

## **FRAMING INTEGRITY THROUGH STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION: A CASE STUDY OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS INITIATIVE FOR LEARNING AND EMPOWERMENT AND THE SAFE SCHOOLS PROGRAMMES IN BAUCHI STATE**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates how strategic communication is applied in framing integrity and promoting anti-corruption governance through the Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE) and the Safe Schools Programme in Bauchi State, Northern Nigeria. Adopting a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, the study combined surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, and media content analysis to capture both quantitative patterns and qualitative insights. Findings show that awareness of anti-corruption messaging was relatively high (87%), but engagement was uneven, with school-based clubs and religious leaders driving stronger participation than digital platforms. Trust levels were highest for teachers and religious figures, while government officials and politicians ranked lowest due to perceptions of bias and hypocrisy. Media analysis confirmed that consequence-based and morally framed messages (e.g., “corruption steals your child’s future”) were more resonant than legalistic or politically branded ones. Barriers identified include poor rural media access, digital divides, and the politicisation of campaigns. Anchored on Framing Theory and Participatory Development Theory, the study concludes that anti-corruption communication must be localised, depoliticised, and participatory to be effective. It recommends empowering teachers and religious leaders as key communicators, redesigning calls to action, investing in community media infrastructure, and institutionalising media literacy in schools.

**Keywords:** AGILE, anti-corruption, northern Nigeria, strategic communication, integrity, safe schools

### **Introduction**

Corruption remains one of the most pressing developmental challenges in Nigeria. It undermines governance, weakens service delivery, distorts accountability mechanisms, and deepens inequalities. In Northern Nigeria, the challenge is compounded by additional factors such as low literacy levels, patriarchal norms, religious conservatism, poverty, and weak institutional presence. These dynamics create an environment where transparency and civic participation are difficult to achieve.

Globally, communication is increasingly recognised as a strategic instrument for shaping public discourse, influencing individual and collective behaviour, and advancing governance outcomes. Scholars argue that communication is no longer a neutral process of information transmission but a constitutive force that frames realities, constructs meaning, and legitimises power (Castells, 2009). Through strategic framing, agenda-setting, and narrative construction, communication determines not only what issues gain public attention but how they are understood and acted upon (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Within governance contexts, communication functions as a critical mechanism for policy legitimisation, citizen engagement, accountability, and behavioural change. World Bank (2007) emphasises that effective communication enhances governance by fostering transparency, enabling participation, and building trust between the state and citizens. Similarly, UNESCO (2018) recognises strategic communication as central to democratic governance, particularly in plural societies where dialogue, inclusion, and consensus-building are essential for social cohesion.

From a development perspective, communication is increasingly positioned as an enabler of social change, rather than a supporting function. Rogers (2003) demonstrates how communication processes influence the diffusion of innovations and adoption of new behaviours, while McQuil (2010) underscores the role of media systems in shaping political awareness, civic participation, and governance norms. In this regard, strategic communication has become integral to public sector reform, development interventions, and governance innovation worldwide. Strategic communication is defined as the purposeful use of communication by organisations or governments to achieve specific goals. It offers a framework for reframing narratives, influencing public attitudes, and stimulating citizen engagement.

In contexts where credibility of government-led campaigns is low, communication strategies rooted in participation and cultural relevance become indispensable as top-down information approaches have been shown to be ineffective in low-trust environments (Freire, 1970; Servaes, 2008). Studies further demonstrate that messages aligned with local cultural norms and social structures enhance credibility, acceptance, and behavioural uptake (Rogers 2003; McQuail, 2010).

Governance literature (World Bank, 2017; UNESCO, 2018) also confirms that participatory communication strengthens trust and legitimacy, particularly in fragile or low-credibility institutional contexts.

In Nigeria, anti-corruption messaging has often been elite-driven and top-down, limiting resonance with local populations. However, recent initiatives such as the World Bank-supported Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE) and the Safe Schools Programme in Bauchi State have incorporated communication as a governance tool. These interventions employ community radio, interpersonal dialogue, and school-based campaigns to enhance accountability and participation, particularly in education. Yet, questions remain regarding their inclusivity, sustainability, and ability to foster long-term behavioral change.

Although a growing body of literature has examined anti-corruption communication and governance in Nigeria, much of the existing scholarship has focused on media exposure, institutional campaigns, and national anti-corruption agencies, with emphasis on awareness creation rather than the communicative processes through which integrity narratives are constructed and enacted at sub-national levels (Alozie & Akpan, 2022; Obot & Uyo, 2019). Studies that explore participatory communication in governance contexts have largely highlighted dialogue, inclusion, and civic engagement outcomes, without sufficiently interrogating how message framing and messenger credibility shape communication effectiveness within specific sectors. For instance, Servaes (2008) conceptualises participatory communication as a process of dialogue and co-creation for social change, while UNDP (2009) emphasises participation as a mechanism for transparency and accountability in governance reforms, yet neither provides empirical analysis of how

integrity messages are framed and interpreted across institutional and community actors. Similarly, Melkote and Steeves (2001) foreground empowerment and participation but do not systematically examine framing dynamics within sector-based anti-corruption interventions.

Furthermore, existing research on anti-corruption communication in Nigeria has relied predominantly on single-method approaches, which limits understanding of how integrity narratives operate across media texts, institutional actors, and audience interpretations. For example, Alozie and Akpan (2022) assessed media-based anti-corruption campaigns primarily through survey data measuring awareness and perception, while Obot and Uyo (2019) examined political interference in anti-corruption journalism using qualitative interviews with journalists, without integrating media content analysis or community-level reception. While these studies offer valuable insights, they do not capture the interaction between communication artifacts, participatory platforms, and contextual constraints that shape governance outcomes in practice.

This gap is particularly evident in relation to donor-supported education programmes such as the Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE) and the Safe Schools Programme, which embed communication within accountability and integrity objectives but have received limited scholarly interrogation beyond programme evaluations and implementation reports (World Bank, 2023). Consequently, little is known about how integrity is strategically framed through these programmes, how messages are received by diverse stakeholders, and how contextual factors in Northern Nigeria influence their effectiveness.

This study addresses these gaps by adopting a convergent mixed-methods design to examine how strategic communication frames integrity within the AGILE and Safe Schools Programmes in Bauchi State, and how such framing influences awareness, participation, and trust among stakeholders. By situating anti-corruption communication within a sectoral, sub-national, and participatory governance context, the study contributes empirically and conceptually to scholarship on strategic communication (Hallahan et al., 2007), development communication (Servaes, 2008), and anti-corruption governance in Northern Nigeria

This study investigates how the strategic communication deployed by the Bauchi State AGILE and Safe Schools Programmes frames integrity and anti-corruption narratives, and how such communication influences public awareness, trust, and participation among stakeholders in Bauchi State. It further examines the contextual factors that continue to shape and constrain the effectiveness of these communication efforts within the education sector.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine how integrity and anti-corruption narratives are framed within communication materials used in the AGILE and Safe Schools Programmes in Bauchi State
2. Assess the level of public awareness, patterns of engagement, and perceived effects of anti-corruption communication under the AGILE and Safe Schools Programme in Bauchi State.
3. Identify the contextual factors that shape the effectiveness of anti-corruption strategic communication delivered through the AGILE and Safe Schools Programmes in Bauchi State.

### **Literature Review**

Strategic communication is the deliberate use of communication processes to achieve specific goals in organisational, policy, or

development contexts (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Verčič, & Sriramesh, 2007). Unlike routine information sharing, it emphasises long-term behavioral and attitudinal change through careful message design, audience targeting, and channel selection. In governance, it has been used to build legitimacy, mobilise citizens, and advance accountability reforms. Studies highlight its role in anti-corruption, health promotion, and civic education (Servaes, 2008).

Development communication focuses on using dialogue, participation, and culturally rooted approaches to enable marginalised groups to engage in social change (Melkote & Steeves, 2001). Inspired by Freire's (1970) pedagogy of dialogue, it challenges top-down information flows by emphasising co-creation of knowledge. In anti-corruption efforts, participatory communication approaches foster community-driven accountability, local storytelling, and the use of indigenous languages, thereby enhancing public ownership, trust, and sustained engagement (Freire, 1970; Melkote & Steeves, 2001; Servaes, 2008). This perspective is particularly critical in Northern Nigeria, where formal governance mechanisms often marginalise rural communities and women due to structural inequalities, low literacy levels, gender norms, and limited access to institutional channels of accountability (UNDP, 2009; British Council, 2017; UNODC, 2022). Empirical studies further show that vernacular communication and community-based platforms especially local radio and school-based forums, are more effective in mobilising accountability and integrity norms in the region than top-down, elite-driven messaging (Adamu, 2020; Ibrahim & Ahmad, 2021).

Governance encompasses the structures and processes of decision-making, accountability, and citizen participation (UNDP, 2009). Corruption, defined as the abuse of entrusted power for personal gain (Transparency International, 2021), undermines these principles by diverting resources, eroding trust, and worsening inequalities. In Northern Nigeria, weak institutions and socio-cultural barriers make accountability efforts particularly fragile. Communication becomes central in reframing integrity, strengthening transparency, and mobilising communities.

Media literacy, the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and create media content, is a critical competency for navigating information environments (Livingstone, 2004). In the digital age, it enables citizens to counter misinformation, critically evaluate political messaging, and hold leaders accountable. Similarly, civic engagement ranging from voting to participation in town halls, school clubs, or social media activism depends heavily on communication infrastructures and public trust. For anti-corruption, media literacy is a safeguard against propaganda and a pathway to active citizenship.

Empirical studies show mixed outcomes for anti-corruption campaigns in Nigeria. Alozie and Akpan (2022) found that media campaigns by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) increased awareness but had limited impact on behavior due to their one-way, top-down approach. Obot and Uyo (2019) emphasized how political interference weakens media credibility, particularly in Northern states. Conversely, Adamu (2020) demonstrated that Hausa-language community radio programs and storytelling

formats increased trust and message acceptance.

The AGILE project integrates anti-corruption communication into girl-child education and school governance. A World Bank (2023) evaluation reported that participatory clubs and budget-monitoring activities enhanced civic awareness and improved oversight of school funds. Ibrahim and Ahmad (2021) similarly noted that school-based clubs in Northern Nigeria significantly raised students' consciousness about corruption. The Safe Schools Programme, which links accountability to student safety, also employs communication platforms such as posters, assemblies, and radio to highlight issues of misused education funds and governance failures.

Framing integrity refers to the strategic construction of meanings around ethical behaviour, accountability, and responsible use of public resources through communication processes. Drawing from Framing Theory, integrity is not treated as a fixed moral concept but as a socially constructed idea whose interpretation depends on how issues are presented, emphasised, and contextualised (Entman, 1993). In governance and anti-corruption communication, framing determines whether integrity is perceived as a personal moral obligation, a collective social norm, or an abstract institutional requirement.

Scholars argue that integrity framing is most effective when it translates corruption from an abstract legal violation into a tangible social harm that affects everyday life (Entman, 1993; Hallahan et al., 2007). Frames that highlight the consequences of corruption such as deteriorating public services, unsafe schools, or compromised futures for children tend to resonate more strongly with audiences than legalistic or

procedural frames. This is particularly relevant in low-trust environments, where citizens may be sceptical of state-led messaging but respond more readily to frames that connect integrity to lived experience and communal wellbeing.

Within development and governance contexts, framing integrity is closely linked to participatory communication approaches. Rather than portraying integrity solely as compliance with rules, participatory framing emphasises shared values, dialogue, and collective responsibility (Freire, 1970; Servaes, 2008). This approach positions citizens not merely as recipients of anti-corruption messages but as co-creators of accountability norms. Integrity, in this sense, is framed as a practice embedded in social relationships, local institutions, and everyday decision-making.

Empirical studies in Nigeria and similar contexts show that integrity frames delivered through trusted intermediaries such as teachers, religious leaders, and community actors are more likely to be perceived as credible and legitimate than those associated with political actors or state institutions (Obot & Uyo, 2019; UNODC, 2022). Moral and ethical framing, often reinforced through religious or cultural narratives, further strengthens message acceptance by aligning integrity with existing value systems. Conversely, integrity framed primarily through institutional slogans or punitive language risks being dismissed as propaganda or elite rhetoric, particularly where public confidence in governance is low.

Framing integrity also involves choices about language, symbolism, and media platforms. Communication in indigenous languages and through familiar community-based channels enhances comprehension and inclusion,

especially among rural populations and women who are frequently marginalised in formal governance discourse (British Council, 2017; Adamu, 2020). Such framing practices broaden participation and reduce the distance between governance ideals and everyday realities.

In the context of education-sector interventions such as the AGILE and Safe Schools Programmes, framing integrity extends beyond abstract anti-corruption messaging to encompass issues of school safety, resource management, and child welfare. By embedding integrity narratives within school-based platforms and participatory spaces, communication efforts can normalise accountability practices and foster early civic consciousness. This sector-specific framing remains underexplored in existing literature, underscoring the relevance of examining how integrity is strategically framed and operationalised within education governance at the sub-national level.

Global evidence underscores the importance of framing and participation. Entman's (1993) framing theory shows that, how corruption is presented, whether as a systemic injustice or a personal threat, shapes audience responses. UNODC (2022) found that religious leaders, when engaged, provide credibility for anti-corruption messages by aligning them with moral teachings. British Council (2017) emphasized gender-sensitive communication as key to empowering women and girls in Northern Nigeria's governance reforms.

The reviewed literature demonstrates that anti-corruption communication is most effective when rooted in local realities, culturally resonant, and participatory in design. However, challenges such as politicized messaging, digital exclusion, and

language barriers persist. The AGILE and Safe Schools Programmes offer unique case studies of how strategic communication can reframe integrity in education governance, but their long-term sustainability and scalability remain open questions.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on Framing Theory and Participatory Development Theory, which together explain how communication shapes integrity narratives and citizen engagement in anti-corruption governance.

Framing Theory, advanced by Entman (1993), posits that the way issues are presented influences how audiences interpret and act upon them. Frames highlight certain aspects of reality while omitting others, shaping perceptions of causes, consequences, and solutions. In anti-corruption campaigns, framing determines whether corruption is perceived as a distant institutional problem or a personal, moral, and community issue.

Research has shown that consequence-based frames. For example, linking corruption to poor school facilities or unsafe learning environments tend to generate stronger engagement than abstract, legalistic narratives (Adamu, 2020; Entman, 1993). Within AGILE and Safe Schools campaigns, messages such as "corruption steals from your child's education" exemplify this strategy. Framing Theory thus provides a lens to evaluate how integrity is constructed in communication materials and how audiences in Bauchi State respond to those narratives.

Participatory Development Theory, rooted in Freire's (1970) pedagogy of dialogue, emphasizes inclusivity, co-creation, and local ownership in communication processes. Rather than treating citizens as passive recipients, it positions them as active agents who shape discourse and action. In governance, participatory communication

creates platforms such as debate clubs, town halls, and religious gatherings where communities deliberate, question leaders, and hold institutions accountable.

In the context of AGILE and Safe Schools, participatory communication is reflected in school-based integrity clubs, community forums, and the involvement of religious leaders in framing anti-corruption messages. This theoretical lens highlights how trust, legitimacy, and sustainability of communication interventions depend on their ability to include marginalized voices, particularly women, girls, and rural communities.

Together, these theories explain both the content and the process of anti-corruption communication. Framing Theory explains how messages shape perception and action, while Participatory Development Theory explains why local involvement and dialogue are crucial for credibility and sustained impact. By applying both frameworks, this study interrogates not only what messages are communicated in AGILE and Safe Schools, but also how their design and delivery affect awareness, trust, and participation in Bauchi State.

### **Research Methodology**

The study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. This design allowed for triangulation of data, ensuring that numerical trends were supported by contextual insights.

Bauchi State, North-East Nigeria was selected as the location of the study due to its active implementation of the Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE) and the Safe Schools Programme. Particularly, the study was done through the State's Ministry of Education and four (4) Local Government

Area Councils of Bauchi, Dass, Ningi, and Katagum. The State's Ministry of Education is the primary institutional authority responsible for policy direction, coordination, and oversight of the AGILE and Safe Schools Programmes (World Bank, 2023). From an institutional governance and framing perspective, the Ministry plays a central role in authorising, framing, and cascading anti-corruption communication through Local Government education structures to schools and community platforms, thereby shaping how accountability narratives are interpreted and enacted at sub-national levels (Entman, 1993; Campbell, 2004; UNDP, 2009).

The four (4) Local Government Areas (LGAs) on the other hand were selected because they represent a mix of urban and rural contexts and are among the areas where the Programmes have been actively implemented.

Within these LGAs eight public secondary schools (two each from the 4 LGAs) which are participating in the AGILE and Safe Schools Intervention Programme were included.

Similarly, the research content analysed all the ten (10) media artifacts designed and implemented for the purposes of the two programmes. This ensured contextual diversity and strengthened the relevance of the findings to education governance and anti-corruption communication in Bauchi State.

### **Population and Sampling**

The population of this study comprised all key stakeholders involved in, or exposed to, anti-corruption communication activities under the AGILE and Safe Schools Programmes in Bauchi State. This included secondary school students and teachers in the participating public schools, civil society organisation representatives engaged in

education and governance advocacy, journalists and community radio presenters involved in programme-related messaging, religious and traditional leaders who serve as community opinion leaders, as well as officials of the Bauchi State Ministry of Education and four (4) Local Government Area councils responsible for programme implementation and oversight.

The study employed purposive sampling approach consistent with mixed methods. Overall, one hundred and twenty-two (122) participants participated in the research. A survey sample of eighty (80) respondents was used for the quantitative component to generate descriptive insights. Ten (10) students who are members of the school-based anti-corruption and integrity clubs were selected from each school to arrive at the 80 respondents for the survey. On the other hand, twenty-four (24) participants consisting of teachers, parents, and community youth (six participants per group) took part in four (4) focus group discussions.

In addition, eight (8) key informants were interviewed, comprising two (2) civil society representatives, two (2) journalists and community radio presenters, two (2) religious and traditional leaders, and two (2) officials from the Ministry of Education and selected Local Government Area councils.

These sample sizes are consistent with established methodological guidance, which indicates that thematic saturation in qualitative studies is often achieved within a limited number of in-depth interviews and focus groups when participants are carefully selected for relevance and diversity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Guest et al., 2006; Krueger & Casey, 2015). The combination of multiple data sources further strengthened the credibility and adequacy of the sample

Four instruments were employed:

1. Structured Questionnaire gathered data on awareness, patterns of engagement, and perceived effects of anti-corruption communication under the AGILE and Safe Schools Programme in Bauchi State.
2. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) explored design, delivery, and reception of messages among educators, media actors, and traditional/religious leaders.
3. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) examined community interpretations of corruption discourse and perceptions of campaign credibility.
4. Media Content Analysis Guide assessed campaign artifacts based on origin, framing style, language, call-to-action, and target audience (Krippendorff, 2013).

The quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS v25, with descriptive statistics (percentages, means) and correlation analysis, while the qualitative data from KIIs, FGDs, content analysis were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically using NVivo 12, focusing on awareness, trust, engagement, framing, and barriers. Triangulation was employed to ensure convergence between quantitative and qualitative findings.

Furthermore, the instrument's validity was confirmed through expert review and pre-testing with 10 non-sampled participants. Reliability of the questionnaire was established using Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ), indicating strong internal consistency (George & Mallery, 2003). For qualitative data, inter-coder agreement ensured consistency in thematic coding. Ethical approval was obtained from the Bauchi State Ministry of Education. Informed consent was secured from all participants, with assurances of confidentiality and voluntary participation. Special ethical safeguards were applied in FGDs with minors and female participants,

consistent with UNESCO (2020) guidelines for education research.

### Findings

The findings are presented in line with the methods employed in the study rather than strictly by research objectives, reflecting the convergent mixed-methods design adopted. Data from the media content analysis, survey questionnaire, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions are reported in sequence to allow each method to contribute distinct empirical insights. This structure facilitates methodological transparency and provides a clear basis for subsequent

triangulation and integrated interpretation in the discussion section.

### Media Content Analysis

The study found that the programmes utilized posters, school clubs, community radio, WhatsApp graphics, and town hall meetings as the communication strategies designed and deployed for the AGILE and Safe Schools Initiative programmes in Bauchi state. These include four (4) radio jingles, three (3) posters, two (2) WhatsApp graphics, and one (1) school assembly script. The contents are synthesized in the Table 1 below:

**Table 1 : Media Genres, Framing Patterns, and Illustrative Wording in AGILE and Safe Schools Anti Corruption Communication**

Media Genre	Number Analysed	Dominant Frames Used	Illustrative Words / Phrases Used
Radio jingles	4	Moral–ethical framing; Consequence-based framing	“Corruption steals our children’s future”; “When funds are diverted, our schools become unsafe”; “Honesty is a duty to our children”; “Allah commands trust and integrity.”
Posters	3	Consequence-based framing	“Corruption destroys classrooms”; “Misused funds mean broken toilets and unsafe schools”; “Protect school resources—protect our children.”
WhatsApp graphics	2	Institutional framing; Informational framing	“AGILE promotes transparency in education”; “Safe Schools Programme: accountability for learning”; “Report concerns through official channels.”
School assembly scripts	1	Participatory framing; Civic responsibility framing	“Integrity begins with us”; “It is our responsibility to speak up”; “Ask questions when school resources are misused.”

The analysis revealed that 50% of the materials employed consequence-based framing, 30% adopted moral/religious framing, while only 20% relied on legal or institutional framing. Language use was

predominantly Hausa (70%) which could enhance accessibility among rural audiences, while English-only materials were associated with lower comprehension. Only 40% of the materials contained clear calls to action such

as reporting mechanisms or community dialogue prompts, indicating a gap between awareness creation and actionable engagement. Overall, the content analysis confirms that framing style, language choice, and messenger credibility were used for anti-corruption communication in Bauchi State.

### Survey

The survey findings provide quantitative insights into respondents' awareness of anti-corruption communication, levels of engagement, trust in messengers, and perceived barriers to effectiveness within the AGILE and Safe Schools Programmes.

A total of eighty (80) questionnaires were administered to respondents across selected secondary schools. The questionnaires were distributed through direct, on-site administration, which facilitated clarification where necessary and supported timely

completion. All administered questionnaires were retrieved and found usable for analysis, representing a high retrieval rate.

The results indicate a high level of awareness of anti-corruption communication messages of AGILE and Safe Schools Programmes, with 87% (n = 70) of the espondents reporting exposure to at least one anti-corruption message related to education within the past two years. Awareness was highest for AGILE school posters and integrity clubs (65%), followed by Safe Schools safety messages (52%). Exposure to the messages disseminated through national anti-corruption agencies and social media platforms was comparatively lower, suggesting that proximity and school-based communication played a stronger role in message visibility. Table 2 below shows the distribution of this result:

**Table 2: Awareness of Anti-Corruption Communication Messages of AGILE and Safe Schools Programmes**

<b>Campaign/Source</b>	<b>% Aware</b>
<b>AGILE school posters and clubs</b>	<b>65%</b>
<b>Safe Schools safety messages</b>	<b>52%</b>
<b>EFCC/ICPC radio jingles</b>	<b>41%</b>
<b>CSO-led town halls (e.g., WeCare Centre)</b>	<b>36%</b>
<b>Religious sermons/messages</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>WhatsApp/Facebook materials</b>	<b>24%</b>

This table reveals that 'awareness' was highest where campaigns had visual presence and repeated exposure (e.g., school posters, clubs).

Furthermore, among respondents who reported awareness, 62% (n = 50) of the campaign messages indicated some form of

engagement with anti-corruption initiatives. Engagement was highest through school-based clubs and debates (44%) and community or town hall meetings (32%), while participation through digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook (6%) was minimal. This is presented in Table 2 below:

**Table 2: Levels of Engagement with the Anti-Corruption Communication Messages of AGILE and Safe Schools Programme (n = 50)**

Engagement Forum	% of Engaged Respondents
School-based clubs/debates	44%
Town halls/community meetings	32%
Religious/youth groups	18%
WhatsApp discussions	6%

The findings suggest that interpersonal and participatory platforms were more effective in translating awareness into action than digital channels.

On perceived barriers to the effectiveness of the anti-corruption communication, the survey respondents identified several constraints. The most frequently cited

barriers were poor radio reception in rural areas (61%), digital inequality (53%), and politicisation of campaign messages (49%). Language barriers and message fatigue were also reported, though to a lesser extent. These barriers highlight the continued influence of structural and contextual factors on communication outcomes. This is presented in Table 3 below:

**Table 3: Barriers to Effectiveness of the Anti-Corruption Communication Messages of AGILE and Safe Schools Programme (n = 80)**

Barrier	% of Respondents
Poor radio reception in rural areas	61%
Digital divide (esp. rural youth/women)	53%
Politicization of campaign content	49%
Language barriers (messages not in Hausa)	37%
Media fatigue/repetition	22%

The survey also revealed differences in levels of trust across messengers, where teachers and religious leaders were rated as the most credible sources of anti-corruption information, while government officials and politicians attracted the lowest trust ratings. This pattern reinforces the importance of socially proximate and morally grounded actors in shaping message acceptance.

Overall, the survey data show that while awareness of anti-corruption communication

within the programmes is relatively high, engagement remains uneven and is strongly shaped by trust, access, and channel choice. School-based and community-driven platforms were more effective than digital or institutionally framed communication in fostering participation.

**Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**

Participants in the key informant interviews and focus group discussions reflected a diverse range of institutional and community perspectives relevant to anti-corruption communication in the education sector. The eight (8) key informants comprised civil society representatives, journalists and community radio presenters, religious and traditional leaders, and officials from the Ministry of Education and selected Local Government Area councils, all of whom had direct involvement in programme implementation, communication, or oversight. The four (4) focus group discussions, involving a total of twenty-four (24) participants, were drawn from teachers, parents, and community youth (six participants per group in four (4) focus group discussions). Participants varied in age, gender, and institutional roles, allowing the study to capture diverse experiences and interpretations of anti-corruption communication under the AGILE and Safe Schools Programmes.

The key informant interviews provided institutional- and practitioner-level insights into the design, delivery, and perceived effectiveness of anti-corruption communication under the AGILE and Safe Schools Programmes. Across interviews with civil society actors, journalists and community radio presenters, religious and traditional leaders, and government officials, four dominant themes emerged.

1. **Institutional Framing and Coordination:** The Key informants consistently highlighted the role of formal institutions, particularly the Ministry of Education and Local Government education authorities, in shaping the framing and coordination of communication activities. Officials explained that most communication strategies were designed at programme or ministerial level and subsequently cascaded to schools and

communities to ensure coherence and policy alignment. As one government official noted:

“The messages usually come from the programme level, and our role is to ensure they are passed down uniformly to schools and LGAs so everyone is speaking the same language.”

However, some informants observed that this institutional framing occasionally constrained flexibility at the community level. A civil society representative remarked that:

“Sometimes the message is already fixed before it gets to the community, and it doesn’t always reflect the realities people are dealing with on the ground.”

2. **Credibility of messengers:** A recurrent theme across interviews was the importance of messenger credibility. Religious leaders, teachers, and community-based actors were widely perceived as more trusted communicators than politicians or government representatives. A community radio presenter explained:

“When an Imam or a teacher talks about corruption affecting children, people listen. But when it comes from politicians, they assume it is just talk.”

A school administrator in Ningi LGA also noted: “When government officials come with banners, people assume it’s political show. But when our teacher or Imam speaks, we listen.”

The Government officials themselves also acknowledged this trust deficit, with one noting that:

“People are suspicious when messages are seen as political. Even when the intention is good, the branding affects how it is received.”

3. Media choice and access constraints: Journalists and community radio presenters underscored the continued relevance of radio as a primary channel for anti-corruption communication, particularly in rural areas with limited internet access. As one radio practitioner stated:

“Radio is still the most reliable way to reach villages. Many people don’t have smartphones, but they have radios.”

However, informants also pointed to infrastructural constraints, including weak signal coverage and irregular electricity supply, which limited consistent reach. Digital platforms were therefore described as supplementary rather than primary channels for rural engagement.

4. Participation and sustainability: Civil society actors stressed that participatory platforms such as school integrity clubs, town hall meetings, and community dialogues were more effective in sustaining engagement than one-off media messages. One CSO representative noted:

“When students discuss these issues in clubs or meetings, they feel involved. It is different from just hearing a message on the radio.”

Nonetheless, concerns were raised about sustainability, particularly where participatory activities were heavily dependent on project funding. As one informant observed:

“Once the project cycle ends, some of these activities slow down because there is no longer facilitation or resources.”

These barriers confirm that communication effectiveness is influenced by infrastructure (media access), perception (credibility and trust), and design (language and calls to action).

The focus group discussions provided community- and school-level perspectives on

how anti-corruption messages were interpreted, internalised, and acted upon. Analysis of the FGDs revealed three key themes.

1. Awareness and message recall: The FGD participants demonstrated high awareness of anti-corruption messages related to education, especially those disseminated through schools, radio programmes, and religious gatherings. Messages linking corruption to visible school problems were more easily recalled than abstract legal references. A student participant explained:

“When they talk about money meant for schools being stolen, I think about our broken classrooms and toilets. That is what corruption means to us.”

The participants frequently associated such messages with AGILE and Safe Schools activities within their schools.

2. Engagement and behavioural responses: Beyond awareness, participants described varying levels of engagement with anti-corruption initiatives. School-based platforms, particularly integrity clubs and assemblies, were cited as spaces where students felt empowered to speak up. One participant noted:

“In the integrity club, we talk about what is happening in the school and ask why some things are not done even when funds are said to be released.”

Some participants reported increased willingness to question absenteeism and delays in school projects, although engagement was largely collective and informal rather than channelled through formal reporting systems.

3. Trust, Language, and Inclusion: The discussions underscored the importance of language and trust in shaping message effectiveness. Messages delivered in Hausa

and framed within familiar cultural or religious references were perceived as clearer and more legitimate. A female participant observed:

“When the message is in Hausa and explained in our way, we understand it better than when it is in English.”

Participants also noted that school- and community-based discussions felt more inclusive than formal government communication. However, persistent barriers were acknowledged, including fear of victimisation and uncertainty about safe reporting channels.

### **Discussion of Findings**

This study adopted a convergent mixed-methods design to examine how strategic communication frames integrity and shapes anti-corruption governance under the AGILE and Safe Schools Programmes in Bauchi State. Triangulation of findings from media content analysis, survey data, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions reveals strong convergence across methods, while also demonstrating how different data sources illuminate complementary dimensions of communication effectiveness.

Across all methods, consequence-based and moral–ethical framing emerged as the most dominant and effective communication approach. Media artifact analysis showed that radio jingles, posters, and school assembly scripts consistently framed corruption in relation to tangible harms such as unsafe school environments, broken infrastructure, and compromised learning outcomes. These framing patterns were mirrored in the survey data, where respondents demonstrated higher recall of school-based messages, and in FGDs, where participants interpreted corruption primarily

through everyday educational experiences rather than abstract legal definitions.

Key informant interviews further reinforced this pattern, with practitioners noting that messages linking corruption to children’s welfare and school conditions were more easily accepted by communities. This convergence across methods supports Framing Theory’s proposition that frames emphasising consequences and moral meaning are more likely to shape audience interpretation and engagement than legalistic or institutional frames (Entman, 1993).

Triangulated findings also highlight the central role of messenger credibility. Survey respondents rated teachers and religious leaders as the most trusted sources of anti-corruption communication, while politicians and government officials attracted the lowest trust levels. FGDs confirmed that messages delivered by socially proximate and morally grounded actors were perceived as more sincere and legitimate, whereas politically branded messages were often treated with scepticism.

These perceptions were corroborated by key informants, including government officials, who acknowledged that public distrust of political actors reduced the effectiveness of some campaigns. Media analysis similarly showed that messages delivered through community radio and school platforms generated stronger engagement than institutionally framed digital materials. Together, these findings indicate that trust in the messenger is a decisive determinant of communication outcomes in low-trust governance contexts (Obot & Uyo, 2019; UNODC, 2022).

The study further demonstrates that participatory platforms serve as the primary bridge between awareness and engagement. Although survey findings revealed relatively high awareness of anti-corruption messages,

participation was uneven and concentrated within school-based clubs, assemblies, and community meetings rather than digital spaces. FGDs provided insight into this pattern, showing that face-to-face forums enabled dialogue, questioning of resource use, and collective reflection.

Key informants similarly emphasised that participatory spaces such as integrity clubs and town halls fostered ownership and sustained engagement more effectively than one-way media messages. The school assembly script analysed in the media artifacts exemplified participatory framing by encouraging students to ask questions and engage in peer accountability. This convergence aligns with Participatory Development Theory, which emphasises dialogue and citizen agency as conditions for behavioural change (Freire, 1970; Servaes, 2008).

At the same time, triangulation reveals persistent structural and contextual barriers that constrain communication effectiveness. Survey respondents identified poor radio reception, digital inequality, politicisation of campaign messages, and language barriers as major challenges. These constraints were echoed in interviews with journalists and civil society actors, who cited infrastructural deficits and project-driven communication cycles, and in FGDs, where participants highlighted fear of victimisation and uncertainty about reporting mechanisms.

Media content analysis further reinforced these findings by showing that institutionally framed WhatsApp graphics lacked clear calls to action and were less accessible to rural audiences. The consistency of these barriers across methods indicates that communication effectiveness is shaped not only by message design but also by broader infrastructural, institutional, and socio-cultural conditions (UNDP, 2009; British Council, 2017).

An additional insight from the triangulation is the tension between institutional coordination and local adaptability. Key informants emphasised the Ministry of Education's role in ensuring coherence and policy alignment, while survey and FGD data showed that locally adapted and culturally resonant messages generated higher trust and engagement. This suggests that institutional framing is necessary for legitimacy and scale but insufficient without mechanisms that allow communities and schools to contextualise integrity messages.

Overall, the triangulated findings indicate that strategic communication plays a significant role in reframing integrity within anti-corruption efforts under the AGILE and Safe Schools Programmes in Bauchi State. High awareness levels were driven by visible, school- and community-based communication channels and consequence-oriented framing that linked corruption to tangible education outcomes, while engagement was strongest where participatory platforms enabled dialogue and local ownership. Trusted messengers, particularly teachers, religious leaders, and civil society actors enhanced credibility, whereas politically branded communication weakened receptivity. Although evidence of behavioural change was modest, school-based accountability actions reflected emerging civic consciousness. Persistent barriers related to infrastructure, politicisation, language, and gendered exclusion underscore that communication effectiveness depends not only on message design but also on participatory processes and enabling contexts. These insights are comprehensively elaborated and triangulated in the subsequent discussion integrating survey, interview, focus group, and media analysis findings.

## **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that framing integrity in anti-corruption communication is a strategic process through which meanings of ethical behaviour, accountability, and public responsibility are constructed and negotiated. Drawing on Framing Theory and participatory communication perspectives, the study shows that integrity is most effectively communicated when corruption is framed not as an abstract legal violation but as a tangible social harm that affects everyday life, particularly within low-trust governance contexts. Frames that emphasise consequences, shared values, and collective responsibility resonate more strongly than legalistic or institutionally driven narratives.

The literature further indicates that participatory framing delivered through trusted intermediaries such as teachers, religious leaders, and community actors, and communicated in indigenous languages enhances credibility, inclusion, and engagement. In the context of education-sector interventions such as the AGILE and Safe Schools Programmes, framing integrity around school safety, resource management, and child welfare provides a contextually grounded pathway for promoting accountability and early civic consciousness. Overall, the study underscores the importance of sector-specific, culturally resonant, and participatory approaches to integrity framing, particularly at the sub-national level, where governance ideals are most meaningfully translated into lived experience.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Adopt consequence-oriented and locally resonant framing by linking anti-corruption messages to tangible education outcomes and communicating in indigenous languages.
2. Institutionalise participatory platforms such as school integrity clubs, assemblies, and community dialogue forums as core components of programme communication.
3. Leverage trusted community intermediaries, including teachers, religious leaders, and civil society actors, as primary messengers of integrity and accountability messages.
4. Strengthen pathways from awareness to action by clearly communicating safe and accessible mechanisms for reporting concerns and engaging in school-level accountability processes
5. Balance institutional coordination with local adaptability by allowing schools and communities flexibility to contextualise centrally framed communication within their local reality.

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