

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY RADIO IN PROMOTING CHILD RIGHTS EDUCATION IN RURAL NIGERIA. “A STUDY OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN BIDA, NIGER STATE”

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Abstract

This study examined the role of community radio in promoting child rights education and reducing out-of-school children in rural Nigeria, with a focus on Bida, Niger State. It investigated how community radio disseminated information on child rights and education, influenced community awareness and behaviors, identified challenges to its effectiveness, and explored strategies for sustainability. Using a survey design, 400 respondents who regularly listened to community radio were selected, and data were collected through a structured questionnaire based on a four-point Likert scale an analysis using frequencies and percentages. The findings of this study revealed that that a large majority of respondents (72–83%) agreed that community radio frequently disseminates educational content on child rights and schooling. The study concluded that community radio is an effective tool for promoting child rights education and reducing children out-of- school in rural Nigeria. It recommended that increase the frequency and variety of child rights and education programs, including interactive formats and expert interviews, to engage a wider audience.

Keywords: Community Radio, Child Rights Education, Out –of-School, Rural Nigeria, Educational Awareness

Introduction

The protection and promotion of child rights have become central concerns in global and national development discourse, particularly in relation to access to quality education. Globally, frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 2019) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (2018) underscore the obligations of governments and communities to ensure that every child enjoys the right to education. In Nigeria, these international provisions were domesticated through the Child Rights Act (CRA, 2019) and the Universal Basic Education Act (2020), which mandate free and compulsory basic education for all children (Okoye & Onyekuru, 2019). Despite these frameworks, child rights particularly the right to education remain weakly

implemented, especially in rural communities.

Multiple studies indicate that Nigeria has one of the highest numbers of out-of-school children globally, with Northern Nigeria accounting for the greatest proportion (UNICEF, 2021; Aderibigbe & Akinrotimi, 2020; Edewor, 2019). In Niger State and rural areas such as Bida, educational challenges are intensified by factors including poverty, early marriage, child labor, gender bias, cultural resistance to Western education, and low parental literacy (Eze, 2018; Mohammed & Yelwa, 2020; Bawa, 2019). These interlocking factors not only perpetuate educational deprivation but also violate basic child rights and hinder national development outcomes.

A central challenge underlying these educational deficits is the communication

gap within rural settings. Parents and community gatekeepers often lack access to timely and culturally relevant information on child rights, educational benefits, and protective legal frameworks (Melkote & Steeves, 2022). Development communication scholars have long emphasized that effective information dissemination is critical to shaping community perceptions, confronting harmful norms, and stimulating behavioral change (Servaes, 2019; Mefalopulos, 2020). Thus, weak communication infrastructures and limited access to educational information significantly contribute to the persistence of out-of-school children in rural communities.

Within this landscape, community radio has emerged as one of the most powerful and accessible tools for grassroots engagement. Community radio stations use local languages, cultural expressions, participatory formats, and indigenous communication patterns to engage rural populations on issues affecting their lives (Fraser & Estrada, 2020; Manyozo, 2019). Research in Nigeria shows that community radio is influential in development interventions such as health campaigns, agricultural extension, women's empowerment, and civic participation (Alumuku, 2020; Ojebode, 2019; Nwabueze, 2019). Scholars also highlight that radio because of its affordability and oral communication style is especially effective in Northern Nigeria, where literacy levels are low (Oso & Pate, 2020; Abdulrahman, 2019).

Recent studies have found that radio campaigns can increase awareness of educational rights, discourage child labor, and challenge socio-cultural barriers that keep children out of school (Yahaya & Okafor, 2021; Danjibo & Ishaq, 2020). However, despite the documented relevance of community radio to development, empirical studies focusing specifically on

community radio's role in child rights education remain limited, especially within rural Northern Nigerian contexts. Few studies examine how community radio content influences parental attitudes, community norms, and children's aspirations regarding schooling. Even fewer provide evidence on how rural audiences engage with child rights messages, how effective these messages are in shaping behavior, or what communication gaps still persist.

Bida presents a unique environment where cultural norms, religious identities, economic pressures, and traditional institutions intersect to influence educational outcomes (Umar & Yusuf, 2019). It is therefore critical to explore how community radio can be used more strategically to promote child rights education and address the entrenched socio-cultural barriers affecting school enrollment and retention.

Given the persistent challenge of out-of-school children in Bida, and the recognized potential of community radio in promoting rights-based education, this study aims to examine the role of community radio in promoting child rights education in rural Nigeria, using Bida as a case study. Specifically, it investigates how community radio messages inform, influence, and shape community perceptions and behaviors concerning children's right to education, and the extent to which radio programming addresses the socio-cultural and economic factors sustaining school dropout in the area.

Statement of the Problem

Despite Nigeria's commitment to child rights through the Child Rights Act (CRA, 2018) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 2019), millions of children about 20 million, according to UNESCO (2022) remain out of school, with

rural areas most affected due to poverty, cultural norms, gender bias, and limited awareness. In Bida, Niger State, out-of-school challenges are driven by economic hardship, early marriage, child labor, and cultural beliefs that devalue formal education, especially for girls. These problems highlight a major communication gap in promoting child rights at the grassroots level. Although community radio has the potential to inform, engage, and mobilize rural audiences, little is known about its effectiveness in promoting child rights education and reducing children out-of-school in Niger State. This study therefore examines how community radio raises awareness, shapes attitudes, and influences community behavior toward sustaining children's education in Bida.

Objectives of the Study

1. Assess the extent to which community radio in Bida disseminates information related to child rights and education.
2. Evaluate the level of community awareness and understanding of child educational rights as influenced by community radio broadcasts.
3. Ascertain perceived influence of community radio programs on attitudes and behaviors toward child school retention and protection.

Review of Concepts

Community Radio

Community radio is a participatory medium that enables marginalized communities to access information, engage in dialogue, and mobilize for social development. Studies have shown that community radio is particularly effective in rural areas because of its use of local languages and culturally relevant content (Olorunnisola, 2019; Tacchi, 2020). In Nigeria, Asemah and Edegoh (2022) found that community radio programs

improved awareness of education, health, and development issues, demonstrating its potential as a tool for empowerment and social change.

Child Rights Education

Child rights education involves teaching and sensitizing communities, caregivers, and children about their rights as defined in legal and international instruments such as the Child Rights Act (2018) and the UNCRC (2019). Empirical studies show that child rights education increases parental understanding, improves child protection practices, and encourages school retention (Banda & Fourie, 2019; Okafor & Nwankwo, 2018). In Nigeria, Akinwalere (2020) reported that community-focused child rights education led to improved reporting of abuse and increased attention to children's welfare in rural communities.

Out-of-School Children

Out-of-school children are those who do not attend any formal educational institution or have dropped out before completing primary or secondary education. Nigeria has one of the highest numbers of out-of-school children globally, with over 20 million affected, particularly in rural northern states (UNESCO, 2022). Factors contributing to out-of-school status include poverty, early marriage, child labor, cultural norms, and limited awareness of education's value (Abdulrahman & Adeoye, 2020; Udu & Eze, 2019). Empirical studies highlight that media interventions, including community radio, can play a role in reducing dropout by raising educational awareness and influencing parental attitudes (Chikafa & Mateveke, 2019; Ezeah & Nwankwo, 2020).

Empirical Review

Empirical studies on community radio, child rights education, and out-of-school children have demonstrated the importance of media-driven awareness in shaping community knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. Several studies have investigated how community radio influences educational participation, child protection, and awareness in rural settings.

Asemah and Edegoh (2022) found that community radio significantly contributed to rural development by increasing awareness on social issues, including education and child welfare. Their study revealed that radio programs broadcast in local languages enhanced comprehension and enabled wider participation among rural residents. Similarly, Chikafa and Mateveke (2018), in a study conducted in Zimbabwe, reported that radio-based educational programs improved school attendance by increasing parental understanding of the benefits of formal education. The authors noted that rural communities were more responsive to culturally relevant and locally produced radio content.

Research also established a link between community radio and child rights awareness. Banda and Fourie (2018) examined community radio stations across Southern Africa and found that stations airing child rights education programs recorded improved community reporting of child abuse cases and increased support for children's schooling. In the Nigerian context, Akinwalere (2020) reported that community radio stations played a crucial role in sensitizing caregivers on the importance of children's rights, especially in areas with limited access to formal child protection institutions. The study showed that radio messaging helped shape community attitudes

toward school enrolment and the elimination of harmful practices such as child labor.

In relation to child rights education, Okafor and Nwankwo (2018) found that consistent exposure to child rights sensitization programs significantly improved parental attitudes toward child protection and schooling in rural southeastern Nigeria. Their findings demonstrated that child rights awareness programs contributed to behavioral changes, including improved monitoring of children's school attendance and reduced acceptance of early marriage. Monaselidze (2019) reported similar outcomes in a study conducted in Georgia, where child rights education enhanced community engagement in promoting children's wellbeing.

Empirical studies on out-of-school children in Nigeria have also highlighted the socio-economic and cultural factors affecting children's educational participation. Abdulrahman and Adeoye (2020) found that poverty, early marriage, and child labor were major determinants of school dropout in northern Nigeria. Their study showed that households struggling with financial insecurity were more likely to withdraw children from school for economic survival. Udu and Eze (2019) further reported that deeply rooted cultural beliefs, particularly those affecting girl-child education, contributed significantly to the high proportion of out-of-school children in rural northern communities. The authors observed that parental illiteracy and traditional apprenticeship practices often took precedence over formal education.

Several studies also established the role of media in promoting educational awareness. Ezeah and Nwankwo (2018) discovered that radio-driven educational campaigns in rural communities enhanced parental knowledge

of the long-term value of schooling and reduced children's absenteeism. Likewise, Manyozo (2019) showed that community radio served as an effective development communication tool capable of mobilizing rural populations toward educational advancement and behavioral change.

Despite these contributions, there remained limited empirical evidence on how community radio influences child rights education specifically in Niger State. None of the reviewed studies focused on Bida, nor did they examine how community radio affects attitudes and behaviors related to sustaining children's education. This gap underscores the need for the present study, which provides context-specific empirical evidence on how community radio promotes child rights education and reduces out-of-school children in Bida, Niger State.

A review of empirical studies on community radio, child rights education, and out-of-school children reveals several critical gaps that justify the present study. First, while numerous studies have examined out-of-school children in Nigeria, most focused on general socio-economic determinants such as poverty, child labor, and early marriage (Abdulrahman & Adeoye, 2020; Udu & Eze, 2019), with limited attention to the role of communication interventions in addressing these issues. Second, although community radio has been identified as an effective tool for rural education and social awareness (Asemah & Edegoh, 2022; Manyozo, 2019), empirical evidence on its specific contribution to child rights education in Nigeria remains scarce. Third, studies conducted in Nigeria largely adopt broad regional perspectives or focus on southern and southwestern states (Akinwalere, 2020), leaving rural northern states, including Niger State, under-researched. Fourth, while existing research demonstrates that

community radio can influence general educational awareness (Chikafa & Mateveke, 2019; Ezeah & Nwankwo, 2018), few studies have investigated how radio interventions shape attitudes, behaviors, and practices related to sustaining children's education, especially in communities with high dropout rates such as Bida. Finally, there is little evidence on the challenges faced by community radio stations in delivering child rights education such as funding limitations, language barriers, and weak collaborations with local organizations which limits understanding of the factors that affect the effectiveness and sustainability of such interventions.

Addressing these gaps, the present study provides context-specific empirical evidence on the role of community radio in promoting child rights education and reducing out-of-school children in Bida, Niger State, thereby contributing to both theory and practice in communication for development and educational advocacy.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) Theory, which explains how new ideas, practices, or technologies spread through communication channels over time among members of a social system. The theory was developed by Everett M. Rogers, first introduced in 1962 and subsequently revised in 1995 and 2003 to reflect broader applications in health, education, and development communication (Rogers, 2003). The central premise of DOI is that the adoption of an innovation such as child rights education delivered through community radio is influenced by the characteristics of the innovation, the communication channels, the social system, the time of adoption, and the categories of adopters, which include innovators, early adopters, early majority,

late majority, and laggards. This theory is relevant to the study because it provides a framework for understanding how community radio messages about child rights and education are disseminated, adopted, and acted upon in rural communities like Bida, Niger State, explaining variations in community members' awareness, attitudes, and behaviors. Several scholars have applied or contributed to the DOI framework, including Valente (1995), who examined innovation diffusion in health and education, Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), who studied interpersonal influence in communication, and Manyozo (2019), who applied diffusion principles to community media in African rural development contexts. The strengths of DOI lie in its clear model for understanding the spread of innovations, emphasis on communication channels and social influence, and applicability to predicting behavioral change in response to media campaigns. However, the theory has limitations, including its focus on adoption rather than long-term empowerment, assumptions of rational decision-making that may overlook cultural or structural barriers, and limited attention to the participatory dynamics of social change (Rogers, 2003; Manyozo, 2019).

Research Methodology

This study employed a survey research design to examine the role of community radio in promoting child rights education in rural Nigeria. The survey method was chosen for its ability to generate quantifiable data on audience awareness, attitudes, and behaviors (Creswell, 2018; Wimmer & Dominick, 2014).

The research was conducted in Niger State, which, as of 2024, has an estimated population of over 6 million people and is divided into 25 Local Government Areas

(LGAs): Agaie, Agwara, Bida, Borgu, Bosso, Chanchaga, Edati, Gbako, Gurara, Katcha, Kontagora, Lapai, Lavun, Magama, Mariga, Mashegu, Mokwa, Munya, Paikoro, Rafi, Rijau, Shiroro, Suleja, Tafa, and Wushishi. The researcher purposively selected Bida LGA for the study because of its relatively high population of 332,000 and documented challenges with children out-of-school and child rights awareness.

Bida LGA is administratively divided into 14 wards: Bariki, Ceniyan, Dokodza, Kyari, Landzun, Masaba I, Masaba II, Masaga I, Masaga II, Mayaki Ndajiya, Nassarafu, Umaru/Majigi I, Umaru/Majigi II, and Wadata. For the purposes of this study, the researcher selected four communities/wards Bariki (102 respondents), Ceniyan (81 respondents), Dokodza (150 respondents), and Kyari (67 respondents) to ensure coverage of diverse population clusters and socio-cultural contexts.

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. In the first stage, the four communities were purposively selected to reflect geographical spread, population size, and accessibility. In the second stage, respondents within each community were chosen using a combination of stratified random sampling and systematic random sampling to ensure that parents, teachers, traditional leaders, and regular community radio listeners were proportionally represented. The final sample size of 400 respondents (sum of the respondents from the four selected communities) was considered adequate for the descriptive analysis planned for this study.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure respondents' exposure to community radio, awareness of child rights, and perceptions regarding child education, using a four-point

Likert scale. The instrument’s validity was confirmed through expert review, while reliability was established via a pilot study conducted in Lapai LGA, yielding a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.82, indicating high internal consistency. Data collection was conducted face-to-face by trained research

assistants, and the collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 26, employing descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores to summarize respondents’ awareness, attitudes, and behaviors.

Data Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion

Table 1: Respondents’ Perception of the Extent to Which Community Radio in Bida Disseminates Information Related to Child Rights and Education.

S/N	Statement	SA (f/%)	A (f/%)	D (f/%)	SD (f/%)	Total
1	Community radio stations in Bida frequently broadcast programs that educate listeners on child rights and the importance of schooling.	160 (41.5%)	144 (37.3%)	60 (15.5%)	22 (5.7%)	386 (100%)
2	Community radio in Bida regularly features discussions and interviews on issues affecting child welfare and education.	180 (46.6%)	120 (31.1%)	53 (13.7%)	33 (8.5%)	386 (100%)
3	Announcements and jingles promoting child education are consistently aired on community radio stations in Bida.	150 (38.9%)	130 (33.7%)	60 (15.5%)	46 (11.9%)	386 (100%)
4	Community radio programs in Bida provide timely and relevant information on policies and initiatives concerning child rights.	186 (48.2%)	110 (28.5%)	45 (11.7%)	45 (11.7%)	386 (100%)
5	Community radio stations in Bida allocate sufficient airtime to programs that promote awareness about children’s rights and school retention.	200 (51.8%)	120 (31.1%)	40 (10.4%)	26 (6.7%)	386 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 shows that a large majority of respondents (72–83%) agree that community radio in Bida actively provides information on child rights and education. The highest agreement (82.9%) concerns the adequate airtime given to child-focused programs, with most respondents also affirming the relevance and timeliness of the content. The small proportion of disagreement (10–15%) does not significantly affect the overall positive perception.

Table 2: Respondents’ Perception of Community Awareness and Understanding of Child Educational Rights as Influenced by Community Radio Broadcasts

S/N	Statement	SA (f/%)	A (f/%)	D (f/%)	SD (f/%)	Total
1	Community radio programs have improved my awareness of the rights of every child to access basic education.	148 (38.3%)	160 (41.5%)	43 (11.1%)	35 (9.1%)	386 (100%)
2	I understand more about government policies on child education through information obtained from community radio.	171 (44.3%)	131 (33.9%)	55 (14.2%)	29 (7.5%)	386 (100%)
3	Community radio has increased my knowledge of the importance of keeping children, especially girls, in school.	193 (50.0%)	103 (26.7%)	66 (17.1%)	24 (6.2%)	386 (100%)
4	I have learned about the consequences of child neglect and school dropout through community radio broadcasts.	170 (44.0%)	113 (29.3%)	64 (16.6%)	39 (10.1%)	386 (100%)
5	Community radio programs have made me more supportive of initiatives that promote children’s education and protection.	169 (43.8%)	132 (34.2%)	50 (13.0%)	35 (9.1%)	386 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 shows that most respondents (72–77%) agree that community radio has strengthened their awareness of child educational rights, especially the importance of keeping children particularly girls in school. High agreement levels (73–78%) also indicate that radio improves understanding of child rights, related policies, and the consequences of neglect. The small share of disagreement (6–17%) suggests limited exposure among a few listeners.

Table 3: Respondents’ Perception of the Influence of Community Radio Programs on Attitudes and Behaviors toward Child School Retention and Protection

S/N	Statement	SA (f/%)	A (f/%)	D (f/%)	SD (f/%)	Total
1	Community radio programs have encouraged parents to ensure their children remain in school until completion.	170 (44.0%)	130 (33.7%)	56 (14.5%)	30 (7.8%)	386 (100%)
2	Listening to community radio programs has changed my perception about the importance of protecting children from abuse and exploitation.	140 (36.3%)	112 (29.0%)	70 (18.1%)	64 (16.6%)	386 (100%)
3	Radio messages on child education have influenced community members to discourage early marriage and child labor.	145 (37.6%)	171 (44.3%)	40 (10.4%)	30 (7.8%)	386 (100%)
4	Community radio programs have motivated community leaders to actively support campaigns on child school retention and protection.	161 (41.7%)	142 (36.8%)	42 (10.9%)	41 (10.6%)	386 (100%)
5	Information from community radio has led to positive behavioral changes among parents and guardians regarding children’s education.	201 (52.1%)	127 (32.9%)	35 (9.1%)	23 (6.0%)	386 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3 shows that most respondents (65–85%) agree that community radio positively influences child protection and school retention. The highest agreement (85%) is on improved parental behavior, while disagreement remains low (6–17%).

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide strong empirical evidence that community radio in Bida significantly enhances awareness, shapes attitudes, and influences behaviors related to child rights and education. This supports earlier research highlighting community radio as a vital tool for social development and grassroots empowerment (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2020; Manyozo,

2019). Results across Tables 1–3 consistently show that community radio functions as a key communication channel through which information on child protection, school retention, and government policies reaches rural audiences. These outcomes align with Rogers’ Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) Theory (Rogers, 2003), which explains how media platforms drive attitudinal and behavioral change.

Table 1 shows that a large majority of respondents (72–83%) agreed that community radio frequently disseminates educational content on child rights and schooling. The high exposure especially the 82.9% agreement on adequate airtime indicates that radio effectively facilitates the knowledge stage of diffusion. This supports Rogers' (2003) argument that mass media efficiently creates initial awareness. Similar findings from sub-Saharan Africa confirm the role of community radio in promoting educational reforms and child protection (Myers, 2020; Gumucio-Dagron, 2021). Low disagreement levels (10–15%) further indicate broad message reach.

Table 2 reveals that radio broadcasts strengthened understanding of child educational rights, with 72–78% of respondents reporting improved awareness of government policies, school retention, and especially girls' education. This reflects the persuasion stage, where repeated, culturally relevant messages foster positive attitudes. The findings correspond with Asemah et al. (2022) and development communication scholars who emphasize the value of localized content (Melkote & Steeves, 2022). Minor disagreement levels (6–17%) likely reflect access or linguistic barriers documented in multilingual radio environments (Alumuku, 2020).

Table 3 provides strong evidence that community radio also influences behaviors. High agreement rates (65–85%) indicate that broadcasts encouraged school retention, discouraged early marriage and child labor, and motivated community leaders to support child protection. These outcomes correspond to the decision, implementation, and confirmation stages of diffusion (Rogers, 2003) and align with behavior change communication literature (UNICEF, 2021; Singhal & Rogers, 2012). The strong

behavioral impact particularly the 85% agreement suggests reinforcement processes typical of community radio's role in promoting pro-social norms (Manyozo, 2019). The engagement of community leaders reflects the DOI principle that opinion leaders accelerate adoption through social endorsement.

The findings validate DOI Theory as an appropriate framework. Community radio successfully facilitated all five diffusion stages knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation leading to high awareness, positive attitudes, and significant behavioral change. The prominence of culturally compatible messages, involvement of opinion leaders, and recognition of structural barriers further reinforce DOI principles. This study therefore not only supports but extends Rogers' theoretical assumptions by demonstrating the strategic role of community radio in promoting pro-social innovations in rural Nigeria.

Conclusion

The study concludes that community radio is an effective tool for promoting child rights education and reducing children out-of-school in rural Nigeria. It increases community awareness, fosters positive attitudes toward children's schooling, and encourages supportive behaviors among parents and community leaders.

Recommendations

1. Increase the frequency and variety of child rights and education programs, including interactive formats and expert interviews, to engage a wider audience.
2. Use local languages and culturally relevant content to improve understanding and community support for children's education.

3. Collaborate with parents, teachers, and local leaders to address barriers to school attendance and promote the protection of children, especially girls

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