

# INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO LITERACY PROMOTION: A REVIEW OF THE LITERACY BY RADIO PROJECT IN NIGERIA

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*ABSTRACT:* The literacy by radio project was adopted as an innovative intervention to widening access to literacy programmes for the non-literate groups in Nigeria. Thus, the purpose of this research is to review the contributions of literacy by radio in Nigeria. The researcher adopted the survey design for the study. The population for the study consisted of 2,706 participants and 47 facilitators of the literacy by radio programme in the 10 pilot states in Nigeria. A sample of four states made up of 302 participants and eight facilitators was used for the study. Information collected through Focus Group Discussion (FGD), interviews and content analysis of official documents were used for the study. The data were analysed qualitatively to determine the efficacy of this innovative approach in facilitating literacy in Nigeria. Results showed increased access to literacy programmes through this innovative approach. The pilot project was 88% successful; not less than 2,110 adults were made literate through the project in 2017. However, poor funding, lack of enthusiasm and commitment on the part of the technical committee and facilitators, poor signals from radio stations, low community involvement in decision making in the project are major challenges to the success of the project. Improved and timely funding of the project by the Government, setting up of independent radio stations for airing the programmes, customization of materials and proper monitoring and evaluation of the project for greater effectiveness was recommended. Conclusively, literacy by radio has contributed significantly in literacy promotion in Nigeria.

*Keywords:* Innovative approach, Literacy, Project, Radio, Survey

## Introduction

In an era of an increasingly knowledge-based economy, various forms of literacy are imperative to the sustainable development of any nation. This is why the Nigerian government took a great interest after World War II to reduce illiteracy in the country. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as cited in Ahmed (2011) defined literacy as the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Furthermore UNESCO (2017) stated that a literate person is one who can with understanding, both read and write a short, simple statement on everyday life, and an illiterate person as one who cannot with understanding both read and write a short simple statement about daily life. The Hamburg Declaration and the Agenda for the Future of Literacy (CONFINTEA) conceptualises literacy through a broad lens, referring to it as “the basic knowledge and skills needed by all in a rapidly changing world” (UNESCO, 1997). Following the importance of literacy, Ihejirika (2013) observed that the colonial government realized the need for mass education of Nigerians if their programmes were to succeed, hence their acceleration of literacy education from 1945. On the whole, the government of Nigeria has launched not less than four mass literacy campaigns since 1945. Unfortunately, these campaigns did not record the expected success due to various reasons. Some of these include: inadequate funding, lack of commitment by successive government to the course of the project, lack of reliable data, and non-involvement of the people.

In 1987, a significant milestone was recorded in the development of literacy in Nigeria when the Federal Government directed that the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and all the states of

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the Federation should establish Adult and Non-Formal Education Agencies to handle literacy education in Nigeria. This directive led to the establishment of the State Agencies for Mass Education (SAME) in all the states of the federation and the National Mass Education Commission (NMEC) at the federal level. The State agencies have the responsibility of eradicating illiteracy by providing adult and non-formal education literacy programmes that suit the economic, cultural, social and political needs of non-literates in their areas. The Commission, later renamed the National Commission for Mass Literacy Adult and Non-Formal Education and still popularly called NMEC, is a parastatal under the Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria. The Commission, through Decree No. 17 of 1990 (now Act No. 18 of 2004), was charged with the responsibility of formulating national policies and guidelines for uniform standards of implementing mass literacy, adult and non-formal education programmes at the federal, state and local government levels (Nigeria, National Commission for Mass Literacy Adult and Non-Formal Education 1990). The target of the Commission as specified by the in the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014), is to provide functional literacy and continuing education for adults and youths who have never attended school or did not complete their primary education.

Some of the projects and programmes executed by the National Commission for Mass Literacy Adult and Non-Formal Education towards eradication of illiteracy and achieving the above stated mandate include the mobile literacy project, basic literacy and post-literacy programmes, mass literacy campaigns, Literacy for Family Empowerment (LIFE), worker's education, and nomadic adult literacy. In spite of these efforts at delivering these programmes, literature still shows that the illiteracy rate remains high in Nigeria. About 60 million Nigerians are non-literate; nearly two thirds of them are women who are expected to nurture their children to literacy (National Commission for Mass Literacy Adult and Non-Formal Education, 2010). The National Bureau of Statistics (2010) reported that the literacy rate in the country stood at 57.9 per cent. This means that the non-literacy rate stood at 42.1 per cent. Furthermore, the National Literacy Survey carried out in 2011 indicated that about 1.5 million children of primary school age were not attending school (Federal Ministry of Education, 2011). United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2022) also observed that at least 10.5 million children are out of school in Nigeria-the highest rate in the world. Federal Ministry of Education (FME) (2018) reported that the national female young adult literacy rate is 59.3%, while that of males is 70.9%. The publication also puts the national literacy rate in Nigeria at 65.1%. This is really worrisome for a developing country like Nigeria that occupies a strategic and significant position in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is, therefore, pertinent that something be done about this situation; hence, the need for more innovative approached to literacy promotion.

### **Literacy by Radio in Nigeria**

The high non-literacy rate in Nigeria forced the government to search for innovative approaches to literacy promotion and delivery. The literacy by radio project was adopted as an innovative and better intervention to literacy delivery in Nigeria because the radio is the cheapest and most easily affordable medium for non-literates. NMEC (2010) states that the general objective of the Literacy by Radio project in Nigeria is to evolve a fast and effective approach to eradicate illiteracy in the country in furtherance of the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Literacy by radio is a process of promoting basic education (reading, writing, and calculation) in Nigeria through the use of the radio. Borode (2011) asserted that radio is particularly useful when the objective is to present up to date or local information to the adult. For example, radio can be effectively used in providing information to local farmers on planting, sourcing of fertilizer and other farm inputs, harvesting, and

distribution of farm products. Literacy by radio is cost-effective; Nigerian families are kept together; no schools are needed; a limited number of facilitators are required; and individuals can learn from the comfort of their homes.

The literacy by radio project in Nigeria started in 2002 aimed at widening access to literacy programmes for the non-literate marginalized and disadvantaged groups—women, physically challenged, out-of-school children, and youths in Nigeria—by taking literacy programmes to their door steps. The literacy by radio project is also aimed at increasing the enrollment of participants in literacy programmes. Literacy by Radio started as a pilot project in 10 states of the Federation: Oyo Kwara, Kebbi, Katsina, Kano, Ebonyi, Borno, Bauchi, Cross River, and Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja. The pilot project has a six-month duration within which the learners are expected to acquire literacy. It adopts the mixed delivery method, whereby the radio listening session is augmented with occasional face-to-face sessions. After three radio listening sessions, the facilitator plans a face-to-face session with the learners at a time and place conducive for the learners. This session enables the learners to clarify issues and solve some existing problems. The government distributes transistor radios to the learners to facilitate the learning process.

The literacy by radio project covered programmes on basic literacy, environmental education, civic education, agricultural education, life skills, health, and hygiene awareness. The government recognised the relationship between culture and education in the design of the primers for the learners. The primers are developed in the local language of the learners and are distributed to the learners on assumption of the programme. There is also the facilitator's guide to direct the activities of the facilitators towards effective teaching and learning. The project makes use of government radio stations in delivering the programmes. Air time slots are allotted to the programmes, and payments for the air time are made by NMEC through funds from the Federal Government.

The project employed facilitators and a technical committee in each state to facilitate the project. The facilitators monitor the progress of the learners and organize face-to-face sessions, while the technical committee in each state is expected to take over the full implementation of the literacy by radio project in the states of the federation in the future. NMEC saw the need for a scale-up of the project to 13 new states: Kaduna, Jigawa, Zamfara, Niger, Yobe, Nassarawa, Akwa Ibom, Edo, Ogun, Ekiti, Ondo, Anambra, and Abia.

### **Research Methodology**

Literacy by radio has been going on for 22 years, and the efficacy and contributions of this innovation need to be constantly investigated empirically. Thus, the purpose of this research is to review the efficacy and contributions of the literacy by radio project as an innovative approach to literacy promotion in Nigeria with a view to identifying the successes recorded and the challenges confronting the implementation of this approach to literacy. Four research questions were raised to guide the study. These include the following:

1. How accessible are the literacy by radio programmes to the beneficiaries?
2. How user-friendly are the instructional materials?
3. How successful is the literacy by radio project?
4. What are the challenges confronting the literacy by radio project?

The research adopted the survey research design for the study. The population for the study consisted of 2,706 participants and 47 facilitators of the literacy by radio project in the 10 pilot states in Nigeria. A total of four states were randomly selected from the ten pilot states through balloting. The states are Bauchi, Cross River, Ebonyi, and Kwara. Eight centres were further sampled from the four states (two from each state), and this gave a final sample of 313 participants and eight facilitators. This sample comprises 210 females and 103 males. The instruments for data collection are Focus Group Discussion and interview schedules and content analysis of official documents. The instruments were face validated by five experts in literacy education and measurement and evaluation. The experts determined the adequacy of the content, language and relevance of the instruments to the study. The modifications suggested by the experts were affected. Research Assistants were used to administer both the Focus Group Discussion and interview schedules. Each of the eight centres is a focus group, while the facilitators were interviewed individually. The data collected were analysed qualitatively to determine the efficacy and contributions of the literacy by radio project, so as to determine the proactive nature of this innovative approach in facilitating literacy in Nigeria.

### **Findings**

Results from the study showed greater accessibility as more non-literates have access to literacy programmes through this innovative approach. The FGD with the participants and interview with the facilitators using the schedules showed that the programmes are accessible to the participants to a great extent. They do not have problems with the language of delivery and time of broadcasts. The programmes were delivered in the major dialects, and that enhanced comprehension of the instruction. They also reported that they have adequate access to the aired programmes so long as they are present while the programme is being delivered. On the issue of time for face-to-face contact, the participants observed that the facilitators consult them before scheduling time for interactive sessions; thus, they do not have problems. However, on few occasions when the facilitators schedule time without due consultation, some of the learners miss the contact sessions. This shows that the participants and the facilitators are satisfied with the accessibility of the programmes. However, the participants complained that they sometimes experience poor signals from the radio stations through which the programmes are delivered.

Observations on user-friendliness of the instructional materials indicate the participants and the facilitators found that the primers and facilitator's guide are very user-friendly. The language of development and the graphic materials were commended, indicating that the presentations are simple to understand and properly sequenced. The participants stated that in situations where they have problems with the content of the materials, the problems were clarified during the face-to-face contacts. The participants further reported that the materials cover the relevant subject areas, and the content coverage is adequate. To the participants, the content of the materials and the learning experiences are culture- and local environment-based. To them, this makes for easy adaptation to the issues raised and discussed in the materials. During the discussion, the finding showed that that the content of the materials and the entire programmes address the needs of the respondents and made them functional in their environment. The contents of the materials provided the respondents with functional skills for effective adaptation. The radios that were provided by the government are simple to operate and can easily be manipulated, and this makes them user-friendly. However, some of the participants and facilitators complained that the radios distributed by NMEC are of low quality and depreciate after a short while, with the result that they sometimes experience technical hitches.

Findings determined the literacy by radio project is quite successful. The participants and the facilitators reported that the project, since inception, has made more adults literate and functional in the society. The project has equipped them with the skills of reading, writing, and calculation. The skills have made participants more functional politically, economically, socially, and agriculturally. Some market women among the participants emphasised that, with the skills they have acquired, they are now able to keep records of their sales and communicate better with their customers. The farmers are overwhelmed because they are better informed about improved agricultural inputs and yields. The participants all confirmed that, socially, they experience better relationship with others, make optimal use of their time, and are better equipped to carry out their social responsibilities both in the family and the society at large. To them, some level of political awareness has been created. Some acknowledged that they can now make wise political decisions. All achievements were gained without leaving the confines of their homes daily.

Table 1 buttresses the responses of the participants and facilitators on the success of the project in equipping adults with literacy skills in Nigeria.

Table 1 shows that, based on available data, not less than 70 per cent success rate was recorded in each of the pilot states of the Federation. Kwara and Oyo states had the highest success rate of 100 per cent respectively. This is followed by Bauchi and Borno states with success rates of 97 per cent and 96 per cent respectively. The success rates in Cross River, Ebonyi, FCT, Katsina and Kebbi ranged from 70 per cent to 86 per cent. The total indicates that 2,133 adults out of 2,421 adults were made literate through the literacy by radio project in 2017. This further shows 88 per cent success rate in literacy promotion in Nigeria.

**Table 1.**

*Data on Success Rate of the Literacy by Radio Project in the Pilot States*

<b>States</b>	<b>Enrolment</b>	<b>Number Examined</b>	<b>Number Passed</b>	<b>% Pass</b>
Bauchi	395	375	362	97
Borno	252	222	212	96
Cross River	153	127	108	85
Ebonyi	100	91	78	86
FCT	492	383	321	84
Kano	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL
Katsina	257	257	193	75
Kebbi	400	354	247	70
Kwara	199	162	162	100
Oyo	521	450	450	100
Total	2,706	2,421	2,133	88

Source: National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education.



The interviewed facilitators reported that the project recorded some level of success with the training of facilitators and the technical committee (the proposed administrative arm of the project in the various states of the Federation). Among other findings, both the facilitators and the participants accepted that the programme has provided better access to literacy and empowered more adults through acquisition of self-sustaining skills.

On the challenges confronting the project, the participants and facilitators observed that inadequate funding is a major challenge of the project, and this has adversely affected the implementation process and success rate of the project. Lack of enthusiasm and commitment on the part of the technical committee and some facilitators due to non-payment of honoraria were also identified as challenges. Other challenges, identified as factors that have slowed down the success rate of the radio project as specified by the respondents, include poor monitoring and evaluation strategies, poor signals from radio stations, interruption of lectures with commercials, low community participation and involvement in decisions concerning the project.

### **Discussion**

The study found participants and non-literates have reasonable access to the programmes of the literacy by radio project. This is in line with the finding of Olaniran (2013), who reported that participants in literacy by radio project have a very high level of accessibility to the aired programmes. He further reported that the respondents claimed they have unlimited access to the programmes aired on radio. This can mainly be attributed to the fact that radio has very wide coverage and is available to everybody who wishes to have it. Thus, radio is highly effective in the instruction of non-literate adults. Radio is known to have limitless boundaries in information dissemination, and it is cost effective. In developing countries, radio is the most-affordable electronic gadget; it is accessible and available to almost all the families because it is relatively cheap and makes use of both battery and electricity. These qualities of radio facilitated the accessibility of the literacy by radio programmes to the non-literates and neo-literates in Nigeria.

The finding that the instructional materials are user friendly is predicated on the fact that the materials' language National Commission for Adult and Non-Formal Education is simple, and materials are developed in the dialect of the participants. Primers for the project are now available in 19 dialects of the Federation. Where the primer is not in the dialect of the participant, it is in the dialect of the immediate community of the participant, which the participant fully understands. UNICEF/NMEC (2010) observed that the materials are discretely developed with very clear logos and symbols for effective learning. The materials are also developed in a didactic manner, and learning experiences are locally-based. Conversation and hands-on-assignments at every stage of the participant's progress are adequately provided in the course material. Radios distributed by the government are simple to operate and do not require unique skill for operation. The radios are also easy to repair, and the technical-know-how for the repairs is readily available. All the foregoing factors make the instructional materials very user friendly.

The respondents and the documentary evidence showed that the project recorded appreciable success. UNESCO (2017) reported that more than 16,700 learners have been made literate through the literacy by radio project in Nigeria. The success rate has generated enthusiasm in the participants of the programme, with the result that many of the participants indicated during the FGD that they can read, write, and calculate and would want to further their studies for

higher achievements. With the success recorded, the participants now have improved communicative, vocational, political, health, economic and agricultural skills for survival. This is in line with UNESCO's (2017) account of Halima, a non-literate, who turned house-help at the age of 9 years. According to UNESCO, she listened to literacy by radio programmes and attended classes secretly; today Halima testifies to being literate and has completed her primary school. However, there is need for greater commitment of the government and stakeholders in the project to reduce illiteracy to the barest minimum level.

The challenges identified are similar to major challenges confronting the literacy by radio project in Nigeria reported by UNICEF/NMEC (2010), including technical issues, poor funding, lapses in monitoring and evaluation, and field capacity depletion. However, the identified challenges from this study clearly show lack of political will on the part of some stakeholders and government at all levels. Funds from the Federal Government are grossly inadequate, and State and Local government support remains very poor. Between 2004 and 2012, the budgetary allocation to education in Nigeria was between 4.83% and 9.15% (Okogu, 2017), despite UNESCO's recommendation that countries should devote not less than 23% of their annual budget to education (Murtala et al. 2013). If the political will is not there, these challenges will continue to be strong barriers to the project and the literacy level achieved can be neither sustained nor increased.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends:

- Improved and timely funding of the literacy by radio project by the Federal Government to enable NMEC fulfill its obligations towards the success of the programme.
- Federal government should establish independent radio stations solely charged with the responsibility of airing literacy by radio programmes.
- State governments should set up community printing presses that will help the participants practice and sustain the acquired literacy.
- NMEC should supplement radio teaching with CDs/VCDs and encourage formation of family learning groups.
- There should be consistent and proper monitoring and evaluation of the project by NMEC and State Agencies for greater effectiveness.
- Advocacy and sensitization by all stakeholders are vital at this point to enlist government interest and increase the participation of non-literates in the project.
- NMEC should customize all materials and broadcasts in all the dialects of the participants and incorporate more civil rights, environmental protection, and agricultural skills into the instructional materials for the project.
- Full time and well paid facilitators should be recruited by the Federal and State governments. This will elicit full commitment and greater success stories.
- International organisations such as UNICEF, UNESCO, and World Bank are appreciated for what they have been doing. However, they should step up their support to ensure that non-literacy is completely stamped out of Nigeria.

## Conclusion

The literacy by radio project in Nigeria is an innovative approach aimed at the use of radio to facilitate and enhance literacy. The project has made significant contribution towards non-literacy reduction as evidenced from the study. However, substantial commitment and effort are required from the government, non-governmental and international organisations and to enable the nation eradicate illiteracy bearing in mind the contributions of literacy towards national development. Nigeria must strive towards greater success by addressing the identified challenges from the study through the implementation of the suggested recommendations.

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