

**COMMUNICATION APPROACHES FOR PROMOTING
SCHOOL ENROLMENT IN RURAL COMMUNITIES: A STUDY
OF ASA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, KWARA STATE,
NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT: In Nigeria, despite government efforts to achieve universal basic education, enrolment rates in many rural areas remain below national expectations. Communication plays an important role in influencing educational participation through community engagement, behavioural change, and social mobilization; however, its effectiveness in rural Nigerian contexts remains insufficiently explored. This study examined communication approaches used to promote school enrolment in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria. The study was guided by the Diffusion of Innovations Theory and Social Mobilization Theory and adopted a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 420 respondents selected using stratified random sampling, of which 384 questionnaires were successfully returned and found usable for analysis. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with purposively selected community stakeholders. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and linear regression, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings showed that interpersonal communication, particularly through community meetings and opinion leaders, was the most effective strategy for encouraging school enrolment. In contrast, formal mass media campaigns had limited reach and influence on parental decisions. The study also identified several barriers to enrolment, including low parental literacy, economic hardship, cultural preferences for male education, and distrust of government communication channels. Furthermore, community mobilization involving religious leaders and traditional rulers significantly influenced enrolment decisions and improved community participation in educational initiatives. The study concludes by recommending greater reliance on community-based communication strategies and stakeholder engagement to improve school enrolment and bridge educational gaps in rural Nigeria.

Keywords: School Enrolment, Rural Communication, Development Communication,
Community Mobilization, Behaviour Change Communication, Kwara State, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

One of the most permanent tools of empowerment and change is education. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have sparked a worldwide response to the lack of progress in

educational access, specifically Goal 4, which states that 'inclusive and equitable and quality education for all' (Gonjo et al., 2025). Despite increased funding for primary education, millions of school-age children have been excluded from mainstream primary education in many developing nations over the past 20 years. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2023), there were around 244 million unschooled children and adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa as of 2022.

The problem of school enrolment is inextricably linked to structural inequity of access, quality and relevance in Africa. Although there has been commendable progress in improving NER in most countries in the region, the implementation of these policies is uneven and inadequate in school uptake in rural and peri-urban areas (James & Olaniyan, 2024; Anazia, 2021). Gender inequality, poverty, displacement, pastoralism, early marriage and child labour are all factors that contribute to enrolment gaps and are interwoven with both the supply and demand sides of education. Importantly, the educational message that communities receive, interpret, and act upon can have an impact on whether or not children enroll in school, which suggests communication as a key but under-explored factor in the enrolment equation.

The out-of-school children situation is one of the worst in Nigeria among all countries in the world. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2022), Nigeria has an estimated 10.2 million out-of-school children, which is the highest number of children out of school in the world. Although this crisis is observed in various geopolitical zones, it is rural communities in North-Central states like Kwara that have been most affected by a combination of geographic isolation, poverty, lack of educational facilities and inadequate information on the educational entitlement to parents/guardians (Alobele, 2023; Omojola, 2025). Nigerian's Universal Basic Education Act (2004) provides for free and compulsory primary and junior secondary education, but it is not enough to simply exist in the law if it is not effectively communicated.

Communication is a key yet often underrated component of the educational mobilization process. Communication is the link between the intention of the policy and action taken by communities, whether through community meetings led by traditional leaders, broadcast on radio by state education authorities, interpersonal persuasion through teachers visiting households, or short message service (SMS) campaigns by non-governmental organizations. Participatory communication scholars, including Gigun et al. (2025) and Ekas (2025), have long argued that models of participatory communication that involve community voices, make use of indigenous knowledge systems, and use culturally appropriate channels are far more effective in changing behaviour than those that are top-down and information-transmitting when implemented in rural settings. However, in reality, many of the campaigns for school enrolment in Nigeria still rely on conventional, formal media and channels, which are not particularly beneficial to the rural, media-scarce, and low-literate populations.

The Educational Mobilization in rural areas in Nigeria faces formidable challenges, like that of Asa Local Government Area (LGA) in Kwara State, North-Central Nigeria. Asa LGA is an analytically rich context in which to consider how communication approaches and the socioeconomic and cultural factors play a role in influencing enrolment outcomes, as it is a population with a high share of agricultural workers, low female literacy, and strong cultural and religious influences on

educational decision-making. Despite occasional government campaigns and NGO interventions, enrolment in the school has been lower than the state average, which indicates that present strategies of communication may not be in tune with the community (Kwara State Ministry of Education, 2022).

Although a huge volume of literature on correlates of school enrolment (infrastructure, cost, proximity, quality, gender) exists, there are relatively fewer studies that have specifically explored the communication dimension of school enrolment promotion at subnational and community levels in Nigeria (Olanrewaju et al., 2021; Yu et al, 2024). Where communication is studied, it is generally either in the form of a national mass media campaign or in terms of comparing urban and rural communication ecologies without a thorough theoretical discussion of the processes of production of enrolment outcomes for the various forms of communication. It is both methodological and theoretical, as the majority of the research conducted to date uses a purely quantitative design that fails to capture the communicative experiences in daily life, or uses a qualitative design that cannot be generalized to a larger population.

The present study was therefore designed to fill the gap by conducting a mixed-method study on communication approaches that will enhance school enrolment in Asa LGA using the social mobilization theory of UNICEF (1999) and the diffusion of innovations theory of Rogers (2003). The study aimed to: (1) understand the communication strategies used for promoting school enrolment; (2) evaluate the effectiveness of the communication strategies in influencing parents' enrolment decisions; (3) identify communication barriers that hinder school enrolment; and (4) discuss the potential role of community stakeholders.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What communication approaches are currently employed to promote school enrolment in Asa Local Government Area?

RQ2: How effective are existing communication strategies in influencing parents' decisions to enroll their children in school?

RQ3: What communication barriers affect school enrolment in Asa Local Government Area?

RQ4: What roles do community stakeholders play in communicating and promoting school enrolment?

Hypotheses

In alignment with the quantitative strand of the mixed-methods design, the study tested the following null hypotheses:

H₀₁: There is no statistically significant relationship between community-based communication approaches and parental decisions to enrol children in school in Asa LGA.

H₀₂: There is no statistically significant association between identified communication barriers and reduced school enrolment rates in Asa LGA.

H₀₃: Community stakeholder involvement does not significantly predict higher school enrolment outcomes in Asa LGA.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

Communication and Development Communication

Communication and development communication is the effective sharing of information between two or more people. In its most general sociological terms, communication is the act of producing, negotiating, and sharing meaning between social actors. The fundamental work of Schramm (1964) that still has much to teach is useful in determining the nature of communication; he explained that it is a “basic social process” that supports all collective action. In a development context, communication goes beyond information transfer and becomes a stimulus for dialogue, a process of negotiating meanings and a process of facilitating behavioural change (Servaes, 2022). Development Communication is a field of study that deals with the strategic application of communication to achieve social and economic development goals. Moemeka (1994) set the foundation for the discussion of development communication in an Afrocentric perspective that emphasizes communal values, oral traditions and participatory dialogue perspectives that are specifically relevant to the rural context that is the focus of this study.

School Enrolment and Educational Access

The formal registration of a child in an educational institution is the first and most basic step towards participation in the educational process, which is called school enrolment. The term enrolment does not necessarily imply that students attended the school or were retained or completed, but it is a factor that is essential for all other educational outcomes. Communication is a tie-breaker between the availability of education (geographic, cost and social access to the school) and enrolment (UNESCO, 2021). The communicative substrate in which access is translated into actual enrolment is parental and community awareness of the availability, the cost structures, the enrolment procedures, and the educational benefits of the school.

Community Mobilization and Behaviour Change Communication

Community mobilization involves engaging community members in a process to identify community problems, prioritize community action priorities and then mobilize the community to take coordinated action to meet those community priorities (Udoh & Willard, 2023). Community mobilization in the field of education can include talking with parents, religious leaders, traditional

leaders and youth groups about the values of education and the practicalities of getting children into school. Another framework, closely related to BCC, is Behaviour Change Communication (BCC), which uses strategic approaches and strategies from health communication and social psychology to influence knowledge, attitudes, and practices around a particular social behaviour. The objective of BCCs on enrolment is usually to change the attitudes of parents towards formal education, to lower barriers created by social norms and to strengthen a community norm, that is, seeing school attendance as desirable and normative (Flax et al., 2022).

Empirical Review

In many developing country settings, the connection between communication strategies and school enrolment has been the subject of study in a growing number of empirical studies. This review summarizes the most important studies carried out in Nigeria, West Africa, East Africa and South Asia from 2019 to 2025, supplemented by selected earlier and seminal studies.

Adeyemi and Adeyemi (2020) studied the effectiveness of community engagement strategies on the enrolment of pupils in primary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Using a survey design with a sample of 420 parents, they determined that interpersonal communication via community town hall meetings had a high and statistically significant impact on parent willingness to enroll children ($r = .63$, $p < .001$), and the effects of radio campaigns were moderate but statistically significant. The study emphasized the need for specific attention to the language (Yoruba) in order to make the enrolment messages understood by people with low literacy rates in the rural areas. One drawback to this study was its cross-sectional design, which prevented conclusions about causality.

Ibrahim and Mohammed (2021) conducted a study to assess the effectiveness of the school-based community engagement programmes in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. They found that in 12 communities that had an active relationship with the parent-teacher association, through regular meetings, home visits, and community bulletin boards, the schools had an average 23% greater growth in enrolment over a two-year period than control communities. This discovery highlights a school's role as a trusted community institution for institutional communication.

Okoye et al. (2021) examined the media campaigns used to advocate universal basic education in Southeast Nigeria and compared the effectiveness and reach of the radio, television, and social media platforms used. The survey of 512 people found a large digital divide, with social media being used by 71% of urban residents compared to 18% of rural residents who reported using digital platforms to access educational resources. Radio was the most prevalent medium in rural areas (64%), reaffirming its enduring relevance as a means of communication in areas with limited infrastructure.

Asante and Tawiah (2019) looked at the role of community radio stations in the context of school enrolment in three districts in the northern region of Ghana. The communities that actively engaged with community radio showed weekly broadcasts in local Dagbani and Twi, and had a higher community radio participation rate than communities served by national radio, with 15% higher rates in community radio participation in enrolment. Parents' empowerment to call into the radio show and discuss their education concerns was seen as a major achievement of community radio.

In the context of promoting girls' education, Mensah et al. (2022) explored the use of mobile phone-based communication by NGOs in the rural areas of Ghana. They made this study report that 19% of the girls enrolled after 6 months of targeted SMS messages to mothers in their local language. The study concluded that successful messages were those that were personalized, translated by community members who served as intermediaries, and delivered by a credible NGO.

Waweru and Kariuki (2020) conducted a study in three rural counties of Rift Valley, Kenya on the work of repurposed community health workers as education champions. The research using ethnographic techniques and household surveys found that these trusted community members, with their existing relationships and communication norms, were effective at disseminating enrolment messages, leading to an increase in enrollee numbers by 21%. Its virtue was the consideration accorded to the existing social trust networks as a communication infrastructure in the study.

Mwangi et al. (2023) reviewed the use of school community mapping as a tool of visual communication in Kenya and concluded that participatory production of school community enrolment gap maps by community members enabled greater community ownership of the school enrolment campaigns and resulted in measurable behaviour change among parents not previously supportive of school enrolment. This study is a good example of how non-verbal and participatory communication techniques can be used to complement text-based communication campaigns.

Dlamini and Ntuli (2021) investigated the effect of communication on school dropout and re-enrolment in the KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa. Their study found that school principals and social workers who used interpersonal communication in their emotional appeal to re-engage families of dropouts were more effective than those who used mass media, which is consistent with the emotional processing aspects of Social Cognitive Theory.

Ahmed et al. (2020) conducted a study in Rural Sindh Province of Pakistan on the effectiveness of the community mobilization program for school enrolment of girls. A programme to train female community mobilisers (different names for the same role, depending on context – such as 'communication champions' here) for household visiting and community dialogue led to a 28% increase in enrolment for girls aged 6-10. The study found that gender congruent interpersonal communication greatly weakened the cultural opposition to girls' education.

In a study to determine the effect of awareness-raising campaigns targeting parents in rural Punjab, Pakistan, on educational outcomes, Hussain and Saleem (2022) showed that in rural areas, parents who attended community awareness sessions to learn about the long-term economic benefits of education were more likely to have their children enroll and stay in school (OR = 2.4, 95% CI [1.7, 3.4]). Overall, the study emphasized the need to consider economic framing when communicating messages about enrolment, especially in low-income rural communities.

Islam et al. (2021) explored the use of community radio to enhance the education of girls in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. The study results showed that using Drama and Story-based programming with local characters that the parents can relate to was more effective in minimizing parental resistance to school attendance than a straight information broadcast, confirming the theoretical underpinning of the Entertainment-Education communication frameworks. In a

productive convergence of economic inclusion programmes and educational communication, Chowdhury and Hossain (2023) discussed the use of community microfinance groups as communication platforms to provide mothers in rural Bangladesh with information on enrolment.

Kumar and Singh (2020) studied the contribution of panchayat governance in educational communication in Uttar Pradesh, India. The research study discovered that village councils that frequently displayed educational rights in their wall paintings, via loudspeaker announcements and community assemblies, were more likely to have higher levels of school enrolment, with their rates 17% higher than those that did not. Sharma et al. (2021) additionally studied the function of ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers as intermediaries in the dissemination of educational information in rural Rajasthan, and concluded that they were far more trusted messengers of educational information than government officials, owing to their credibility and social embeddedness.

The empirical studies reviewed demonstrate that communication effectiveness in promoting educational enrolment is shaped by both the medium and the social context in which messages are delivered. Evidence consistently shows that interpersonal and community-based communication channels are more effective than mass media in rural communities characterized by low literacy levels and limited access to communication technologies. The studies further highlight the importance of source credibility, language accessibility, cultural relevance, and message persuasiveness in influencing enrolment decisions. The literature also identifies persistent barriers, including language constraints, low parental education, and competing information sources, which often reduce the effectiveness of enrolment campaigns. In addition, the role of gender and culturally defined authority structures in educational decision-making remains insufficiently explored, particularly within the West African context. These findings suggest that educational information is more likely to influence behaviour when it is communicated through trusted social networks and culturally appropriate channels. This perspective aligns with Diffusion of Innovations Theory, which explains how new ideas and practices spread through social systems. The theory therefore provides a suitable framework for understanding how communication strategies influence enrolment decisions in rural communities.

Theoretical Framework

Diffusion of Innovations Theory

Everett M. Rogers (1962) developed the Diffusion of Innovations Theory, which was expanded in subsequent editions up to 2003, that offers a systematic approach to the spread of new ideas, practices and technologies within social systems over time. The theory assumes that an innovation (defined as any new idea, practice or object perceived as new by a person or unit of adoption) is communicated through the adoption process over time among members of a social system through certain channels (Rogers, 2003, p. 5). In the educational setting, "school enrolment" may be thought of as an innovation spreading among parents who can be resistant, uncertain, or unaware of the benefits of the innovation.

The theory identifies five categories of adopters: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards, and suggests that communication strategies need to be customized to the adoption phase of the target population. It has as its key elements the nature of innovations (relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability); the communication channels (mass media versus interpersonal); the time involved (the innovation-decision process from knowledge through persuasion to decision and implementation to confirmation); and the social system (community norms, opinion leaders, and change agents). Problems with the theory are that it has been criticized for its pro-innovation slant, its lack of attention to structural barriers to adoption, and its assumption of a linear diffusion process (Singhal & Rogers, 2003). Despite these restrictions, the theory's focus on opinion leaders and communication channels matches exactly with what is observed in the dynamics of enrolment communication in rural communities in Nigeria.

Social Mobilization Theory

Social Mobilization Theory, as defined in the field of development communication and as operationalized by development organisations like UNICEF (1999), views change as a process of mobilizing institutions, community networks and individual actors into collective actions to achieve a common development goal. Social Mobilization Theory (SM) differs from the individualistic approach of many behaviour change theories in that it focuses on the organisational, relational and community aspects of change. It posits that without engaging and facilitating community leadership structures, civil society organizations and peer networks to support enrolment behaviour through social norms and collective accountability, sustainable enrolment gains are unlikely to occur (Rogers et al., 2018).

The theory is especially important for the Nigerian context, where the traditional rulers, religious leaders and community development associations have a significant normative influence on household decisions. If these gatekeepers make it clear that education is important and visibly promote enrolment initiatives, Social Mobilization Theory suggests that there will be a “trickle-up effect” that will go beyond any mass media campaign (Wu et al., 2024). One of the theory's weaknesses is that it might underestimate that deep-rooted structural barriers like gender discrimination and economic disadvantage can only be addressed by systemic policy changes in addition to communicative mobilization (Williams, 2021). Thus, Diffusion of Innovations Theory and Social Mobilization Theory are complementary tools that can be used to analyze the spread of enrolment as an innovation through communication links and the collective action dynamics that can either facilitate or hinder that spread.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study followed a sequential explanatory mixed methods research design, where the quantitative data were collected first, with the qualitative data collection specifically aimed at elaboration and contextualization of the quantitative results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design was chosen because it allows for the quantification of communication patterns and their relation to the outcomes

of enrolment, as well as for the generation of nuanced and contextualised understanding of the social processes that underlie these patterns, that is, a duality that is not possible using a solely quantitative or qualitative approach.

Study Area

Asa Local Government Area is located in Kwara State of the North-Central region of Nigeria with its administrative headquarters at Afon. The total land mass of the LGA is about 2,531 km², most of the population is Yoruba speakers with subsistence agriculture, petty trading and animal husbandry as the major occupation. The 2006 national census reported a population of 158,170, which is projected to become over 220,000 at the present rate of growth. The LGA is a mix of mainly rural and scattered settlements, with sub-optimal access to services such as health, education, and transport. The primary schools in LGA are government owned and run and also faith-based with enrolment records collected by the Kwara State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB).

Population and Sampling

The target population included parents/guardians of school age children (6-15 years), teachers, traditional rulers, religious leaders, officers of the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and Kwara State Ministry of Education (SME), as well as NGO representatives within the study local government area (LGA) of Asa. The quantitative strand was based on accessible population estimates sourced from data from the National Population Commission (2022) which produced and estimated 38,450 households. The sample size was calculated with a Yamane (1967) formula using 95% confidence level and a margin of error of 5% which resulted in a minimum sample size of 396. 420 questionnaires were distributed, in anticipation of nonresponse and attrition. The selection of 24 participants was made using purposive sampling for the qualitative strand in order to achieve information variation and context depth across five stakeholder groups.

For quantitative strand, stratified random sampling was used. The LGA was stratified into four strata based on the four school-age most populated council wards; Afon, Otte, Ballah and Yashikira. It is recognised that findings may not be generalised to lower population density wards and more geographically peripheral settlements in Asa LGA as this sampling methodology concentrated on the high population wards. The respondents of each stratum were selected by systematic random sampling with proportional allocation. For the qualitative strand, it was decided to use purposive sampling technique that involved participants who have rich and contextually validated information on communication and enrolment decision making in the study area.

Research Instruments

Two main data collection tools were used. The quantitative data was collected from a structured questionnaire, which was divided into six sections: demographic information, communication channels, frequency of exposure, content of the communication, clarity of the communication, parental awareness and attitudes, and barriers to enrolment, and stakeholder roles from the community. For all items, a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5

(Strongly Agree) was used with dichotomous and multiple-choice items added. The qualitative strand used an in-depth interview guide with nine semi-structured questions which were used to delve deeper into the communication dynamics and the perspectives of stakeholders regarding the enrolment barriers and enablers of enrolment.

Validity, Reliability, and Factor Analysis

Content and face validity were achieved by having three academics with relevant backgrounds in Mass Communication, Education and Sociology at Thomas Adewumi University review the content and make suggestions for some revisions of the items, which were accepted. Construct validity was then evaluated using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of the questionnaire's 6 Likert-type subscales. The principal axis factoring with varimax rotation was used. All the data were satisfactory for factor analysis (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sampling adequacy = .81; Bartlett's test of sphericity: $\chi^2 = 2,847.31$, $df = 990$, $p < .001$). EFA solution explained 62.4% of the total variance. All items had factor loadings $\geq .45$, and items with cross-loadings $> .32$ were removed to yield a 41-item instrument. A pilot test was carried out with 40 respondents from a neighbouring LGA, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficients on the subscales ranged from .76 to .89, with all values above the .70 criterion recommended by Nunnally (1978). In the qualitative strand, member checking, cross-group triangulation and thick description of findings were used to enhance credibility.

Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

The quantitative data collection lasted for six weeks from January to February 2026 with trained research assistants who were fluent in both the local languages of Asa LGA, which are Yoruba and Nupe. Low-literacy respondents were accommodated by the use of face-to-face administration of questionnaires, with the help of research assistants when needed. The participants were interviewed in their preferred languages, on average for 55 minutes and with explicit consent for audio recording. The recordings from interviews were then transcribed and translated. The Research Ethics Committee of Thomas Adewumi University on the 21st of January, 2026, gave ethical approval to the study under reference UIHR/COM/21/2026. The aims of the study, the right of the subjects to withdraw from the study without prejudice and the confidentiality of the data were explained to all participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants in writing before the data was collected.

Data Analysis

IBM SPSS version 25 was used to analyse quantitative data. All variables were analysed in descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations). A linear regression analysis was used to test H_{01} and H_{03} , which examined the predictive relationship between communication approaches and stakeholder involvement and enrolment decisions. The association between communication barriers and enrolment rates was tested by Pearson chi-square tests, which were used for H_{02} . The significance level of the statistical analyses was selected as $\alpha = .05$ (95% confidence level). Qualitative data obtained from the 24 transcripts of the interviews were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021), which comprised six steps: data familiarisation, initial coding, theme generation, review of themes, theme definition and naming,

and report production. NVivo 14 software was used to manage and systematically code the qualitative dataset.

RESULTS

Sociodemographic Characteristics of Respondents

Of the 420 questionnaires distributed, 384 were returned completed and usable, yielding a response rate of 91.4%. Table 1 presents the sociodemographic profile of respondents.

Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 384)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	214	55.7
	Female	170	44.3
Age	20–29 years	62	16.1
	30–39 years	147	38.3
	40–49 years	118	30.7
	50 years and above	57	14.8
Highest Education	No formal education	86	22.4
	Primary school	101	26.3
	Secondary school	138	35.9
	Tertiary	59	15.4
Occupation	Farming	179	46.6
	Trading	107	27.9
	Civil service	61	15.9
	Other	37	9.6
Number of School-Age Children	1–2	112	29.2
	3–4	178	46.4
	5 or more	94	24.5

The data reveal a predominantly male respondent pool (55.7%), with the majority falling within the 30–49 age bracket (69.0%), indicative of the household decision-making demographic. The low proportion of tertiary-educated respondents (15.4%) and the substantial segment with no formal education (22.4%) underscore the importance of designing communication approaches that transcend literacy-dependent channels. The predominance of farming as an occupation (46.6%) suggests that communication activities timed around agricultural calendars would be strategically advantageous.

Communication Channels and Frequency of Exposure

Respondents were asked to indicate their primary sources of information about school enrolment and the frequency with which they received such messages. Table 2 summarizes findings.

Table 2: Communication Channels Used for School Enrolment Information (N = 384)

Communication Channel	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean (1–5)	SD
Community town hall meetings	287	74.7	4.12	0.81
Religious gatherings (mosque/church)	274	71.4	4.03	0.88
Interpersonal (teacher home visits)	231	60.2	3.87	0.93
Radio (community/state)	198	51.6	3.41	1.02
Traditional ruler announcements	183	47.7	3.29	1.14
Mobile phone/SMS campaigns	112	29.2	2.74	1.21
Television	98	25.5	2.48	1.19
Posters/flyers/wall paintings	87	22.7	2.31	1.08
Social media (WhatsApp/Facebook)	61	15.9	2.06	1.17
Government campaigns (UBEC/SUBEB)	54	14.1	1.98	1.11

The findings in Table 2 demonstrate a clear hierarchy of channel effectiveness, with community town hall meetings (74.7%), religious gatherings (71.4%), and teacher home visits (60.2%) constituting the dominant communication channels through which parents received enrolment information. These interpersonal and community-mediated channels scored highest on mean ratings of perceived informativeness and persuasiveness. In contrast, mass media channels, including television (25.5%), posters (22.7%), and social media (15.9%), demonstrated substantially lower reach and influence, particularly notable given the limited media infrastructure and low digital literacy characterizing the study area. Government-organized campaigns through the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and the Kwara State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) reached the smallest proportion of respondents (14.1%), a finding with significant policy implications.

Effectiveness of Communication Strategies: Regression Analysis and Test of H_{01}

To test H_{01} that there is no statistically significant relationship between community-based communication approaches and parental enrolment decisions a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted with parental enrolment decision scores as the dependent variable and five primary communication channel scores as independent variables. Table 3 presents the regression results.

Table 3: Multiple Linear Regression: Community Communication Approaches and Enrolment Decisions (N = 384)

Predictor Variable	B	SE	β	t	p
(Constant)	1.14	0.23	—	4.96	< .001
Opinion leader persuasion	0.41	0.07	.38	5.86	< .001
Religious leader endorsement	0.36	0.08	.31	4.50	< .001

Community town hall engagement	0.29	0.09	.24	3.22	.001
Teacher home visits	0.22	0.08	.18	2.75	.006
Community radio broadcasts	0.11	0.07	.09	1.57	.117

Note. $R^2 = .54$; *Adjusted* $R^2 = .53$; $F(5, 378) = 88.47$, $p < .001$. B = unstandardised coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardised coefficient. Reference category: social media/government campaigns. Significance assessed at the 95% confidence level ($\alpha = .05$).

The regression model was statistically significant, $F(5, 378) = 88.47$, $p < .001$, accounting for 54% of the variance in parental enrolment decisions ($R^2 = .54$). Opinion leader persuasion emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .38$, $t = 5.86$, $p < .001$), followed by religious leader endorsement ($\beta = .31$, $t = 4.50$, $p < .001$), community town hall engagement ($\beta = .24$, $t = 3.22$, $p = .001$), and teacher home visits ($\beta = .18$, $t = 2.75$, $p = .006$). Community radio broadcast, while positively associated, did not reach statistical significance ($\beta = .09$, $t = 1.57$, $p = .117$). These findings provide sufficient evidence to reject H_{01} : community-based communication approaches are statistically significant predictors of parental enrolment decisions in Asa LGA.

Communication Barriers and Test of H_{02}

To test H_{02} that there is no statistically significant association between identified communication barriers and reduced school enrolment rates Pearson chi-square tests were conducted between individual barrier variables and self-reported enrolment delay or non-enrolment. Table 4 presents the barrier frequencies and the chi-square results.

Table 4: Communication Barriers Affecting School Enrolment and Chi-Square Test Results (N = 384)

Barrier	N	%	M	SD	χ^2	p
Low parental literacy limits message comprehension	296	77.1	4.21	0.84	38.47	< .001
Messages in English not understood	279	72.7	4.09	0.91	31.62	< .001
Economic concerns dominate household priorities	263	68.5	3.98	0.96	27.14	< .001
Cultural norms favouring boys over girls	254	66.1	3.89	1.02	24.88	< .001
Distrust of government communication sources	241	62.8	3.74	1.08	21.35	< .001
Irregular/infrequent communication activities	228	59.4	3.61	1.11	18.73	< .001

Religious misgivings about Western education	187	48.7	3.33	1.18	14.20	< .001
Distance and mobility constraints limit reach	172	44.8	3.19	1.14	11.84	.001
Competing household labour demands on children	164	42.7	3.08	1.16	10.17	.002
Absence of feedback mechanisms in campaigns	143	37.2	2.89	1.21	8.52	.004

Note. All chi-square tests were conducted with $df = 1$, comparing respondents who reported enrolment delay/non-enrolment against those who did not. Significance assessed at the 95% confidence level ($\alpha = .05$). M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation.

All ten identified communication barriers demonstrated statistically significant associations with reduced enrolment (all $p \leq .004$). The strongest associations were recorded for low parental literacy ($\chi^2 = 38.47$, $p < .001$) and language inaccessibility ($\chi^2 = 31.62$, $p < .001$). Economic prioritisation ($\chi^2 = 27.14$, $p < .001$) and gender-discriminatory cultural norms ($\chi^2 = 24.88$, $p < .001$) also exhibited strong associations. These findings provide sufficient evidence to reject H_{02} : communication barriers are significantly associated with reduced school enrolment outcomes in Asa LGA.

Community Stakeholder Roles and Test of H_{03}

Table 5 presents the effectiveness ratings for each communication channel by type, along with regression coefficients assessing the predictive contribution of community stakeholder involvement to enrolment outcomes, in a test of H_{03} .

Table 5: Effectiveness of Communication Channels and Stakeholder Regression Coefficients (N = 384)

Channel / Stakeholder	M	SD	Rank	β	P
Opinion leader persuasion	4.39	0.72	1	.38	< .001
Religious leader endorsement	4.31	0.79	2	.31	< .001
Community town hall engagement	4.18	0.83	3	.24	.001
Teacher home visits	3.96	0.91	4	.18	.006
Traditional ruler announcements	3.74	1.04	5	.14	.019
Community radio broadcasts	3.42	1.09	6	.09	.117
Peer/neighbour persuasion	3.37	1.06	7	.08	.143
SMS/mobile campaigns	2.81	1.18	8	.05	.312
Government campaigns (UBEC/SUBEB)	2.44	1.23	9	.03	.489

Social media	2.09	1.14	10	.02	.621
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Note. β = standardised regression coefficient from separate bivariate regressions with enrolment decision score as the dependent variable. M = Mean effectiveness rating (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High); SD = Standard Deviation. Significance assessed at the 95% confidence level ($\alpha = .05$).

The data in Table 5 indicate that relational and authority-based stakeholder communication specifically opinion leader persuasion ($\beta = .38, p < .001$), religious leader endorsement ($\beta = .31, p < .001$), community town hall engagement ($\beta = .24, p = .001$), teacher home visits ($\beta = .18, p = .006$), and traditional ruler announcements ($\beta = .14, p = .019$) were statistically significant predictors of enrolment outcomes. Government campaigns, social media, SMS campaigns, and peer persuasion did not reach statistical significance. These findings provide sufficient evidence to reject H_{03} : community stakeholder involvement significantly predicts higher school enrolment outcomes in Asa LGA.

Qualitative Findings

Four main themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the 24 in-depth interviews: (1) Trust, Credibility, and Social Influence in Educational Communication; (2) Linguistic Accessibility and Meaning-Making in Enrolment Messaging; (3) Gendered Silences and Exclusions in Communication Processes; and (4) Religious Institutions as Community Communication Gateways.

As for relational trust, a community development officer of 12 years in the LGA explained the main thing: "The issue is that they don't believe the message when it comes from a government officer, but when it comes from the village head or the imam, the next day they are bringing their children to school. This finding is consistent across almost all stakeholder interviews and reinforces the call to community channels that people trust, as the strongest levers for behavior change identified in the Social Mobilization Theory.

Concerning language, a primary school headmistress said: "Most of our recruitment drives have an English flyer which many parents cannot read; messages on the state radio are in English; we have begun to write the messages in Yoruba and we see more parents come at once. This is an experiential confirmation of the quantitative data that one of the most powerful indicators of poor enrolment is language inaccessibility.

Male and female NGO programme officers both commented on the theme of gender as an under-communicated barrier, with a female officer saying, "Campaigns would often say to enroll your children, but they don't talk about how female education benefits the entire family sometimes, if parents can only afford to send some, the boys get first crack at it. It's something we need to be talking about. From this viewpoint, there is a significant flaw in message targeting and content design.

Lastly, as for the role of religious institutions, a top Islamic cleric said, "I tell my congregation every Friday: the duty of every Muslim is to seek knowledge. When parents listen, they are left with no excuse not to send their kids to school. But nobody from the government says this. The

importance of this statement is that there is potential there to use the religious communication networks as a channel for enrolling students, which most government campaigns have overlooked.

DISCUSSION

The finding of this study provide substantive understanding of the communication environment of school enrolment in the rural setting of Asa LGA. The main result that interpersonal and community mediated communication is more effective and influential in generating behavioural change than mass media approaches is very similar to what has been found in other settings such as Adeyemi and Adeyemi (2020), Ahmed et al. (2020) and Waweru and Kariuki (2020). Theoretically, this finding aligns with Diffusion of Innovations Theory, which classifies mass media as having a role in the creation of knowledge and the role of interpersonal communication in persuading and deciding in relationships of social trust (Rogers, 2003).

Special mention should be made of the high effectiveness rating that was given to religious leader endorsement ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$). The present result is an extension of the opinion leadership literature of educational communication which specifically highlights the religious leader as a gatekeeping authority in predominantly Islamic rural communities. The results corroborate those of Tunga et al. (2022) in Kebbi State, where they reported that Muslim scholars played a key role in the decision of household enrolment. The present study advances this knowledge in the following ways: First, it sheds light on the presence of religious influence and how it is communicated, that is, the theological legitimization of formal education within an Islamic discursive framework. Parental opposition is significantly reduced if enrolment is seen as a religious obligation and not a government mandate. The findings suggest that government communication campaigns have had limited reach and effectiveness within the study area, which may have contributed to the observed enrolment patterns.

This is a large association between the level of language inaccessibility and enrolment ($\chi^2 = 31.62$, $p < .001$), which is in line with the development communication research on language exclusion. Asante and Tawiah (2019) reported a 15 percentage point difference between enrolment in the communities served by vernacular-language community radio and those that only listened to English-language national broadcasts. The qualitative data from the present study also help to contextualise the quantitative association: English-language campaigns not only limit information access among low-literacy audiences, but also convey social distance and institutional alienation, which is also reflected in the significant distrust of government sources found in the barrier analysis ($\chi^2 = 21.35$, $p < .001$).

This low reach and effectiveness of government campaigns via UBEC and SUBEB channels deserves attention to policy. Although the Government of the United States and State have made significant efforts to promote UBE, only 14.1% of respondents said they got UBE enrolment information from official Government of the United States and State channels, and these channels were rated as the least effective among all channels tested. This disparity between implementation is consistent with the extensive literature in Nigeria that shows that the communication structure of government prioritises compliance with the formal reporting requirements over community outreach (James & Olaniyan, 2024; Ibrahim & Mohammed, 2021). The disconnect between

government communication strategies and community communication ecologies is not only a technical problem, but a conceptual one, too, in that target communities are not seen as active communicative participants, but rather as passive recipients of information.

This study offers an important analytical lens on enrolment communication that focuses on gender, which complements the current literature. Although there is increasing information regarding gender disparities in school enrolment in North-Central Nigeria (UNICEF, 2022; Kwara State Ministry of Education, 2022), the communicative pathways by which gender discrimination manifests in school enrolment are largely under-explored. The findings that gender discriminatory cultural norms were a significant barrier (66.1%; $\chi^2 = 24.88$, $p < .001$) and that existing campaigns did not directly target cultural norms resonate with the results from rural Pakistan by Ahmed et al. (2020) who found that though gender neutral messaging was effective, it was not until gender specific messaging targeting females that gender specific culturally embedded barriers were targeted that these could be overcome. The conclusion that follows for communication design is clear: for enrolment communication in settings with high levels of gender disparity, it needs to be gender responsive, not just a universal approach in name.

The findings of the quantitative and qualitative data taken together offer a coherent explanation of the communication deficit in enrolment in Asa LGA. This gap seems to stem not from a lack of communication activity, but from a systematic mismatch of the communication strategies that are used and communicative needs, capacities and relation structures of the target community. The misalignment is happening through a multi-dimensionality; shifting across channel selection, language, source credibility, messaging and gender responsiveness, with a resulting compounded failure in communication, necessitating a multi-dimensional approach to solving the communication problem, from the community. Note that, however, because of the cross-sectional nature of the design of this study, these findings are only associative, and not causal.

Conclusion

This study examined the communication strategies used to promote school enrolment in Asa LGA, Kwara State, and assessed their effectiveness in influencing parents' enrolment decisions. The findings revealed that interpersonal communication, community mobilization, and religious leader endorsements are the most effective approaches for reaching and persuading rural parents. In contrast, mass media campaigns, government communication efforts, and digital platforms were found to be less effective due to the rural communication context. The study contributes to development communication scholarship by validating both Diffusion of Innovations Theory and Social Mobilization Theory. It confirms that opinion leaders, particularly religious leaders in Islamic-majority communities, play a crucial role in influencing enrolment decisions. Similarly, communities with active and regular communication activities recorded higher school enrolment rates. The findings challenge the prevailing government communication approach, which relies heavily on formal media, English-language messages, and bureaucratic structures, rather than community-based and culturally relevant channels. Key barriers identified include low literacy levels, language barriers, distrust of government information, and gender-related cultural norms. These challenges can be addressed through communication strategies that prioritize local participation, indigenous communication systems, religious engagement, and gender-sensitive

messaging. The study therefore recommends a policy shift by UBEC and SUBEB toward community-driven communication models that utilize traditional institutions, religious networks, parent-teacher associations, and community radio. Future studies should employ longitudinal, experimental, and comparative research designs to further investigate the long-term impact and causal effects of community-based enrolment communication interventions across different regions.

Recommendations

- i. UBEC should redesign its enrolment communication strategy by prioritizing community-based communication through local champions, religious leaders, and traditional authorities, while allocating at least 40% of communication budgets to interpersonal and community-level activities. SUBEB should ensure that all enrolment messages are translated into Yoruba, Nupe, and other local languages.
- ii. Traditional rulers, village heads, imams, and pastors should be formally integrated into enrolment campaigns through structured partnerships, training, and communication support. Religious gatherings and sermons should be systematically utilized as platforms for promoting school enrolment.
- iii. Schools should establish structured home-visit programmes and train teachers in interpersonal, gender-responsive, and needs-based communication. Parent-community liaison officers should also be appointed to maintain continuous engagement with households.
- iv. NGOs should incorporate indigenous communication channels, local-language media, and community champion networks into enrolment programmes. Development partners such as UNICEF and the World Bank should support community radio infrastructure to enhance educational awareness.
- v. Community radio stations should expand educational programming in Yoruba and Nupe, while the National Broadcasting Commission should encourage broadcasters to provide more rural-language public service announcements on basic education.
- vi. Future researchers should adopt longitudinal and experimental approaches to establish causal links between communication strategies and enrolment outcomes, investigate the influence of religious leaders on enrolment decisions, and conduct comparative studies across LGAs and geopolitical zones to identify context-specific best practices.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design only identifies associations between communication approaches and enrolment decisions and cannot establish causality. Second, the study was limited to four high-population wards in Asa LGA, excluding rural and low-density areas that may have different communication patterns and enrolment challenges, thereby limiting generalisability. Third, the quantitative data were based on self-reported responses, which may be affected by social desirability bias, recall errors, and respondents' tendency to provide favourable answers. Although efforts were made to minimise these biases, they could not be completely eliminated. Fourth, the qualitative component involved only 24 purposively selected participants, whose views may not fully capture the diversity of experiences across the study area.

Finally, the study relied on perceived enrolment outcomes rather than official enrolment records. Future research should incorporate administrative data, such as SUBEB enrolment registers, and adopt longitudinal designs to enhance the validity and robustness of findings.

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