

RISING ON • AIR

RISING ACADEMIES: RISING ON AIR

Rising Academies was founded in Sierra Leone in 2014 to provide education to children before the Ebola epidemic. In April 2015, Rising Academies opened their first school. In Sierra Leone, Rising Academies operate a low-cost private school model where they share lessons learned with the local government and other partners.

Sierra Leone and Liberia have low internet connectivity and weak infrastructure rendering online learning an unrealistic or inequitable solution. In both countries, only 1 out of 8 people have access to the Internet, while access to radio and phones is better distributed, with 51:49 men to women ratio, and a 62:38 rural to urban ratio.²

Lack of learning resources at home is a challenge for most children in Sierra Leone and Liberia. As a response to COVID-19, Rising Academies adapted their curriculum content into a radio program called Rising On Air, to ensure the students continue their education even while they are out of school.

Rising On Air is a 20-week program of ready-to-air radio standardized scripts along with SMS content to support learners. The content is developed by a team of international writers and curriculum writers in English. The scripts focus on numeracy and literacy for early childhood, early primary, upper primary, early secondary, and upper secondary education. Each lesson is 30-minutes approximately starting with 5 minutes of music and health messages followed by 25-minutes of academic content. Other partner organizations funded Arabic- and French-translation.

² Lamba, K. and F. Reimers (2020), Sierra Leone and Liberia: Rising Academy Network on air, Education continuity stories series, OECD Publishing, Paris.

To enhance the effectiveness of Rising on Air, Rising Academies developed a 20-week series of SMS content to complement the radio program. Its content targets and focuses on parents and the role they play in supporting children as radio listeners and learners. Rising Academies use parents' feedback to inform subsequent message content. SMS content includes schedule reminders, tips on radio prep and listening, after lesson tips, friendly parent encouragement, and positive parenting.

Rising On Air has been broadcast directly by Rising Academies to around 1.4m children in Sierra Leone and Liberia. It has also been adopted by 3 other governments and around 27 other providers across 20 countries, having been made available for free via Rising's website (www.risingacademies.com/onair).

SOLUTION

Criteria	Category	Details
Technological Readiness	Radio/Television SMS/basic phone	Rising on Air is broadcasted on the radio; however, SMS is used to guide parents on how to prepare and support their children and how to manage them during this pandemic.
Content availability	No	Rising Academies creates its own content and provides it for free to others via a Creative Commons License.
Personalization	No	Rising Academies created standardized lesson scripts for the possibility to be adapted in different countries or contexts.
Interactivity	Yes	Rising on Air provides encouragement for active learning and student involvement such as child movement based on answers, mindfulness, singing, and drawing. Rising Academies has hotlines to call to give feedback on the content.

Mode	Synchronous	Students receive their lessons through radio broadcasts.
Feasibility to replicate		
Time	Short	The content and infrastructure to replicate this solution exist. Rising Academies partnered with national radio in Liberia, Sierra Leone and with 3 other governments and 25 other provides across 20 countries
Effort	Low	Rising Academies offer their materials including scripts and recordings for any interested NGO via their website
Money	Low	Unless modification is needed, the cost of replicating this model is low. Costs of adapting the content may include translation, audio recording, etc.

FOLLOW-UP AND IMPLEMENTATION

Criteria	Category	Details
Preparedness of teachers to design and facilitate learning	High	Rising Academies use high-quality, structured curriculum content, intensive teacher coaching, and rapid feedback loops to ensure quality education. Rising Academies teachers call parents to check-in and ask for feedback.
Availability and ability of parents or caregivers to facilitate effective home-based distance learning	Available for guidance but not as	In many households in Sierra Leone and Liberia, adults cannot support their children in their at-home learning.

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Monitoring and evaluation capacities

Monitor distance learning processes	No	Rising Academies set up a hotline number in Liberia and Sierra Leone, which is provided at the end of each radio lesson encouraging parents and students to call and give feedback.
Track the access to courses and engagement	No	Rising Academies tracks the number of broadcasts aired versus the number scheduled to air (to ensure broadcasts are aired as planned); the number of teacher phone calls to students to confirm they heard the lessons; the number of SMSs sent and received. However, tracking engagement is a challenge given the nature of the solution.
Assess learning outcomes	No	An external entity is conducting a controlled experiment on the progress of some students throughout different grade levels and districts where Rising on Air is implemented. Students have been assessed prior to school closures during the crisis and will be assessed again after school reopening.
Sustain immediate distance learning responses for achieving long-term goals	Yes	Rising Academies plans to use the radio and SMS program to complement its core curriculum and communication with families.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Providing supporting material

Rising Academies initially planned to provide physical handouts to accompany the lesson. Still, they decided against it when they realized that the lessons would be used nationally and across

more than 20 other counties. Therefore, radio lessons were created with the assumption that students would not have any supplementary paper resources.

Informing rural communities about Rising on Air

Although radio is available in rural communities in Liberia, there was little awareness of the availability of Rising on Air. Rising Academies engaged community stakeholders and created WhatsApp campaigns to inform families and engage them in the program.

TAKEAWAY LESSONS

The development of high quality, engaging scripts that are adaptable to other contexts is highly sought after. By offering these scripts for free via a creative commons license, Rising has helped accelerate the process for partner organizations and governments wanting to deliver radio broadcasting. It has also helped bring down costs as script development is typically the most expensive and labor-intensive element of the program.

The program has also shown that creating ‘standardized’ resources can be a great platform for others to build from. Rising On Air is being adapted into a variety of local languages in Africa and Asia, as well as more formally being developed into French and Arabic.

Rising On Air is also now benefiting from network effects created through sharing the materials. The 25 providers and 5 governments working on distance learning projects via Rising On Air have formed an informal community of support, sharing ideas, research, and new innovations to support each other’s programs.

Rising on Air reaches more than 12 million children and is continuing to expand to support children in geographies across the world. Despite school closure, learning for those children continued at home. Rising On Air allowed those children to continue their education without allowing their circumstances and any education disruption to put them at a further disadvantage.