

The Influence of Vernacular Radio programming on Broadcasting in Akwa Ibom state

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*The authors declare
that no funding was
received for this work.*



Received: 15-May-2025

Accepted: 26-May-2025

Published: 15-June-2025

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This article is published by **MSI Publishers** in **MSI Journal of Arts, Law and Justice (MSIJALJ)**

ISSN 3049-0839 (Online)

Volume: 2, Issue: 6 (June-2025)

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the influence of vernacular radio programming on broadcasting in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, with a focus on the use of indigenous language as a tool for enhancing audience engagement and cultural preservation. Broadcasting in Nigeria has historically evolved from colonial structures to regionally-driven platforms that reflect local identities. In Akwa Ibom, the establishment of the Akwa Ibom Broadcasting Corporation (AKBC) marked a critical step in developing a localized media system. Over time, the incorporation of vernacular programming—particularly in languages such as Ibibio, Annang, and Oro—has transformed the media landscape in the state. This paper explores how such programming strategies have improved listener accessibility, strengthened cultural identity, and increased public participation in media discourse. Drawing on historical analysis and current broadcasting practices, the study highlights the pivotal role of indigenous language broadcasting in connecting with grassroots audiences and resisting cultural erosion. It further discusses the broader implications of vernacular media in a multilingual society like Nigeria, where effective

communication must resonate with linguistic and cultural realities. The findings underscore the necessity of vernacular programming not only as a communicative tool but also as a medium for cultural continuity and inclusive broadcasting.

Keywords: *vernacular programming, indigenous language, broadcasting, Akwa Ibom State, cultural preservation, audience engagement.*

Introduction

Broadcasting remains one of the most powerful tools for mass communication, especially in multilingual and culturally diverse societies. It is defined as the distribution of audio and visual contents to a dispersed audience via any electronic mass communication medium, particularly radio and television (Aliyu & Yusuf, 2020). In recent years, vernacular programming—broadcast contents delivered in indigenous languages—has emerged as a strategic medium for enhancing audience engagement and fostering cultural preservation. The term vernacular refers to the native language or dialect spoken by the ordinary people of a specific region or country (Okonkwo, 2021). In the context of broadcasting, vernacular programming involves creating and transmitting media contents in these indigenous languages to ensure inclusivity and cultural relevance. This trend is particularly evident in Nigeria, where the complexity of ethnic identities and linguistic diversity necessitates the use of locally resonant communication channels. Akwa Ibom State, located in the South-South region of Nigeria, stands as a compelling case study in this regard, given its rich linguistic tapestry and evolving media landscape. The state is home to several indigenous languages, including Ibibio, Annang, and Oro, making it a fertile ground for examining the interplay between language and media.

The role of vernacular programming in broadcasting within Akwa Ibom State reflects a deliberate shift towards the use of these indigenous languages in radio contents. This shift not only increases the accessibility of media to a broader spectrum of the population but also reinforces the socio-cultural identity of local communities. As globalisation and media homogenisation threaten the survival of many indigenous languages, vernacular radio programming serves as a vital mechanism for cultural preservation and intergenerational knowledge transfer (Ekanem & Essien, 2020).

Also, audience engagement has notably improved in regions where radio stations have embraced indigenous language broadcasting. Listeners tend to identify more closely with contents delivered in their mother tongue, which enhances both comprehension and emotional connection. In Akwa Ibom, this dynamic has contributed to a more participatory media environment, where citizens are not only consumers but also contributors to the local broadcasting discourse.

This study explores the influence of vernacular radio programming on broadcasting in Akwa Ibom State, with a particular focus on how the use of indigenous languages shapes the media's capacity to preserve culture, enhance audience participation, and redefine the broader objectives of broadcasting in the region. Through this inquiry, the paper seeks to underscore the enduring relevance of culturally rooted media practices in the face of modern communication challenges.

Historical background of broadcasting in Nigeria and the evolution of vernacular programming in Akwa Ibom State

Broadcasting in Nigeria traces its origins to 1932 (Ukonu, 2006), when the British colonial administration introduced the Radio Diffusion Service (RDS) in Lagos. This early system functioned by relaying British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) contents through wired loudspeakers in selected public spaces. As demand for more localized and structured broadcasting grew, the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS) was established in 1951, marking a shift toward domestically managed radio operations. In 1957, the NBS was restructured into the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), enabling the production and dissemination of local contents tailored to Nigerian audiences. After Nigeria gained independence in 1960, broadcasting experienced significant growth, with regional and state governments setting up their own radio and television stations to meet the communication, educational, and cultural needs of their populations (Ojebuyi & Folarin, 2020).

In Akwa Ibom State, which was created in 1987 from the former Cross River State, the quest for a localized broadcasting identity led to the establishment of the Akwa Ibom Broadcasting Corporation (AKBC) in 1991. AKBC operates both radio and television arms—AKBC Radio (90.5 FM) and AKBC Television (UHF Channel

45)—and has since become the most prominent broadcast station in the state. Its mandate includes the dissemination of information, promotion of indigenous culture, and support for state development through effective mass communication. Initially, AKBC programming was dominated by contents delivered in English, in alignment with national broadcasting norms. However, over time, it became evident that a significant portion of the state’s population—especially in rural areas—was better reached through indigenous languages. This realization led to the strategic introduction of vernacular programming in the station’s broadcast schedule. Indigenous languages such as Ibibio, Annang, and Oro began to feature prominently in news bulletins, interactive segments, cultural programmes, and entertainment contents.

The integration of vernacular programming into broadcasting in Akwa Ibom serves not only to enhance audience accessibility and comprehension but also to function as a vital instrument for cultural preservation and identity reinforcement. As scholars have noted, the use of indigenous languages in broadcasting strengthens community participation and sustains oral traditions in an era increasingly defined by globalization and cultural dilution (Essien & Udoh, 2021). Through its vernacular contents, AKBC has successfully positioned itself as a cultural custodian and a vehicle for grassroots communication, thereby aligning broadcasting practice in the state with both local realities and global imperatives for media inclusivity.

Statement of the Problem

Akwa Ibom State has witnessed a significant rise in vernacular radio programming, with indigenous languages such as Ibibio, Annang, and Oro taking center stage in many local broadcasts. These programmes have become powerful tools for cultural preservation, public engagement, and community mobilization, particularly among rural populations. As more radio stations embrace local languages, the media landscape in the state is evolving in ways that deserve closer examination.

Despite these developments, critical questions remain about the broader impact of vernacular programming on broadcasting practices in the state. How has the use of indigenous languages influenced content creation, audience engagement, and the

professional standards of radio broadcasting? What challenges do stations face in sustaining quality vernacular contents? This study seeks to investigate the influence of vernacular radio programming on broadcasting in Akwa Ibom State, highlighting both its achievements and areas needing further developments.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

- i. to examine the extent to which vernacular radio programming has influenced audience engagement and access to information in Akwa Ibom State.
- ii. to assess how the use of indigenous languages in radio broadcasting has shaped content development and programming strategies among local radio stations.

Review of Related Literature

In 2024, a study was conducted by three scholars on "Influence of Radio Programmes on the Political Development of Akwa Ibom State." The three scholars were Godswill Walter, Bassey Esuk, and Daniel Akarika. The study focused on how radio programmes aired on stations like Inspiration 105.9 FM and Tang Sio 102.7 FM influenced the political awareness and participation of people in Akwa Ibom State.

The study set out to achieve four main objectives. First, it aimed to find out how often people in Akwa Ibom State listen to political radio programmes. Second, it examined how these programmes affect the political knowledge and involvement of listeners. Third, the study looked at how the use of local languages in radio broadcasts helps people better understand political issues. Lastly, it aimed to assess whether these radio programmes have any influence on how responsive government officials are to public concerns. Using a survey of 390 respondents from various parts of the state, the study was able to find that many listeners were regularly exposed to these programmes, and that local-language broadcasts played a major role in helping rural communities understand political issues. The use of indigenous languages made the contents more relatable and improved how well people engaged with political discussions on the radio. Respondents also said these programmes

helped hold the government accountable and encouraged them to participate more actively in political processes.

The highlighted literature is highly relevant to the current study on The Influence of Vernacular Radio Programming on Broadcasting in Akwa Ibom State. It provides empirical evidence that vernacular programming not only enhances information accessibility but also shapes broader societal developments—in this case, political participation. The research underscores the communicative power of indigenous language broadcasting in mobilizing public engagement and influencing institutional accountability. By extending the focus beyond political contents to include cultural, educational, and entertainment programming, your current study can build upon this foundation to assess the overall impact of vernacular broadcasting on the state's radio industry. Additionally, the cited work supports the argument that vernacular radio programming is not only prevalent but also influential in Akwa Ibom State, reinforcing the significance of examining its evolving role in contemporary broadcasting.

Theoretical framework

This study adopts the Uses and Gratifications Theory. Uses and Gratification Theory was propounded by Elihu Katz, Jay G. Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in the early 1970s, with significant contributions to the field of mass communication. This theory diverges from traditional views of media influence, which often assumed passive audiences. Instead, Uses and Gratifications asserts that media consumers are active participants who seek out media contents to fulfill specific needs. These needs could range from obtaining information, gaining entertainment, fulfilling personal identity, or seeking social integration.

At its core, the theory posits that audiences make intentional choices about the media they consume based on individual needs and desires. This contrasts with theories that focus on the media's ability to shape or manipulate audiences. The key premise is that media consumption is goal-oriented and aimed at satisfying personal, social, or cultural gratifications.

In the context of this study, Uses and Gratifications Theory is particularly relevant to understanding how Akwa Ibom's vernacular radio programming meets the communicative needs of its audience. Given that the indigenous population primarily speaks languages such as Ibibio, Annang, and Oro, it can be hypothesized that listeners gravitate toward vernacular programming for emotional, cultural, and identity-related needs. These gratifications may include a desire for cultural preservation, community cohesion, or enhanced understanding of local issues, which are more effectively communicated through the mother tongue. Thus, the theory provides an insightful lens through which to explore the motivations of Akwa Ibom listeners in engaging with local radio stations that use indigenous languages.

Methodology

The population of this study comprised 300 participants. 100 participants were drawn from the three senatorial districts using the convenient sampling method. The selection included individuals from various local government areas affiliated with the Radio Callers Association of Nigeria, Akwa Ibom State branch, as well as other active radio listeners within Akwa Ibom State. Data were gathered through the use of questionnaires.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table i: Extent to which vernacular radio programming has influenced respondents's engagement in Akwa Ibom state.

| Options | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Completely influenced | 200 | 67 |
| Partially influenced | 58 | 19 |
| Never influenced | 42 | 14 |
| Total | 300 | 100 |

From the data above, 67% of the respondents, which constitutes the largest population, said that vernacular radio programming has completely influenced their engagements in the state.

Table ii: Extent to which vernacular radio programming has enabled respondents' access to information in Akwa Ibom state

| Options | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Greatly enabled | 198 | 66 |
| Rarely enabled | 92 | 31 |
| Never enabled | 10 | 3 |
| Total | 300 | 100 |

Using the data above, 66% of the participants said that vernacular radio programming has enabled them access to information and happenings in the state.

Table iii. Extent to which vernacular radio programming has sharpened the contents development in local radio stations in Akwa Ibom state

| Options | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Greatly | 189 | 63 |
| Partially | 76 | 25 |
| No change at all | 35 | 12 |
| Total | 300 | 100 |

This table reveals that 63% of the respondents said that vernacular radio programming has shaped the content development in local radio stations in Akwa Ibom state.

Discussion of Findings

Vernacular radio programming has increasingly become a powerful tool for engaging diverse audiences in Akwa Ibom state, particularly among rural and semi-urban populations. In a multilingual environment where everyone is not fluent in English or dominant national languages, the use of indigenous languages such as Ibibio, Annang, and Oro has made radio contents more relatable and easier to understand. This linguistic connection fosters a sense of familiarity and cultural pride, encouraging more people to tune in and participate in discussions on community development, health, politics, and education. From the survey done, table one reveals that 66% of respondents agreed that they feel more engaged with radio contents when

it was presented in their local language, highlighting the significant influence of vernacular broadcasting on audience involvement. Moreover, vernacular programming has significantly improved access to essential information, as revealed in table two, particularly for individuals who might otherwise be excluded from mainstream communication channels. Public health announcements, local government updates, and emergency alerts—when broadcast in local languages—are more likely to reach wider segments of the population. This enhances the effectiveness of public communication, especially during times of crisis or community mobilization efforts.

Findings for the second objective reveal that the use of indigenous languages in radio broadcasting has significantly influenced how local stations Akwa Ibom develop and structure their contents. Rather than simply translating English-language programmes, many stations now create original contents that reflect the cultural context, worldview, and daily experiences of local audiences. Indigenous language programming has led to the inclusion of locally relevant stories, proverbs, idioms, and traditional communication styles in news, entertainment, and public affairs shows. These culturally embedded elements help stations connect more meaningfully with their listeners, thereby improving audience retention and loyalty. As a result, contents are no longer generic or urban-focused but tailored to reflect the values, concerns, and humor of grassroots communities.

In terms of programming strategies, radio stations increasingly schedule vernacular contents during peak listening hours to capture the attention of their target audiences. This includes creating specific slots for traditional music, folk storytelling, local health talks, market updates, and religious segments—all delivered in indigenous languages. Additionally, many stations are training presenters who are fluent in local dialects and are familiar with community dynamics, ensuring authenticity and relatability in delivery. The decision to prioritize local language programming also reflects a shift in strategic planning, where stations recognize the commercial and social value of serving local populations effectively.

Conclusion

Vernacular radio programming in Akwa Ibom State has proven to be a vital tool for enhancing local broadcasting, fostering cultural preservation, and increasing community participation. The study reveals that programmes in indigenous languages such as Ibibio, Annang, and Oro have significantly empowered rural populations by improving access to essential information and bridging communication gaps. Vernacular radio not only provides an avenue for expressing local identities but also addresses critical issues such as agriculture, health, and governance in a way that is relatable and easily understood by listeners. Furthermore, these programmes have contributed to the preservation of cultural heritage, with many participants highlighting their importance in maintaining and passing down indigenous traditions. Overall, the positive impact of vernacular radio programming is evident in its ability to engage audiences, promote local development, and ensure the inclusiveness of marginalized communities.

Recommendations

This study recommends the following:

- i. Radio stations should invest in trained indigenous language broadcasters and develop culturally relevant contents to strengthen audience engagements and promote community development.
- ii. The various radio stations in the state should leverage on the fact that radio programming has influenced citizen engagements to a large extent (67%) by offering more programmes in vernacular.
- iii. Since vernacular programmes have helped the citizens to access more information from the radio, radio stations in Akwa Ibom state should provide more vernacular programmes in their programming offerings.

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