



Radio as a Tool for Alternative Education in Nigeria

Hassana Shuaibu

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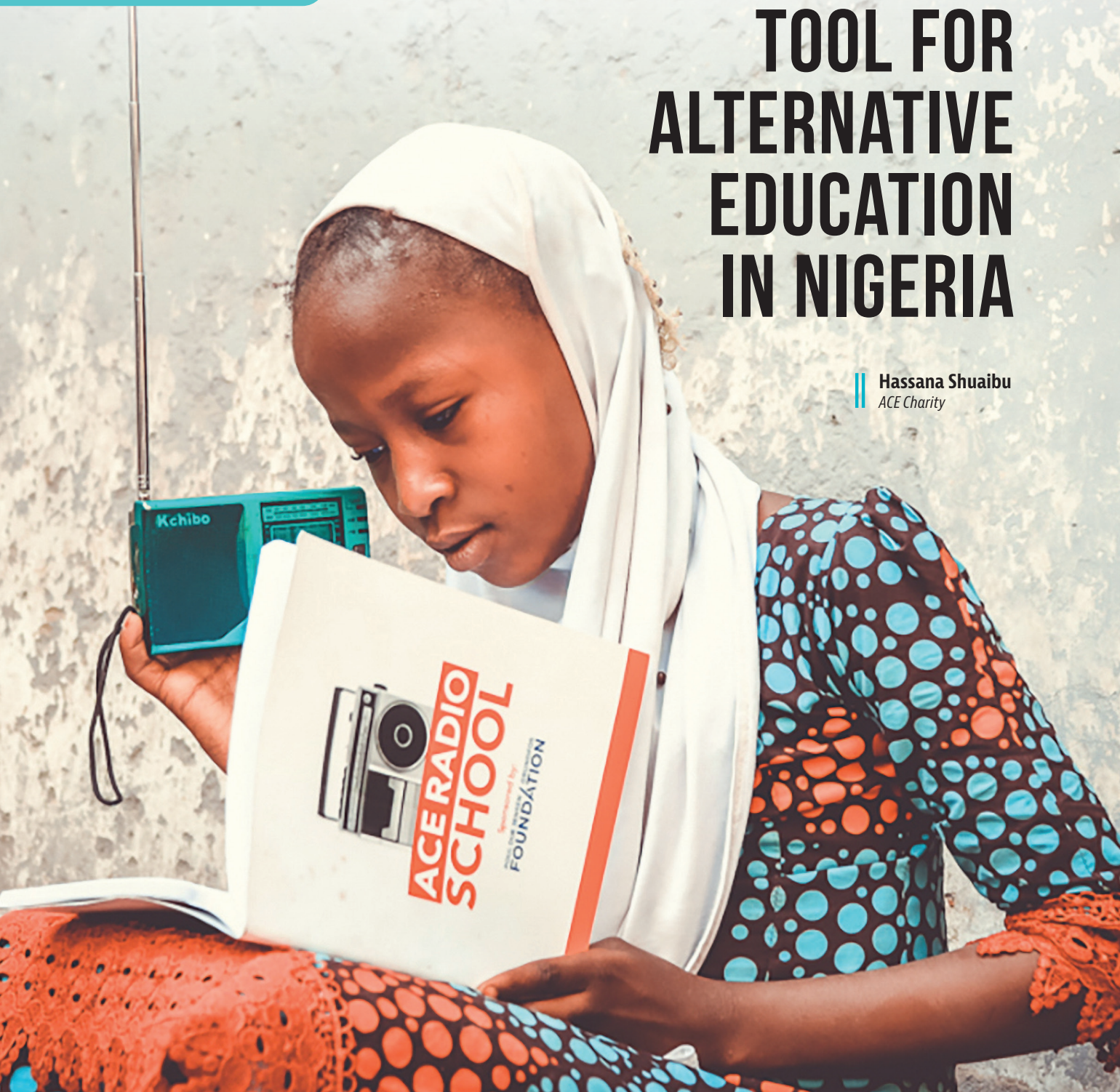


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To address challenges affecting education accessibility, learning can be delivered via a variety of mediums to ensure broader reach and engagement in the learning process.

Radio AS A TOOL FOR ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

|| Hassana Shuaibu
ACE Charity



Aisha is 11 years old. She lives in Nigeria, a country with the highest number of out-of-school children in the world – 20 million.¹ She lives in a rural community; her parents are farmers who have to toil every day for the food they eat. She helps them on the farm, so she cannot go to school.

The above story is not uncommon. Many children have similar stories. For some, poverty means children have to contribute to the family income. Taking time away from work to go to school is not a priority. Moreover, quality education is not free where they live. Parents would have to pay fees they cannot afford to grant their children access to education. Children who do attend school may not be truly learning. The teachers are overworked, underpaid, and tired, and so the quality of learning they provide suffers. In those cases, parents may withdraw their children from school, preferring to make what they feel is better use of their children's time in the home or at their places of business.

For some girls, cultural norms have made them vulnerable to early marriage. Once married, they cannot leave to attend school, as they now must take care of the husband's home. Schooling is a dream that becomes more distant every day. Others live in a region that used to be rife with insecurity from the Boko Haram crisis, where children were kidnapped from school, teachers were attacked, and schools were bombed. Parents in these areas have become scared to send their children to school. For others, schools are far away and they are scared to send their children because students have died crossing busy roads.

Whether it is the poor quality of education, insufficient funds to access schooling, distance to schools, insecurity, or cultural norms, many children in Nigeria have been denied the opportunity to be educated. Despite the government's efforts to build schools and hire teachers, the factors responsible for the high numbers of out-of-school children are multifaceted and deep-rooted. These factors will take years to unravel and solve. As the work to improve education

outcomes sometimes moves forward and sometimes moves backward, millions of children are being left behind and denied access to quality education.

Aisha's father owns a radio that he uses to listen to the news and stay updated on politics. One day, Aisha turns it on and hears someone sing a song about the alphabet in a language she understands. So every week, while on the farm, she asks her father for his radio. Aisha listens as they recite the alphabet song and simple arithmetic concepts. She has never been to school, but she is learning. The radio program she listens to is called ACE Radio School.

About ACE Radio School

ACE Radio School is an alternative form of education that caters to the learning needs of out-of-school children and adolescents (age 6-18 years) by providing access to quality basic and secondary education through the radio. It began as an emergency education initiative for children in underserved areas who could not access online learning while quarantined at home during



THE RADIO IS THE MOST COMMON FORM OF MEDIA COMMUNICATION IN NIGERIA

the COVID-19 pandemic. It is now designed to address poor access to quality education in marginalized communities, by providing free, quality, and safe education for children who are otherwise unable to access formal education.

To develop the content, private school teachers are engaged to write and record scripts on topics that align with the national curriculum. Because the ACE Radio School curriculum is based on the Nigerian National Curriculum, this facilitates entry of out-of-school children into formal education. The scripts are reviewed for creativity, interactivity, and pedagogy. The developed episodes apply realistic examples that consider the context of disadvantaged communities.

Episodes are translated into local languages, which ensures that out-of-school children can grasp the content being taught. Airing in the local language helped to create a shift in how parents and guardians value education, as they can listen to the episodes along with their children. It has helped to dispel false narratives around “Western education,” as the lessons are in a language they, too, can understand.

Why the Radio?

The radio is the most common form of media communication in Nigeria, with 83.4% of Nigerians having access to the technology.² Radio is a particularly important form of media for people in rural and disadvantaged communities, where internet connection is a luxury. Northern Nigeria, where the project has been largely implemented, has the highest radio listenership in the country. By using the radio as a format for delivering our lessons, we can reach





children in their homes, on their farms, and in the markets. We are also able to reach married female adolescents in their homes.

ACE Radio School Listening Centers

To reach out-of-school children who do not have access to a radio, ACE Radio School set up listening centers where children gather to listen to the ACE Radio School episodes via a speaker. The children are provided with writing materials to take notes. These listening centers are located within the community, usually at a place donated, maintained, and run by members of the community. The centers are inconspicuous and safe, easing the minds of parents and guardians who are scared to send their children to formal schools.

The listening sessions adopt the traditional system of learning typical to Northern Nigeria, usually with children seated on mats listening to the episodes, enabling a higher degree of acceptance in those communities. Each listening session lasts for about an hour, and thus can easily be incorporated into the daily routine of out-of-school children. The shorter learning sessions allow them to still go to the farm or carry out other activities.

Measuring Learning Outcomes

To measure learning outcomes, monthly baseline assessments are administered to our listening center beneficiaries based on the topics to be aired for a month. At the end of the month, end-line assessments using the same questions are re-administered to measure learning outcomes. We also have larger assessments conducted at the beginning and end of a six-month period.

Results have shown a two-fold increase among learners in the listening centers. At baseline, before the project commenced, the average knowledge score of all participants was 35%; this number increased to 72% at the end of the project. For learners receiving a basic education, the baseline score was 36% and the endline score 73%. For those receiving secondary education, the knowledge increased from 34% at baseline to 71% at the endline.

We also collect qualitative data through beneficiary interviews. Beneficiaries were motivated to attend the listening sessions because of the opportunity to continue learning, the fun and engaging learning style, and the support from their parents or guardians. Beneficiaries reported that ACE Radio helped them learn how to read, understand complex concepts, and increase their interest in formal education.

The impact of ACE Radio School is not restricted to out-of-school children. ACE Radio School also has provided supplementary learning to children attending public schools where the quality of education is usually poor. In a country where over 50% of school children are unable to comprehend a simple sentence,³ access to other forms of learning, like ACE Radio School, is critical. Teachers also have been unexpected beneficiaries of ACE Radio School. Teachers in rural areas, who rarely receive in-service training, have reported learning how to explain complex concepts from ACE Radio School.

Ensuring Sustainability

A major part of our approach in implementing development projects is ensuring that our projects use local solutions and are community-driven, resulting in the sustainability and impact of our projects. The listening sessions



are generally low-cost activities that require easily found, locally available materials, like the learning space, mats, a speaker, and audio-educational materials. Our listening center facilitators are community members who are trained to administer assessments, monitor learning progress, and prepare project reports. All the audio materials, speakers, and mats used to facilitate the sessions are given to the community to facilitate learning post-project completion. These ensure project continuity and sustainability.

ACE Charity is also working on translating its episodes into other local languages so as to reach more out-of-school children across Nigeria.

Conclusion

The challenges that both in-school and out-of-school children face in attaining free, safe, and quality education are deeply rooted, multifaceted, and complex. ACE Radio School has showcased an ability to improve access to education in Nigeria by overcoming

financial and physical barriers. By using radio, ACE Radio School has reached children in near and far-flung areas. Its use of local languages facilitates easier learning and acceptance among uneducated

parents. Using community members to facilitate listening sessions allows for community ownership and sustainability.

ACE Radio School has the potential to have long-lasting impacts on rural communities and the lives of out-of-school children. It has the power to break down barriers and transform lives. For many, their day-to-day realities mean that ACE Radio School is the only form of learning they receive.

Notes:

¹ UNICEF, 2022. Accessed: <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/media/7746/file/UNICEF%20Nigeria%20Cheat%20Sheet:%20Out-of-school%20Children.pdf>

² US Agency for Global Media. Accessed: <https://www.usagm.gov/wp-content/media/2014/05/Nigeria-research-brief.pdf>

³ World Bank. (2023). *Learning poverty brief*.

Disclosure Statement:

The author is an employee of ACE Charity.



History of Radio-Based Schooling Around the World

Radio instruction is intertwined with the development of radio technology and the evolving needs of education systems, particularly in regions facing challenges such as limited access to traditional schooling, conflicts, or emergencies.

1. Early Beginnings (1920s-1930s):

- The earliest experiments in radio-based education date back to the 1920s, shortly after the commercialization of radio broadcasting. Educators and broadcasters recognized radio's potential as a tool for reaching large audiences with educational content.
- In the United States, pioneers like the University of Wisconsin's experimental radio station 9XM (now WHA) began broadcasting educational lectures and instructional programs in the 1920s.
- Similarly, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in the UK started airing educational talks and programming for schools as early as the 1920s.

2. Expansion and Formalization (1940s-1960s):

- The expansion of radio networks and improvements in broadcast technology during the mid-20th century facilitated the growth of radio-based schooling initiatives around the world.
- During World War II, radio was used extensively for educational purposes, particularly to train military personnel.
- After the war, many countries formalized radio-based education programs to supplement traditional schooling, especially in rural or remote areas where schools were scarce.
- Organizations like UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) promoted radio as a tool for mass education and launched initiatives to support radio-based schooling in developing countries.

3. Cold War Era and Educational Diplomacy (1950s-1980s):

- The Cold War era saw increased competition between the United States and the Soviet Union in using radio for educational and propaganda purposes.
- The Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) broadcast educational programs aimed at promoting democratic values and countering communist influence in Eastern Europe and other regions.
- Similarly, the Soviet Union used radio to disseminate communist ideology and promote education in its satellite states.

4. Global Expansion and Innovation (1990s-Present):

- With the advent of satellite radio, the internet, and digital broadcasting technologies, radio-based education programs expanded their reach and diversified their content.
- Organizations like the World Bank and non-profits such as the Open Learning Exchange (OLE) promoted innovative radio-based education projects in developing countries, focusing on interactive and participatory learning approaches.
- During crises such as conflicts, natural disasters, or pandemics, radio-based schooling initiatives have played a crucial role in ensuring continuity of education for children when traditional schools are disrupted.
- In recent years, the rise of mobile phones and other digital devices has led to the integration of radio-based education with other technologies, enabling personalized learning experiences and greater interactivity.

Overall, the history of radio-based schooling reflects the evolution of educational technologies and the ongoing efforts to expand access to quality education for all, regardless of geographical or socio-economic barriers. The 2023 GEM Report reported evidence gathered by UNESCO showing that almost 40 countries use radio instruction to deliver education. While radio remains a powerful tool for mass education, its integration with other media platforms and technologies continues to shape the future of radio-based education worldwide.

