

Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) and Quality Assurance in Nigeria's Educational System: The Gains and Import of Policy Intervention

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ABSTRACT

The power of the radio in diffusion of information has been underscored in a plethora of academic writings and research. Yet, the use of radio medium in education has not been optimized by successive administrations in delivering quality formal education in Nigeria. Radio has far greater reach than other conventional media of mass communication. It is cost-effective, easy to use and portable. These features, especially its ubiquity, can be leveraged to close the widening gap between the number of those seeking admissions into the tertiary institutions in Nigeria yearly and those who succeed as well as address the problem of out-of-school children in the country. As a short-term measure, media platforms were deployed during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown period to provide instructions. However, since the restoration of normal course of activities following the attenuation of covid-19 pandemic, we have lapsed the status quo. The crux of this paper is that interactive radio instruction (IRI) can be leveraged by the government to address the problem of access, quality as well as funding that undermine quality assurance in the country's educational system and chart a positive course for national development.

Key words: Radio instruction, Interactive radio instruction, Education, Quality assurance

INTRODUCTION

Education is a life-long learning process which involves acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes. It is not limited to a classroom, or school of formal learning. Rather, it begins at birth even before a child begins to verbalize words and continues throughout the lifetime of an individual.

Similarly, education is not meant for people of any given age bracket nor to a particular period of life. Instead, it embraces all experiences through which an individual acquires knowledge or ideas and develops his/her intellectual capabilities and strengthens his/her will.

As a process of acquiring knowledge through study, by way of instructions, exposure to new knowledge, be it by watching television, listening to radio, reading a book or other printed materials, or through some other practical procedure, education happens everywhere and in everything we do. Hence, throughout life, one goes on learning to adjust oneself to the changing patterns of life of the society one finds oneself in, and continues to learn to adjust and conform to the prevalent norms and values of the society.

For instance, recent advances in computer technologies and innovations introduced by Internet technologies, including the advent of android phones have opened up vistas of learning both for the young and the old who are eager to embrace the technologies. While some will, on their own, figure out how those

technologies function through self intuition, others may have to enlist the services of other people to put them through. Yet so many people may have to enrol in a vocational training outfit to acquire knowledge about what the devices are, how they function, and how to trouble-shoot them. Therefore, taking a wide-view of the concept, we define education as the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, abilities, competences and cultural norms of a society necessary for seamless integration of an individual into the social fabric of the society in which he/she lives.

It encapsulates all the experiences, knowledge and skill that an individual acquires at different stages of his/her life through different channels (i.e., formally, informally, non-formal and incidental learning). It includes all the experiences that an individual receives in the school or at home, in the community and society through interactions of various sorts and involvement in social activities. It is a continuous process, a life-long activity. In fact, acquisition of new information opens up new frontiers of knowledge.

Accordingly, “Communication plays a central role in education of all forms; and the use of the mass media in bringing about an educated society cannot be downplayed.” (Nwabueze, 2007, p. 189). As Reddi (2003, p. 01) put it, “Media have always formed an integral part of modern education since the beginning of the twentieth century. From print to radio, television, and today’s Web-enabled e-learning, each medium has been seen as a potential solution for the problems, inadequacies and certain ills of education.”

By providing their audience streams of information on the goings-on in the society, and on the policies and programmes of governing institutions, the people become well acquainted and better informed, able to live meaningful lives, conscious of their rights, duties, obligations and social norms and values. Again, by broadcasting formal educational programmes, such as teaching of subjects and courses on radio and television, in particular, the media bridge the knowledge gap created by distance, location, cost and time by affording busy and disadvantaged individuals the opportunity to acquire formal education without being physically present in schools.

Function of the media is carried out through the instrumentality of mass communication, using the media vehicles, such as radio, television, books and other computer and Internet-enabled educational technologies. Of all these media of communication, however, the radio ranks above for reasons to be adduced later. Not even the advent of the new media has demeaned its efficiency in education.

In this paper, the import of interactive radio instruction (IRI) in promoting quality assurance in education in Nigeria is underscored; and propositions are canvassed for policy intervention in the area of IRI so as to deepen the national educational goal as well as address the problems of access, quality and cost dogging formal education in the country.

State of Formal Education in Nigeria

The education sector in Nigeria is obviously on downward trajectory. The problems plaguing formal education in the country are legion and monumental, yet the efforts of successive administrations in addressing them are lame duck and uninspiring. The sector remains in comatose situation characterized by poor funding, abject lack of facilities and low morale of poorly incentivized teachers.

Statistics on access and students drop out are troubling indications of where the country is headed on the developmental strides. The right of every Nigerians to formal education as enshrined under Chapter Two of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 as amended (Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy) is further enunciated by the National Policy on Education that sets out the guiding principles and philosophy of education in the country.

Under the educational objectives provided for in section 18 of the Constitution, it was stated in subsection

(1) that “Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate opportunities at all levels.” Sub-section 3 of section 18 provides as follows: “Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy; and to this end, Government shall as and when practicable provide –

1. Free, compulsory and universal primary education;
2. Free university education; and
3. Free adult literacy programme.

To give further effect to the above constitutional provisions, which is, however, not justiceable (cannot be litigated upon), the Federal Government, through the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), developed the first National Policy on Education in 1977 which enunciated the guidelines, objectives, standards, structures and strategies for achieving national education goals in Nigeria.

The philosophy of education in Nigeria, according to the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) (2013), is based on the development of the individuals into a sound and effective citizen and the provision of equal opportunities for all citizens at the basic, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system. Under the Policy, the following five set of beliefs encapsulate the philosophy of education in the country:

1. Education is an instrument for national development and social change;
2. Education is vital for the promotion of progressive and united Nigeria;
3. Education maximizes the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self-fulfilment and general development of the society;
4. Education is compulsory and a right of every Nigerian irrespective of gender, social status, religion, colour, ethnic background and any peculiar individual challenges; and
5. Education is to be qualitative, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the needs of the society.

The Policy further highlighted the specific goals of education in Nigeria, which include:

1. Ensuring and sustaining unfettered access and equity to education for the total development of the individual;
2. Ensuring the quality of education delivery at all levels;
3. Promoting functional education for skill acquisition, job creation and poverty reduction;
4. Ensuring periodic review, effectiveness and relevance of the curriculum at all levels to meet the needs of the society and the world of work;
5. Collaborating with development partners, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and local communities to support and fund education; and
6. Promoting information technology capability at all levels.

It is saddening to note that 46 years after the first National Policy on Education was put in place, the country’s educational sector is still grappling with multifarious challenges limiting access to and quality of formal education. Key education statistics for Nigeria paint a very gory picture of the challenging situations facing the country’s education sector.

For instance, according to World Bank, Statistica, UNICEF and Invictus Africa statistics, Nigeria’s literacy rate as at year 2018 was 62 percent. In 2020, only 68 percent of the youths in Nigeria had received secondary education. However, only around 15 percent of them had completed primary education, while 17 percent pursued higher studies after secondary education. There were 18.5 million non-school-going children in Nigeria by May 2022. Unfortunately, 60 percent of those children were girls; whilst 20 percent of all Nigerian children were out of school around the middle of 2022. The budget allocated to education in Nigeria in 2022 was 5.39 percent, which is a reduction of 50 percent from what it was in 2015 (10.79%)

(retrieved from <https://zoetalentsolutions.com/education-statistics-for-nigeria/>).

Further to the foregoing, higher education participation rate, which Okebukola (2008) defined as the proportion of 18-35 years age group that is enrolled in tertiary education, remains abysmally low. According to him, higher education participation rates of 16 countries revealed that Nigeria ranked the lowest (8.1%) followed by India and China (10%), while the USA was rated 64% and Spain, Italy and Japan had 50%.

Similarly, Ezekwesili (2006) cited in Obiorah, Ofor and Okika (2014, p. 92) pointed out that “In 2005, an average of 868,000 Nigerian youths sought admission to our universities out of which only 23 percent were adjudged to have been successful (that is 200,000). That, according to her, was because “our universities then had the capacity to absorb only 150,000”. She warned that the nation is in serious danger of mass-producing miscreants, the disaffected, the misdirected, the unlearned, the wronged, the angry, the agitated and the hopeless.

More recent statistics do not disclose any marked dissimilarity. Hence, the access gap to formal education was, according to Oluwatoyin (2023), as a result of three factors: out-of-school syndrome, which has grown exponentially in the last decade; low completion rate and leaky education pipeline – a phenomenon that describes the progressive reduction in access to education in Nigeria as one moves higher in the tiers of education. Also worthy of note are poor quality of services due to lack of basic instructional materials, outdated curriculum, dilapidated infrastructure, high pupil-teacher and pupil-classroom ratio, high rate of unqualified teachers, weak and poorly funded school administration. It must also be noted that the complexities of the federal structure of government in Nigeria with varying roles for stakeholders at the federal, state and local government constitute another challenge, especially as it concerns the implementation of educational programmes (Semere & Swadchet, 2010).

In the midst of the above troubling statistics, what is needed presently is immediate refocusing and redirection of goals and policies towards achieving what Obiorah, Ofor and Okika (2014, p. 87) called “massification of education”, leveraging on the opportunities created by technology, especially the radio infrastructure, in shoring up enrolment, improving access, enhancing quality and curtailing cost of education through interactive radio instruction (IRI) without undermining quality. The importance would include achieving uniformity of instruction and elimination of most of the vexing issues impeding formal education access and quality assurance in Nigeria, such as the problem of carrying capacity by which the number of students that can be admitted by every tertiary institution is set by the regulatory bodies thereby shorting out millions others from tertiary education, the problem of infrastructural facilities which are either non-existence, grossly inadequate, obsolete or decayed; dearth of human resources (academics staff) to match students-teacher ratio per class, funding gap arising from financial paucity and lack of commitment by government.

The Power of the Radio Medium

Broadcast media, especially the radio, play critical roles in education because of their unique characteristics. They have wide reach; are able to quickly spread information and provoke dialogue.

Radio transcends the barrier of illiteracy, time and space. It can reach the remotest parts of the world simultaneously. For instance, the radio transmission of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Voice of America (VOA) are received on amplitude modulation (AM) and short wave (SW) bands here in Nigeria all the way from Westminster, London and Washington respectively. Hence, according to Onabajo (2000), radio is the leading mass communication medium in terms of general availability.

The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) (1998) cited in Agbo, Ojobor and Ezinwa (2008, pp. 231-2) underscored the utility of the radio over other mass media of communication as

follows:

Radio is the most accessible mass medium of communication in use. It is a particularly effective means of communication in communities where most people cannot read and write, but can speak and listen. Its listenership is therefore much broader than the readership of newspaper and television viewers (particularly in developing countries). Technically, its production costs are significantly lower than those of most printed or video community media. Likewise, its reception is easier and more affordable than that of community video or television, and leaves out the distribution nightmares of community publications.

With the advancement in computer technology, it has become possible to create live radio broadcast on personal computers (PCs) for education purpose. Hence, radio-on-the-internet is a growing phenomenon that removes the restrictions of frequency or license. It is relatively cheap to set up and has the advantages of airing user-generated contents which is key in IRI set up.

Some of the advantages of radio that can be leveraged on for education purpose include the fact that

1. *It is cost-effective by being cheaper to acquire and use.* Even in the absence of electricity, one can still enjoy the radio using batteries. It is even much easier presently with the innovations brought by rechargeable radio technology for people to listen to radio even without electricity.
2. *Radio is a portable and mobile device.* Portability here connotes the ability to carry a radio set around. Its mobile nature makes it easily transferable from one place to another particularly the walkman, transistor radio and those installed in mobile phones. It is therefore suitable for both classroom and home listening.
3. *Even remote areas can be easily reached.* Radio has a very wide reach unlike the other media types. This makes it an important mechanism for rapid diffusion of development information in a diversity of languages and to widespread, often remote geographical areas. Location is not a barrier to listening to radio. One can listen to radio anywhere, including in cars, on the horse back, at the farm, etc. With advent of phones with radio system, there is obviously no limitations as to where one can tune to a radio programme. Radio signals can also be accessed via the computer. Again, satellite technology have made it possible to receive radio signals from across the world thereby adding to the ubiquity of the radio medium.
4. *It is easy to use the radio.* No special training is required for anyone to tune in and listen to radio programmes. Therefore, the radio medium serves the literate, semi-literate and illiterate individuals seamlessly. As Uwakwe (2012, p. 123) put it, “Radio lends itself to oral culture and is, therefore, a great companion for the illiterate.”
5. *Radio programmes can be recorded for future use.* It is possible to air pre-recorded programmes. Likewise, one can record a programme and listen to it at one’s convenient time.
6. Radio makes a far lesser mental demand on the listeners than does reading books, magazine, newspaper and even watching of television. One can be engaging in attention-catching tasks and still be listening to radio programme.
7. Radio provides listeners with a sense of involvement and allows the listener to hear authorities or programmes that are beyond the scope of the typical school system.

RADIO IN EDUCATION

Radio is an essential educational tool used for formal, non-formal and informal learning. It is an audio device that is capable of providing valuable assistance to teachers in the classroom by presenting useful information and learning experience to a large number of learners.

According to Onabajo (2000), radio brings dramatic feelings into the classroom and can carry to the listeners all the emotional overtones of the broadcast materials. Since it is rare for a teacher to be expert in

every facet of the subject he/she teaches, radio makes it possible to bring in experts into classrooms. Hence, radio enriches the knowledge of the listeners through the provision of stream of information on diverse subject matters and issues. It teaches language, literacy, culture and life skills. It is also used in the teaching of formal school subjects as was the case with the famed University of the Air (UNIAIR) programme of the Enugu State Broadcasting Corporation.

As a supplement to classroom teaching, radio teaching is not confined only to the hours when students are supposed to be school. Educational programmes are available from early morning till long after midnight. By so doing, both young and adult learners are opportune to access the best of the world's stores of knowledge while in school and out of school.

Aderibigbe (2013) identified the following functions of radio in education:

1. Radio brings to children, youth and adults the greatest achievements of our cultural heritage in art, music, drama, poetry, etc.
2. It brings the inspiration of great teachers, artists, statesmen and scientists into the lives of people who might otherwise never have direct contact with personalities of comparable magnitude.
3. It plays an important role in making tertiary education available to our rapidly increasing admission seekers and to adults who were unable to secure education in their youth.
4. Radio lessens the gap between the rapidly growing body of scientific knowledge and public understanding of the social implications of modern science.
5. It is a major agent in all types of adult education from “do-it-yourself” skills to science and philosophy.
6. Radio acquaints the people rapidly with major social, civic and international issues.
7. New events around the world are brought to people everywhere in a few hours through radio.

Nature of Educational Radio

Educational **radio** is a low-cost educational technology, christened **interactive radio instruction (IRI)**. It is an educational broadcast prepared to serve the cause of education and classroom in form of radio lessons and lectures.

As a distance education system, IRI combines radio broadcasts with active learning to improve educational quality and teaching practices. It is a teaching methodology in which a radio broadcast guides a teacher and learners through the activities of a lesson. The IRI methodology requires that learners stop and react to questions and exercises through verbal response to radio characters, group work, and physical and intellectual activities. Learners participate in lessons by recitation, singing, reading, writing, answering questions and solving problems in ways that ensure active learning.

Also, short pauses are provided to enable students to think and interact with the teacher as they work together to conduct short experiments, perform activities, and solve problems using local resources and imaginative situations and stories. For both the teacher and the students, the lesson becomes an immediate hands-on and experiential guide.

Unlike many distance learning efforts, such as the open and distance learning (ODL) model in Nigeria, that are designed primarily to address access issues, IRI began as a tool used in the classroom to counteract inadequate teacher training, poor achievement among learners, and dearth of learning resources. It has been shown to be capable not only of expanding access and increasing equity in both formal and non-formal educational settings, it enhances quality assurance in terms of instruction.

According to Bosch, Rhodes, and Kariuki (not dated), “The pedagogy of IRI is more deliberate than active

learning alone.” This is because IRI series guide learners through the learning process with activities related to measurable learning objectives. Educational contents are organized and distributed across lessons so that learning is built on previous knowledge, and new learners can understand more easily the subject being taught. Again, activities and problems are modelled first by radio characters so that the teacher and the learners have an idea of the process they are undertaken and the skills and support that may be required. All of these elements are knit together through story lines, music, characterization, and other attributes available through the audio medium.

Lalima (2013) identified the objectives of IRI as increasing access to basic education for all learners of school-going age; improving educational quality; making teaching participatory through radio broadcast; providing a forum for teachers and students to share their problems, and discuss their views with experts and other members of their communities; and giving practice in communication skills.

Other advantages of educational radio include:

1. It affords students the opportunity to listen to lectures, talks, and discussions by renowned authors, educationists, leading scholars, etc. that provides educational and psychological value to them;
2. It provides huge assistance to classroom teachers in realizing the instructional objectives, especially where there is planned and sequential classroom lessons on topics related to school subjects;
3. It is an avenue for integrating education with real life experience on one hand and healthy entertainment on the other hand;
4. Students are more motivated to learn as a result of the entertainment content of broadcast materials;
5. IRI is an economical way of delivering education in terms of access, time and financial commitment. This is because one broadcast is capable of reaching millions of learners;
6. There is uniformity of contents for all learners as against situations where curriculum is delivered by different teachers to different students;
7. It promotes uniformity of instruction. The same thing is taught to students across distance and time;
8. It cushions the impact of brain drain by affording Diaspora Nigerians the opportunity to share their knowledge and experience with students.

It is important to point out that radio is selective in terms of pedagogy because of its audio-only nature. It cannot be used in any teaching method involving demonstration, dramatization, or the use of any instructional material that displays concepts or requires practice and hand-on technique. Other limitations to the use of radio in formal education include the fact that students may become disinterested and non-attentive after listening to a radio lesson; and IRI tends to reduce teaching and learning to one-way communication. However, “There is a general acceptance of the fact that radio makes a profoundly significant contribution to an improved quality of education for children, youths and adults.” (Obiorah, 2019, p. 105)

IRI Applications and Experiences

The IRI has been used with greater results in many developing countries, especially in South America where it was first used. Countries like Nicaragua, Paraguay, Guatemala, and Dominican Republic have leveraged the system for the education of adults and children in hard-to-reach areas with significant results.

In Africa, Zambia and Republic of Guinea are the two countries where the system was used to improve instruction, scale up school enrolment and counter female dropout from school. (World Bank, 2005). In Zambia, for instance, interactive radio instruction was used to counter the problem of shortage of teachers caused by the effect of HIV/AIDs and poverty as well as to address dwindling students enrolment figures. The system helped to increase access to education for children who are without schools, especially orphans and other vulnerable children through the collaborative effort of local communities, churches, non-

governmental organizations (NGOs), the Ministry of Education's Educational Broadcast Services (EBS), the Peace Corps, and the Education Development Centre. Other African countries where the system has been used and the purpose of use include in Mali (for literacy training), in Botswana (for civic education), in Kenya (in support of correspondence courses) and in Swaziland (for public health enlightenment).

The closest of IRI system in Nigeria is the ODL pioneered by the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). However, the fact that NOUN itself does not have a radio station and there is no national policy framework for implementation of IRI constitute a clog on the attainment of the goals enunciated in the National Policy on Education regarding ODL, which include to:

1. Provide more access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities;
2. Meet special needs of employers and employees by mounting special courses for employees at workplace;
3. Encourage internationalization especially of tertiary education curricula;
4. Ameliorate the effect of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing Nigerian experts as teachers regardless of their locations or places of work; and
5. Encourage life-long learning opportunities.

IRI and the Way Forward for Nigeria's Education Sector?

With a landmass of 923,768 square kilometres and an estimated population of 223,804,632 out of which 42.54 percent falls between the ages of 0-14, and those within 15-64 years are 53.73 percent, something drastic needs to be done to address issues of manpower and quality of education in Nigeria. According to the World Bank, between 2000 and 2005, primary school gross enrolment rate in Nigeria increased from 95.5 percent to 102.9 percent. However, during that same period, the pupil-teacher ratio decreased from 41.1 percent to 37.2 percent. (retrieved from <http://devdata.worldbank.org/external/CPProfile.asp?CCODE=NGA&PTYPE=CP>)

As at year 2022, UNESCO reported that approximately 20 million Nigerian children were not enrolled in school. This amounts to about 20 percent of the country's population; and it represents the highest number of out-of-school children in the world (The Guardian, 2023). Coupled with the issue of access to tertiary education which has been on a steady decline, there is need for urgent measures to address these challenges through well-honed systemic approach that leverages on technologies, especially the radio medium, to diffuse knowledge and learning across the strata of Nigerian population.

The policy thrust of the Federal Government in addressing the problem must be well thought out and far-reaching. It must not focus on equivalency of the programme with conventional pedagogies, but on the need to encourage coordinating agencies as well as national and sub-national governments, tertiary institutions and media organizations to work in tandem to address the most critical components of the problem, which hinges on funding, manpower and tools.

It is against that backdrop of the likely challenges to IRI, such as the propensity for young learners to wander off during lesson, scheduling of programmes to suit every learner as well as the problem of certification, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Federal Government should establish a body to oversee open and distance learning in the country. Part of its responsibilities should be training of teachers on mediated communication, developing of instructional materials and regulating the broadcasting of IRI programmes.
2. Government should work to establish a good working relationship with media owners and practitioners to ensure seamless IRI programmes scheduling. Also, media outlets should be set up and dedicated to broadcasting formal school subjects.

3. Radio personalities and teachers involved in IRI should be properly trained and effectively supervised based on measurable goals.
4. The roles and responsibilities of community stakeholders, such as local communities, churches, schools, NGOs, within the IRI system should be streamlined and clearly defined.
5. Conducive learning centres/venues should be established and schools should be provided with the requisite IRI tools, such as radio receivers, a blackboard, and instructional materials.
6. Benefits of radio instruction can be blended with the flexibility and advantages provided by learning through mobile phones, especially for adult learners. This is necessary since mobile phones is used by nearly every adult irrespective of socio-economic status.

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