

EDUCATION IN TIMES OF NEED

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Abstract

The motivation for the research is based on the recognition that over the worst of the epidemic, we are experiencing new uncertainties. The pandemic meant both constraints and opportunities. New tools and creative solutions emerged driven by ICT companies while looking back we also had to learn that part of our world had no chance to join and solve social, educational, and health problems with these tools. We may think that this will only happen in developing countries. Still, even in Western societies, there are many for whom home education is not provided to a satisfactory standard. They do not have access to education in the event of an emergency, such as a pandemic, a war situation, or energy restrictions. *Research questions:* How has education without ICT tools been solved during the pandemic in disadvantaged areas? What can we learn from the experience there?

During the lockdown, some parts of Africa, South-East Asia, and South America switched from formal education to innovative approaches that use local communication channels for education. This paper is focusing on community radio as it has been used extensively as an educational tool in developing countries since the 1970s (Nwaerandu & Thompson, 1987) (Africa Educational Trust, 2019). The revival of radio in education was the consequence of the pandemic and emphasized local specifications (Education Development Center, 2020).

The research is based on a scientific literature review (database of ERIC). Also, first-hand information was collected from Community Media Forum Europe affiliate member organizations in Asia. Selected case studies from Bangladesh (BNNRC, 2020), Indonesia (Prahmana, Hartanto, Kusumaningtyas, & Muchlas, 2021), Bolivia and Sierra Leone have several similarities to ensure engaging radio lessons and provide access to education in rural areas.

Results and conclusions worth further reflection: Radio is a good alternative to ICT when online learning is impossible, cheap and accessible in most households, does not need mains electricity, works with batteries, etc. The partnership between local actors (volunteers, civil society, religious groups) is essential for long-term commitment to spread awareness, provide space and resources for the radio station or the staff and teachers. The factors of most concern are the missing educational content in audio formats and the difficulties of producing such content in a short time. Therefore, I suggest the promotion of partnership and collaboration between the education and media specialists and preparing educational protocols with emergency governmental organizations.

Keywords: *Educational radio broadcasting, community radio, emergency education.*

1. Introduction

Education has undergone significant transformations worldwide as a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic. While ICT companies have played a crucial role in introducing collective solutions, certain regions of the world have been unable to participate in addressing social, educational, and health challenges using these tools. Even transnational organizations have prioritized the utilization of ICT tools in education during lockdowns, recognizing their importance for all nations in the 21st century. According to UNESCO (UNESCO, 2020), the closure of schools during the initial phase of the pandemic resulted in approximately 826 million students (50% of total students) being unable to attend school. Moreover, even in times of peace and stability factors such as poverty, regional disparities, and famine have further impeded access to education in regions with existing educational systems. Consequently, community development and education face significant uncertainties during these times. However, the pandemic has also presented unprecedented opportunities to explore innovative solutions to these challenges (Westoby & Harris, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic, compounded by measures like lockdowns, has exacerbated the situation, particularly in regions with limited access to ICT. As a result, alternative means of providing education,

such as radio, television, and mobile phones, have been adopted in certain parts of Africa, South-East Asia, and South America. These regions have transitioned from traditional formal education to innovative approaches using local communication channels for educational purposes. Community radio, which has been utilized extensively as an educational tool in developing countries since the 1970s (Nwaerandu & Thompson, 1987; Africa Educational Trust, 2019), has experienced a revival in the context of the pandemic, highlighting the significance of local specificities and resources (Education Development Center, 2020).

2. Methods

This research employs three distinct methods. Firstly, from March 2020 to March 2022, first-hand information was collected through email and regular newsletters from affiliate member organizations of Community Media Forum Europe, an international non-profit organization founded to strengthen the participation of the community media sector in European discussion and regulation processes. The research is focusing on information from affiliate members because they are located mostly in Asia. Secondly, an ongoing process since December 2021 involves conducting scientific literature research and analysis. The ERIC database (online library of education research, <https://eric.ed.gov>) was accessed in December 2021, yielding over 100 papers identified using the keywords 'community radio, education, covid'. Only full-text and peer-reviewed papers published in 2020 and 2021 were selected – the peak times when Covid-19 hit the world - with the assessment of these papers continuing throughout the summer of 2022. Thirdly, also ongoing since December 2021, secondary literature processing was conducted. Multiple searches were performed on Google using the same keywords such as community radio, education, and Covid, specifically focusing on reports from international mass communication organizations, transnational organizations (such as UNESCO and the World Bank), international not-for-profit organizations, governmental offices, and ministries. The assessment of these selected papers will continue throughout the summer of 2023. This study presents the current state of research as of January 2023, relying on a literature review and case studies examining the role of radio in education during the Covid-19 pandemic. Case studies from Bangladesh (BNNRC, 2020), Indonesia (Prahmana, Hartanto, Kusumaningtyas, & Muchlas, 2021), Bolivia (Borchers, 2021), and Sierra Leone (World Bank, 2021; Sengeh, 2021) exhibit several similarities in terms of strategies employed to ensure engaging radio lessons and enhance access to education in rural areas.

3. Results

The emergence of the first community radio station in Bolivia in 1949 was a response to the poverty issues faced by mining workers and the dissemination of state-controlled propaganda on mainstream radio channels, which failed to address their concerns truthfully (Prahmana, Hartanto, Kusumaningtyas, & Muchlas, 2021). Community radio, since its inception, has served as a platform to amplify the voices of marginalized groups who are often excluded from public service and commercial radio broadcasts. It operates based on several key principles, including the active participation of community members as primary contributors, a focus on local interests and needs, and a non-profit orientation to serve the community rather than generate revenue (Lewis, 2008). Community involvement plays a crucial role in shaping the content of broadcasts, and the management of community radio stations is typically entrusted to members of the local community (Velics, 2021; Doliwa & Purkarthofer, 2021). During the Covid-19 pandemic, countries worldwide faced the challenge of reorganizing education in compliance with social distancing measures and other restrictions. This study specifically concentrates on regions where ICT technology was not a viable solution due to geographical limitations, inadequate access to technology, or low levels of digital literacy.

3.1. Bangladesh - they have the tool and use it to disseminate correct information

Established in 2009, the BNNRC (Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication) functions as a national apex organization dedicated to the development of community media. Their mission centers around the establishment of a democratic society founded on principles such as the free flow of information, equitable and affordable access to information, and ICT for remote and marginalized populations in Bangladesh (BNNRC, 2022). With a network comprising 18 community radio stations currently broadcasting in the country, they collectively air 157 hours of programming per day, encompassing information, education, local entertainment, and developmental initiatives. The primary objective is to empower rural communities and ensure their right to access information. To achieve this, the network is embedded in the locality: local presenters (mostly women), local language, and addresses general topics of health, agriculture, and education, next to local culture. The existence of this network, with approximately 6.18 million listeners, has served as a robust foundation for providing information since

the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic. On 1st March 2020, the 18 radio stations commenced the broadcast of the Coronavirus Education program targeted at rural populations, delivering the initial information about the virus and prevention measures in the local language, facilitated by local presenters (Rahman, 2020). This consistent coverage gradually alleviated panic in rural areas, prompting listeners to seek further information through live broadcasts, telephone calls, text messages, and Facebook Live sessions. Undoubtedly, this solution proved effective, as the audience displayed greater receptivity to advice from individuals who shared the same language or dialect and were familiar with their community. In subsequent stages, the focus shifted to combating misinformation, leading to the launch of the Counter Misinformation & Malformation Awareness Campaign on 7th February 2021 (Rahman, 2021). The campaign aimed to identify and address various forms of misinformation regarding the immunization program, while providing scientific information to disadvantaged and marginalized communities at risk during the immunization process. As part of this initiative, community radio stations broadcasted a variety of programs, including news, radio dramas, jingles, vox pops, and public service announcements, to raise awareness about the Covid-19 vaccination program and counter-propaganda. The information delivered by community members in the local dialect holds greater credibility and acceptance compared to that provided by unfamiliar sources. Likely, younger voices and women reporters were particularly well-received in this regard.

3.2. Indonesia – they have the tool but not yet using it for education

The challenging geographical conditions in Indonesia have posed significant obstacles to ensuring widespread access to online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. In response, the Indonesian government has taken measures to address the issue and provide education during these uncertain times. Policies and guidelines have been established and implemented for remote learning; however, these measures do not cater to individuals who lack internet connectivity. According to Prahmana, Hartanto, Kusumaningtyas, and Muchlas (2021:1), many students are compelled to undertake arduous journeys, such as trekking up mountains, climbing trees, or venturing into the woods, in search of an internet signal. Consequently, teachers have had to assume additional responsibilities and visit students' homes to deliver education. It is evident that this approach is inefficient and fails to serve the best interests of students, parents, and teachers. Radio has been employed for educational purposes in Indonesia since 1980. The Ministry of Education and Culture has developed Radio Edukasi (Education Radio), which supports both formal and informal learning and collaborates with other radio stations. However, the country's topography poses challenges to clear radio transmission. To overcome this issue, the utilization of community radio (Radio Komunitas) could be a potential solution. Community radio stations, recognized by Law Number 32 of 2002, are more localized and have legal status already. The Indonesian Community Radio Network (ICRN), established in 2002, encompasses 11 networks spread across different parts and islands of Indonesia. Unfortunately, community radio has primarily focused on broadcasting socially relevant social content for local communities and has not yet been utilized for educational purposes. Prahmana suggests that a community radio-based blended learning approach could serve as an alternative solution to provide education in challenging areas (Prahmana, Hartanto, Kusumaningtyas, & Muchlas, 2021).

3.3. Bolivia – they have the tool and let children use it

In September 2021, the Bolivian Community Radio Network introduced Radio Escuela (School Radio) as part of a project funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, with financial support from DW Akademie. The initiative aimed to provide educational programming to students residing in rural regions, broadcasting a total of 100 programs. The project primarily targeted four rural areas in central Bolivia, leveraging radio as the primary medium for the learning process. The content reached over 25,000 students through approximately 20 local radio stations. In addition to the broadcasted programs, the Bolivian Community Radio Network developed supplementary materials such as brochures, worksheets, and games to facilitate individual learning. An additional benefit of the project was to foster media literacy among young learners, encouraging a critical approach to media consumption by teaching them how to assess and verify information. Furthermore, the project promoted active student involvement, enabling learners to host the Radio Escuela program and allowing listeners to send messages that were read aloud by the young hosts (Borchers, 2021). This project exemplified the principle of participation in community radio, exemplifying the notion of "from, by, for, and about the community."

3.4. Sierra Leone - they have past experience to build on

During the Ebola outbreak from 2014 to 2016, radio served as an educational tool. These were far before the dominant position of Zoom and online learning platforms. With students being out of school for a prolonged period of nine months, the implementation of an interactive Radio Teaching Programme proved

successful. The situation presented by the Covid-19 pandemic resembled this prior experience, and the established routine helped reinforce the distance learning process facilitated by radio during school closures in 2020-2021. Given the familiarity with the method of utilizing radio for education, teachers were able to focus on sharing their expertise and creating more pedagogically well-designed content. They organized themselves, engaging in peer learning, developing teaching manuals for early-grade students' literacy and numeracy, and convening in small groups to discuss lesson plans (World Bank, 2021). In 2020, the Institute for Governance Reform and Oxfam Sierra Leone investigated the education system, revealing significant shortcomings. These included limited access to the Radio Teaching Programme due to a lack of contiguous FM radio transmitter coverage and a limited number of receivers. Consequently, certain rural districts were unable to reach all students effectively. An analysis suggested that increasing the number of stations would be beneficial. For example, the incorporation of 14 transmitters would enable a 90% reach, while 17 transmitters would extend the coverage to reach 96% of students, approximately 2.8 million children. In response to this finding, the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education has committed to procuring the initial set of three transmitters, with an additional two transmitters being acquired through collaboration with an NGO partner (Sengeh, 2021).

4. Conclusions

The utilization of existing local communication technologies holds the potential to address the challenges associated with achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all, even in times of emergencies such as a pandemic. Radio serves as a viable substitute for ICT in areas where internet connectivity and online learning platforms are inaccessible (UNESCO, 2020). There is a growing availability of manuals and guides that facilitate the planning and implementation of education through radio. The significance of the pandemic is evident in the majority of these resources being published in 2020. Transnational organizations, such as the World Bank, offer pragmatic guides like the Education Radio Knowledge Pack and Education TV Knowledge Pack (Zacharia, 2020), as well as the Interactive Audio Instruction Repurposing Toolkit (Education Development Center, 2020), which assist decision-making processes and project implementation. These manuals not only aid in planning community-based solutions and projects but also emphasize the importance of local engagement. By leveraging local resources, education programs can be designed using the local language or dialect and involve community members and partners. Long-term commitment and the mobilization of awareness are facilitated through partnerships and collaborations with local actors, including volunteers, civil society organizations, and churches (Velics & Doliwa, 2015). These partnerships also contribute to financial support and enable practical project activities, providing resources and space for radio stations or training support staff and teachers. However, numerous challenges persist in the implementation of emergency radio education. These challenges include the lack of educational content in an audio-visual format in local languages, doubts regarding the timely production of such content, and the absence of partnerships and collaborations between education and media specialists. Further investigation is required to address these obstacles comprehensively and transform radio-assisted learning in disadvantaged areas into a practical reality. As demonstrated in Lagos, the availability of more community media centers in different communities would be beneficial, fostering group listening environments where learners can receive supervised support, as solely self-directed learning has proven to be less effective (Sanusi, Talabi, Adelabu, & Alade, 2021). A detailed understanding of these factors is necessary to advance radio-assisted learning initiatives in marginalized areas.

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