19-related deaths and infections skyrocketed astronomically as at the 11th March, 2021 update.

Thus, Varrella, in Iwunna, Dimonye, Okoro, Okeke, Nkwocha, and Patrick (2021), sadly reports that the world had recorded more than 119,109,202 Covid-19 infections, and a whopping 2,641,683 unfortunate deaths. It adds that out of these figures, Europe recorded 35,749,011 infections and 848,137 deaths. According to this source, North America recorded 786,428 deaths and 34,380,177 infections. It is heart-warming however that these pieces of sad news occupied headline news in the programme presentations of Nigeria's radio stations. The situation became so alarming that several radio stations in Nigeria converted their daily programmes into awareness messages, designed to sensitize and educate the listening public on the dangers associated with the disease and the precautionary measures that could be adapted to prevent contacting the virus. Through the radio channels too Nigerians received information about the various preventive measures, also known as the "new normals" approved by WHO and Nigeria's NCDC.

Education on the Signs and Symptoms

During the Covid-19 pandemic era in Nigeria, the radio constituted one major channel of information dissemination about the relevant signs and symptoms which identified the presence of the disease among persons. This explains another prominent role played by this essential ICT infrastructure during the pandemic. As a veritable news agency, it delivered news and Covid-19-related information to Nigerians in their homes and local communities in their own languages, plus the English language. It educated listeners on the signs and symptoms associated with the virus. Because Nigerians of all classes usually identify the radio as a great companion and strong source of information, sending out messages about the signs and symptoms of the Covid-19 pandemic became worthwhile.

Thus, through the organs of the radio network, Nigerians came to the awareness that the signs and symptoms of the virus included the following: Diarrhea, shortness of breath, high fever, cough and catarrh, loss of sense of smell, and loss of appetite, etc. Nigerians also got the awareness that maintenance of strong hygiene through regular washing of hands, avoidance of crowded spaces, regular use of face masks, avoidance of all physical contacts and handshakes, sneezing into the elbows and strict maintenance of physical distancing among persons, could help prevent infections and untimely death (Afolabi, 2020).

Strong Source of Sensitization on the 'New Normals'

The concept of "new normals" connote refers to the new healthcare regulations approved by the WHO and Nigeria's healthcare agencies designed to prevent infections of the Covid-19 pandemic among citizens, reduce death rates among persons and monitor the activities of infected persons anywhere within Nigeria. Thus, through various radio programmes, Nigerians got the awareness that the wearing of face masks could reduce Covid-19 infections. They also got the fundamental education that through

regular washing of the hands in alcohol-based sanitizers and maintenance of strong hygiene, contact with the disease could be eliminated.

Significantly, the Covid-19 pandemic created an opportunity for Nigerians to earn extra income for their families. The production of face masks and hand sanitizers became a major industry in several homes. Families engaged their children in the production of these essential products. Though As unprofessional and improvised, the continued production of both products brought extra income into families, made families resourceful, saved members from hunger and idleness and armed them with new skills. With the aid of such added skills, several Nigerian homes survived the harsh economic crunch created by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Summary

This paper has highlighted a number of key factors based on the relevance of the radio as an important tool of information dissemination. As an ICT facility which entered Nigeria in 1956, the radio network plays crucial roles in the dissemination of crucial information to the entire listeners simultaneously. During the pandemic era, it successfully delivered school lessons to learners at their homes, sensitized them about the dangers of the Covid-19 pandemic, provided them with awareness about relevant precautionary measures, and educated them on the need to adapt to the “new normals” approved by the WHO and Nigeria’s NCDC. Significantly, the radio in Nigeria could be credited for performing creditably in the successful handling of the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria, a situation which accounted for the low casualty rates recorded by the country in her battle against Covid-19.

References

- Afolabi, O. (2020). WHO to make vaccines available globally. *The Nation*, 26 August.
- Akinnaso, N. (2020). How Osun Prepared for school reopening. *The Nation*, 26 August.
- Akpan, C. S. (2000). *Broadcast and journalism foundation*. Enugu: JOEN Printing and Publishing Company.
- Danbatta, U. G. (2017). *The role of the ICT infrastructure in tertiary education in Nigeria: NCC interventions*. Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press Ltd.
- Emorinken, M. (2020). Chloroquine kills Coronavirus in early stage, says NAFDAC D-G. *The Nation*, 26 August.
- Fafunwa, A. B. (1974). *History of education in Nigeria*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Federal Ministry of Information & Culture. (1997). *Nigeria handbook*. Abuja: Production Department, Federal Ministry of Information & Culture.
- Iwunna, P. (2011). *The impact of the Catholic primary school education in Igboland: The impact of the Catholic education (1925-1960)*. Saarbrucken: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing GmbH & Co. K.G.
- Iwunna, P. U., Dimonye, S. C., Nwokeji, I. C., Abubakar, A. O., Okoro, C. O. C., & Alison, J. O. (2021). Virtual conferencing in the era of Covid-19 pandemic: Relevance to the Historians of Education Development Society of Nigeria. *African Journal of Historical Sciences in Education*.
- Iwunna, P. U., Dimonye, S. C., Okoro, C. O. C., Okeke, J. N., Nkwocha, G. O., & Patrick, C. C. (2021). ICT infrastructures in the era of Covid-19: Challenges militating against adaptation to effective teaching and learning in Nigeria's tertiary institutions. In J. E. Umeifekwem (Ed.). *International Journal of Studies in Education*, 17(1), 88-101.
- Lugard, F. D. (1922). *The dual mandate in British Tropical Africa*. Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood and Sons.
- Mohamedbhai, G. (2020). Covid-19: What consequences for higher education? <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post-mobile.php?story=20200407064850279>
- National Teachers' Institute. (1983). *Course book on education: Other agencies of education*. Kaduna: National Teachers' Institute.
- Nigerian Television Authority. (2021). *News line*, 30 October.
- Odo, J. N. (2015). Challenges and prospects of integration of computer and ICT skills into teaching and learning of physics education for entrepreneurial development in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. In E. E. Agomuo (Ed). *Computer Educational Research Journal (CERJ)*, 2(1), 31-38.
- Ogbonna, A., & Adigun, O. (2020). COVID-19: Regulators double down on consumer protection mandate amid Fintech disruption. *Daily Sun*, 16 November.
- Oji, C. (2020). UNN produces contactless digital hand cleaning machine. *The Nation*, 26 August.
- Okoro, E. N. (2021). Parental attitude towards academics of children with hearing impairment in Oyo State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 9(1), 130-138.
- Pember, S. T., & Humbe, T. T. (2013). Promoting effective teaching/learning of Physics computer simulations. In I. Ikpa (Ed.). *Katsina-Ala Multidisciplinary Journal (A Journal of College of Education, Katsina-Ala, Benue State)*, 1(4) 29-38.