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## Journalists' slants in covering of children's rights: Acumens from the Amhara Media Corporation

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### Abstract

This study examined how Ethiopian children's rights are portrayed and promoted in television programs produced by the Amhara Media Corporation. Besides, the study examined how the media incorporates the four pillars of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Children. It delved into the survival, protection, development, and participation rights into its weekly children's programming. The study guided by theories of social responsibility and agenda-setting. The study identified both successes and failures in rights-based media practice through a mixed-methods approach. This study conducted in-depth interviews with five editors and producers in addition to quantitative content analysis of 41 episodes. The quantitative results indicated that the rights of development (33%) and participation (32.6%) are most commonly represented, whereas the rights of protection (20.7%) and survival (13.8%) are less frequently highlighted; Whereas qualitative data showed that rather than overtly advocating for rights, coverage frequently takes place covertly through plays, stories, and songs. Comprehensive rights coverage is further limited by structural factors such as undervaluation of children's programming, lack of specialised training, urban-centric sourcing, and limited airtime. Although media's programs encourage involvement and educational values, they fall short in addressing inclusivity and child protection, especially for older and rural children. The author suggests that improving the specialisation, contextualised content creation, and institutional commitment of journalists is essential to turning regional broadcasters into successful social responsibility and child rights advocates in Ethiopia.

**Keywords:** children, coverage, media, rights, Ethiopia

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## Introduction

This study provides insights how media educate children rights in Ethiopia. It sheds light on what and how children rights are portrayed in media. In a nutshell, the interrelationship between children program and practice of children rights is the thematic area that attracted less attention of scholars across various disciplines. Human rights are universal moral principles that individuals can invoke against anyone, particularly those in positions of authority within social institutions, to safeguard their dignity and freedoms (Orend, 2002). The United Nations has established a framework of international treaties, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, CRC, (United Nations, UN, 1989), to promote these as a global standard. Yet, violations persist worldwide, perpetrated directly by state and non-state actors or indirectly through complicity, with individuals and groups often acting as violators, protectors, or intermediaries (Arat, 2006). Media plays a pivotal role in amplifying awareness, as heightened visibility of abuses fosters accountability and empowers rights-holders (Nickel, 2007). In the context of children's rights defined under the CRC as encompassing protection, provision, and participation for those under 22, the media serves as a critical conduit for education, advocacy, and cultural preservation (UN, 1989; World Vision, 2023).

The interplay between children and media has long been recognized as a gateway to broader dimensions of child rights, including education, play, freedom of expression, health, identity, and protection from harm (Onumah, 2004). International consensus, as articulated in the CRC, emphasizes that children should develop in environments promoting peace, dignity, tolerance, equality, and solidarity, with media ideally supporting these through responsible content that counters influence like violence, consumerism, gender stereotyping, and cultural homogenization in a globalized era (UN, 1989). However, empirical research on media's portrayal of human rights, including children's rights, has predominantly focused on quantitative content analyses in print media, such as newspapers and magazines, tracking the mere frequency of rights-related terminology (Victoria, 2011). Far less attention has been paid to broadcast media, particularly television, where narrative depth and visual storytelling could implicitly or explicitly address rights issues (Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012).

In Ethiopia, where children face multifaceted vulnerabilities stemming from political instability, socioeconomic disparities, cultural norms, and familial neglect, media holds untapped potential to inform, educate, and entertain while advancing rights awareness (Mulugeta, 2009; Central Statistical Agency, CSA, 2016). Recent studies underscore this urgency: For instance, a 2021 analysis by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission revealed that over 70% of reported child rights violations involve neglect and abuse, often unaddressed due to low

public awareness, with media coverage limited to sporadic reporting rather than programmatic integration (Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, EHRC, 2021). Similarly, a UNESCO-backed study on African media landscapes found that only 15% of children's programming across sub-Saharan broadcasters substantively engages rights themes, prioritizing entertainment over advocacy amid resource constraints (UNESCO, 2022). In Ethiopia specifically, research by Assefa and Tefera (2020) examined print and radio coverage of child rights, concluding that while awareness campaigns have increased post-2015 reforms, television remains underexplored, with programs often produced by non-specialist journalists assigned ad hoc, leading to superficial treatment of issues like education and protection (Assefa & Tefera, 2020).

Earlier Ethiopian scholarship highlights similar gaps. Genaye's (2008) evaluation of a children's rights pictorial booklet demonstrated its efficacy in building awareness but noted variations in comprehension influenced by age and gender, underscoring the need for tailored media formats. Wendimu (2009) surveyed children's media preferences, revealing expectations for content that balances information, education, and entertainment, yet found Ethiopian Television (ETV) programs inadequate in meeting these needs. Skjerdal (2017) further critiqued the generalist orientation of Ethiopian journalists, who rarely specialize in child rights, resulting in inconsistent coverage. More recent work builds on this: A 2019 study by the African Child Policy Forum analyzed digital media's role in Ethiopia, finding that while social platforms amplify youth voices on rights, traditional broadcast like television lags, with just 20% of airtime dedicated to child-focused content and minimal rights integration (African Child Policy Forum, ACPF, 2023). Internationally, comparative analyses, such as those by the International Federation of Journalists 2022, emphasize that in low-resource settings, media's failure to embed rights education in children's programming exacerbates inequalities, particularly for marginalized groups like rural Ethiopian children.

Despite these insights, a critical research gap persists: While studies have probed print, radio, and digital media's handling of child rights in Ethiopia (Assefa & Tefera, 2020; ACPF, 2023), in-depth analyses of television programming, especially its implicit treatment of rights themes are scarce. No comprehensive examination exists for regional broadcasters like the Amhara Media Corporation (AMECO), which airs a dedicated 30-minute children's program weekly on Fridays at 5:00 PM, yet lacks specialist producers and rights-focused evaluation (AMECO, 2024). This oversight is significant, as television remains a primary medium for Ethiopian children, influencing socialization amid rising concerns over globalization's cultural impacts (Mulugeta, 2009; UNESCO, 2022). Addressing this gap is vital for enhancing media's social

responsibility in child development and rights protection, particularly in a context where informed children are better equipped to claim their entitlements, and free media can deter impunity (Nickel, 2007; EHRC, 2021).

This study contributes to a multidisciplinary understanding of children's rights by investigating the extra-legal roles of social actors, such as journalists, in broadening rights discourse. It explores AMECO's children's programs through the lens of rights portrayal, production practices, and challenges.

(1) What extent do AMECO children's programs explicitly or implicitly address key child rights domains (development, protection, provision, participation)?

(2) How do production processes, including journalist specialization, influence children rights integration?

(3) What barriers hinder effective rights coverage, and how might they be mitigated?

## **Theoretical framework**

This study draws on „„Social Responsibility Theory““ and „„Agenda-Setting Theory““ to examine how AMECO addresses children's rights. Social Responsibility Theory is applied to evaluate the corporation's role in safeguarding children's welfare and promoting societal values, while Agenda-Setting Theory is used to assess the extent and prominence of children's rights coverage in AMECO's programming. Together, these theories illuminate both the ethical obligations of the media and the practical challenges faced by content creators.

### **Social Responsibility Theory**

Social Responsibility Theory emphasizes the media's obligation to protect and promote the welfare of society. In relation to children, this means ensuring their access to information that supports education, identity, dignity, health, and protection. The theory views the media not merely as a channel of information but as a guardian of values, charged with creating an informed and ethical generation.

Originating as an extension of Libertarian Theory, Social Responsibility Theory shifts from the notion of „negative liberty“ (freedom from interference) to „positive liberty“ (freedom supported by enabling conditions). Siebert et al. (1956), argued that because of the media's concentrated ownership and influential power, it must be held to standards of fairness, accountability, and ethical responsibility. Freedom of expression, therefore, is not absolute but must be balanced with social welfare and the rights of others.

Technological advances, industrialization, and the rise of mass advertising all heightened concerns about media power, prompting calls for professional codes of ethics, press councils, and anti-monopoly laws. Scholar such as Shaw (2012) noted that responsible journalism requires pluralism, access for minority voices, and watchdog functions that protect democracy and human rights. Joseph Pulitzer 1904 similarly insisted that journalism must be guided by moral concern and commitment to the public good rather than commercial interests. Applied to children's rights, Social Responsibility Theory suggests that media outlets must prioritize educational and ethical content, avoid harmful stereotypes, and provide platforms for children's voices. By doing so, the press fulfills its duty as both a watchdog and a promoter of human rights (Lusgarten & Debrix, 2005).

### **Agenda-Setting Theory**

Agenda-Setting Theory explains how the media shapes public priorities by giving differential attention to issues. Through repeated coverage, prominent placement, and framing, the media signals to the public which topics deserve attention (McQuail, 2005; Severin & Tankard, 1997). Rather than dictating „what to think“, the media effectively tells audiences „What to think about“.

In the context of children's rights, agenda-setting is crucial. Media reports on child maltreatment, exploitation, or educational rights can elevate these issues onto the public and political agenda, influencing policies and mobilizing responses (Goddard & Saunders, 2001). By highlighting children's voices especially those in vulnerable situations such as domestic labor, street work, or rehabilitation programs the media can increase visibility and foster advocacy (Parajuli, 2004). Silverstone's (2007) concept of the „media poleis reinforce this role, viewing media as a moral and civic space that connects audiences to both local and distant “others.” In this sense, agenda-setting is not only about issue salience but also about cultivating moral responsibility and global citizenship (Beck, 2003).

### **Media's role in human rights and children's rights advocacy**

The media exerts profound influence on human rights discourse through both representational and persuasive mechanisms, shaping public perceptions even as audiences exercise interpretive autonomy (van Dijk, 2007). As the primary information source for most individuals (Middleton, 2009), media outlets determine the visibility of human rights issues, their contextual framing, and their potential elevation to the political agenda (International Council on Human Rights Policy, 2002). This gatekeeping function extends beyond mere reporting of violations to a moral imperative: empowering citizens with knowledge of their rights, exposing systemic abuses, and galvanizing advocacy

efforts (Munir, 2010; John, 2008). Such responsibilities are particularly acute in environments marked by armed conflict or entrenched neglect, where violations proliferate unchecked.

Within this broader landscape, children's rights emerge as a domain where media impact is especially pronounced and multifaceted. By framing narratives around abuse, neglect, and developmental imperatives, media drives public understanding and advocacy, positioning children's needs in education, health, participation, and protection as national priorities through agenda-setting processes (Liddiard & Campling, 1994; Goddard & Saunders, 2001; Lindsey, 1994). Moreover, media can amplify children's agency by integrating their voices directly into programming, fostering awareness while affirming them as societal contributors rather than passive subjects (Parajuli, 2004). This participatory approach not only educates audiences but also counters marginalization, aligning with global calls for child-centered media that promotes dignity, tolerance, and equity.

Yet, realizing these potential hinges on media professionals' competence in human rights reporting a persistent challenge, particularly in resource-constrained settings like Ethiopia. Studies reveal widespread deficiencies in journalists' training, with limited formal education on human rights at both university and institutional levels, leaving many unaware of key national and international frameworks (Skjerdal, 2009; Birhan, 2011). This knowledge gap often results in superficial or inaccurate coverage, undermining media's advocacy role. While some outlets, such as „„The Reporter““ newspaper and the Ethiopian Radio and TV Agency, have mitigated this through targeted hires (e.g., those with legal or social science expertise) and workshops on democracy and rights, these initiatives remain piecemeal and insufficient to meet broader demands. For regional broadcasters like the Amhara Media Corporation (AMECO), evaluating journalists' and editors' awareness of child rights in program production is thus essential, as it directly informs the depth and ethical integrity of content aimed at young audiences.

## Methods

In this study, a mixed-methods design integrating quantitative and qualitative content analysis was employed to comprehensively examine the portrayal and production of children's rights in Amhara Media Corporation (AMECO) television programs. This approach aligns with the principles of mass communication research, where content analysis serves as a robust technique for systematically evaluating textual, auditory, and visual media artifacts (White & Marsh, 2006). By combining both paradigms, the study leverages the strengths of each to address the research questions (RQs) holistically: RQ1-extent of



explicit/implicit rights addressing in programs), RQ2-influence of production processes and journalist specialization on rights integration, and RQ3 -barriers to effective coverage and mitigation strategies. As Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) notes, mixed methods mitigate the limitations of singular approaches such as the superficiality of purely numerical data or the subjectivity of interpretive depth by triangulating findings for enhanced validity and reliability.

Therefore, quantitative results informed qualitative probing (e.g., low rights frequency triggered interview questions on causation), while qualitative themes enriched quantitative interpretations (e.g., explaining statistical variances through producer narratives). This convergence validates findings, as quantitative breadth establishes "what" occurs, and qualitative depth elucidates "why" and "how" (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007). For addressing the RQs, mixed methods are ideal because RQ1 demands measurable scope, whereas RQ2 and RQ3 require interpretive richness to inform policy-relevant insights in a low-awareness context like Ethiopia's regional media (Assefa & Tefera, 2020). Overall, this design enhances generalizability, credibility, and practical utility, positioning the study as a novel contribution to child rights media scholarship.

### **Sampling techniques and samples**

The study is being performed to investigate the contents of children's rights coverage, the practices of journalists, and the problems encountered in producing children's rights in the case of Amhara Media Corporation's children's program. A year document was chosen at random from the archived records based on the broadcasted children's program. Through available sample, 41 programs were picked from among them. According to AMECO's human resources department, there are approximately 700 journalists employed at Amhara Media Corporation (AMECO). Out of these, more than 150 journalists are working in Amhara Media Corporation television program, specifically; three editors and two reporters who were working in children's programs at different times were chosen. Accordingly, five of them were selected through comprehensive sampling because their numbers were manageable.

### **Data gathering instruments**

Content and interview were the data collection tools which the researcher employed to investigate journalists' actual practice in covering the rights of children on Amhara Media Corporation. Since the research inquires and seeks an answer regarding the practice of journalists towards the rights of children, in-depth interviews and documents are believed to bring significant data.

## **Content**

In this study, broadcasted children's program documents were taken as sources of data which showed the actual practices of journalists who prepared and produced programs. Hence, the broadcasted programs were collected from archived documents. A total of 41 program documents were collected. From these documents, 276 of the rights of children's issues were covered. These rights were presented in six packages: Introducer, Tales, Plays, Film, Song, and Best practice. Besides the quantitative data, qualitative issues related to children were collected, coded, and interpreted thematically.

## **Interviews**

In-depth interview is a procedure designed to provoke a vibrant picture of the participant's view on the research topic. Accordingly, the interview could provide insight into the journalists' practical application of children's rights in children's programs. The interview items were prepared based on the literature, the research questions, and the objectives of the study. Thus, editors of children's programs were interviewed by telephone as the Corona pandemic forced us not to have face-to-face contact to address the research problem.

## **Method of Data Analysis**

The unit of analysis comprised all children's programs on child issues in the form of songs, introductions, tales, films, best practices, and plays. Using descriptive and inferential statistics, the visible data was examined by Chi-square, frequency, and percentage of their rights. Whereas the qualitatively collected data from documents and in-depth interview was analysed thematically. The findings of the study are discussed in line with the literature review and findings of previous scholarly work. Finally, conclusions and recommendations were forwarded.

## **Results**

The quantitative data indicated that forty-one programs were produced in 2022/3. Within these programs, a total of 276 children's rights issues were covered.

### **Children's program packages**

Amhara Media Corporation television children's program has six packages. These are Introducers, songs/music, best practices, Plays/Games, Tales and Films.



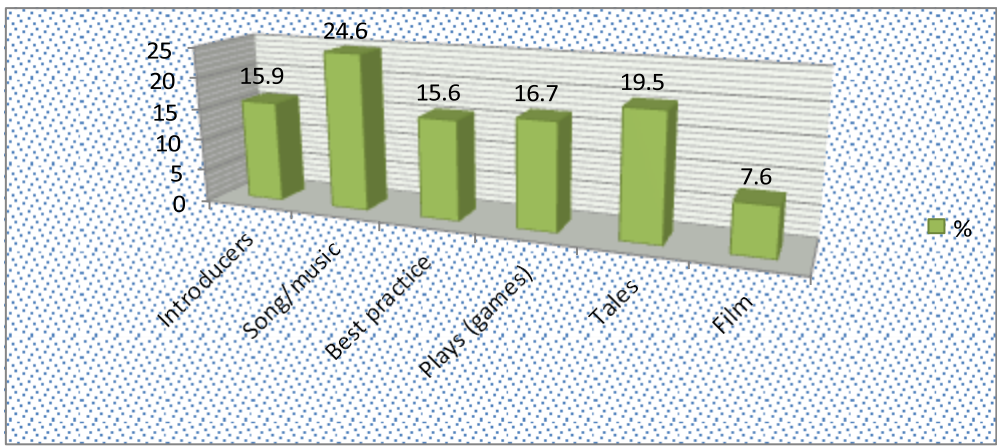


Figure 1 Children program packages and observed children's rights issues

The result in Figure 1 depicted that from the total of 276 (100%) produced programs, the introducers package covered 44 (15.9%) of children's rights issues. Whereas 68 (24.6%) of children's rights issues were found in the Song/music packages. The best practice package covered 43 (15.6%) children's rights issues. During the plays or game packages, 46 (16.7%) of children's rights issues were found. Fifty-four (23.5%) of children's rights issues were found in the Tales package while the Film package covered 21(7.6%) children's rights issues. Therefore, the result revealed that the highest number of rights of children were covered in the Music package; however, the least number of rights of children issues were covered in the Film package.

**Categories of children's rights**

UN convention on the rights of children is grouped into four categories (Survival, Development, Protection and Participation) of rights and a collection of guiding principles (UNICEF, 2007).

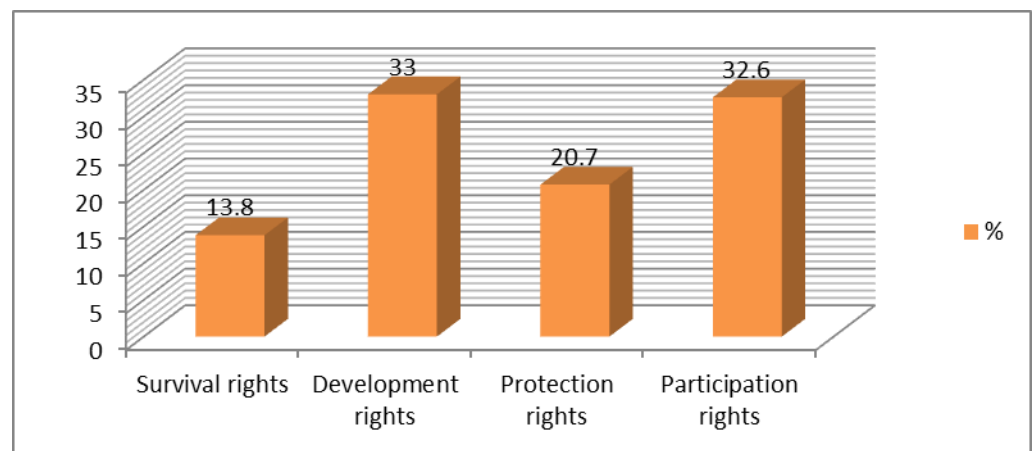


Figure 2 Types of Children Rights and their occurrences

As it is shown in Figure 2, development rights 91 (33%) were the most frequently covered rights. Participation rights 90 (32.6%) are also the second most frequently covered rights as compared to survival and protection rights. Whereas protection rights 57 (20.7%) and survival rights 38 (13.8%) are less frequently covered children's rights. Therefore, development rights and participation rights were frequently covered.

**Distribution of UN convention on the rights of children across time**

The rights of children across four quarters of year distribution are illustrated in the next figure

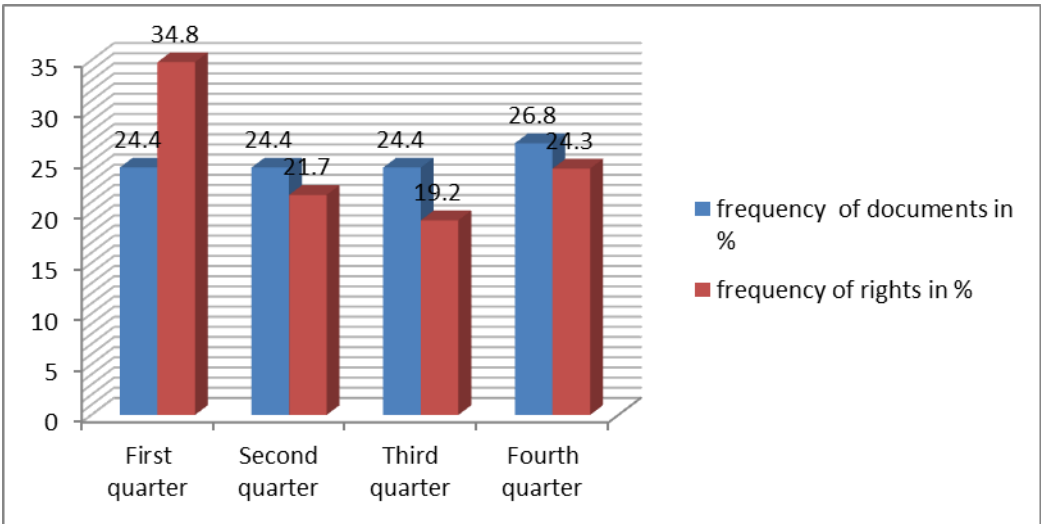


Figure 3 The distribution of children rights within quarters of a year (2022/23)

The result in Figure 3 depicted the number of collected documents, except for the fourth quarter 11(26.8%) in the other three quarters 10 (24.4%) documents were collected. In the first quarter of the year (July, August and September) 96 (34.8%) of children's rights were aired. In the fourth quarter (April, May and June) 67 (24.3%) were the second most frequently children's rights were covered. The second and third quarters covered less frequent children's rights as compared to the first and fourth quarters. The second quarter (October, November and December) covered 60 (21.7%) of children's rights. Third quarter (January, February and March) 53 (23.2%) of children's rights were produced. Hence, the first quarter was the time that the highest numbers of children's rights were covered while the third quarter was the least.

Types of children right across quarters of the year

UN convention on the rights of children is grouped into four categories (Survival, Development, Protection and Participation) of rights and reported periods with reference to quarters of the year

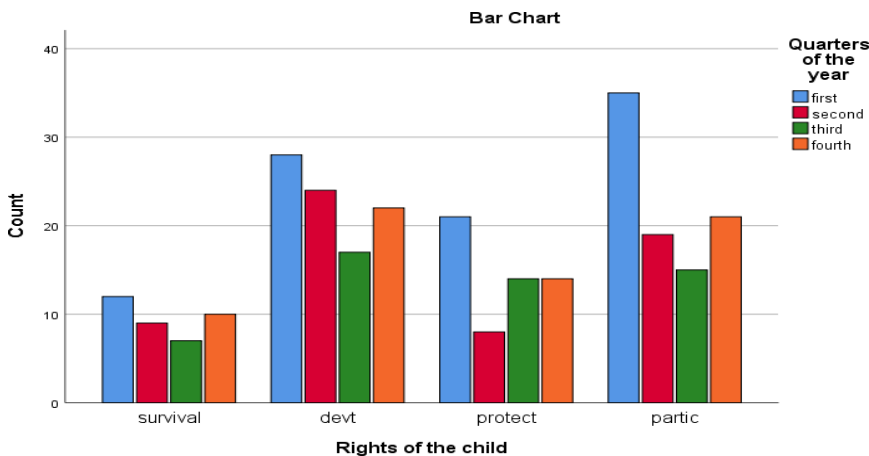


Figure 4 Types of spotted rights across the quarters of the year 2022/23

The finding in Figure 4 revealed that survival rights were covered more frequently in the first quarter of 12 (31.5 %) and the fourth quarter of 10 (26.3%) of the year. However, in the second 9 (23.6%) and third 7(22.4%) quarters of the year, survival rights were less frequently covered. Development rights were less frequently covered in the third quarter of 17 (22.6 %) of the year whereas 28 (30.7 %) of them were produced during the first quarter. Twenty-four (26.3 %) and 22 (24.1%) of development rights were covered in the second, and third quarters consecutively. Similar to survival and development rights, protection rights 21 (36.8%) were the most frequently covered rights in the first quarter of

the year, but the second quarter covered only 8 (14%) of protection rights among the four quarters. Both the third and fourth quarters covered an equal number of protection rights 14 (24.5%) each of them. The Highest number of participation rights were covered in the first quarter 35 (38.8%); on the other hand, the least number of protection rights were produced during the third quarter 15 (16.6%). In the fourth and the second quarters 21 (23.3%) and 23 (21.1%) numbers of participation rights were produced. The P-value is .45 which is greater than 0.05. This indicated there is no relationship between dates of production with the occurrences of the type of rights of the children.

### **Qualitative content analysis**

This section presents the qualitative content analysis of forty-one archived documents. The majority of the productions covered the rights of children implicitly while some of them presented explicitly in the form of advice. For instance, children frequently introduce to daily programs. As a result, children participate in leading a program and develop children's participation rights. Participation rights include the right to participate in cultural, historical, and religious events, and holidays. Besides, those children's best practices were frequently presented in the programs which mean children's development right was practically observed. For instance, the best practices of the mind plus program in several schools were presented.

Children's art and innovation and competition practice were presented to enhance the psychomotor skills of children. Most of the time tales taught children to protect themselves from hazardous things. Therefore, survival rights were highly advocated in the tale's package. Though 41 productions were analysed, frequently presented children's rights themes were left out due to redundancy. The themes emerged based on packages: introducers, music, best practice, tale, film, and plays. The following text is extracted from the news which was broadcasted on September 29/2023.

Three packages like, songs, plays, and films. Ethiopian Amharic music and English music were produced. Amharic music's message was about culture whereas English music teaches numbers, names of animals, and colour identification. In the best practice package, a „Tekuando“ sports trainer trained children. During the training, knowing the culture, the value of time, health, mental development, and personal hygiene were presented. Especially, disability meant doing nothing as the trainer was a disabled person. Finally, a translated cartoon film was presented. In the film, two major characters were a mother and a daughter. During the play, the mother insulted her daughter by saying talkative, chocolate fighter, fiercer animal, etc. The carton film was not contextualized. During that day, participation rights were found in the programs,

and violations of the rights of children were also found. Insulting is one of the emotional violation practices. The following text is extracted from the program which was broadcasted on October 11/2022.

That day production was made at Bahir Dar Academy, which has been found in Bahir Dar city. Mind plus program and how to learn Mathematics was presented by a Mathematics teacher. Two students of the Academy were interviewed. Those students shared their experiences of studying Mathematics. In the Academy, students and teachers played and sang together. One of the teachers told the tale to the students. Music also presented about love and helping each other. The theme was encouraging children's participation and development rights. Therefore, students sharing their experiences meant they were participating in practicing their rights instead of being passive listeners. Moreover, children were encouraged to learn Mathematics which helped them to practice cognitive development. The following text is extracted from the program which was broadcasted on November 26/ 2022.

In the Music package, foreign music was aired. The best practice package was presented at A Catholic School in Bahir Dar. The lesson was about similar Amharic letters. Children were advised of the method of study habits. Students in grade twelve were asked about their plans while joining the university. Catholic school students sang national and nationality music. At the time of the introducer's package, two children introduced the numbers of Tana monasteries. Specifically, Narga Sillasie's monastery's internal wall paintings were presented. The film package presented the nagging between a mother and father. Unexpectedly, a magician came and entertained a girl. Tale was presented by one of the the Catholic school teachers. Children were encouraged to know about the culture, and historical places; entertained and participated in school events, learned about the Amharic language similar letters, etc. Development rights, participation rights, and protection rights were found. The following text is extracted from the program which was broadcasted on December 25/ 2022.

Two children introduced that day program. English Music through animation was presented. The innovation and creativity of students at Deluxe Academy Bahir Dar were presented. Some of the student's works were Dynamo from plastic, a ventilator from a carton, waver of paper, etc. Advice from children to children was broadcasted. Amharic letters song..." He, Hu, Hi, Ha, Hie, H, Ho; Mimiye, Weye, Amharic song and we came to take children plays and songs were sung. This means teaching Amharic letters through song. During the introducer package, it went to North Shewa, Amhara region. Children introduced the „Menzguasa“ protected area. Carton's film about fox eyes in the English language was presented. Tale was told by one of the Deluxe academy teachers. The tale was about wild

animals hunting; how they cooperate; help each other; friendship and love. Therefore, the fable story theme was cooperativeness, and social inclusion; love each other for the common will. The following text is extracted from the program which was broadcasted on January 24/2023.

Two children introduced that day program. Ethiopian music Ete emeyte yelomi shita” ... was sung. The theme of the music advised children to become clever and to respect elders and friends. Students’ best practice was presented in a video. Emperor Tewodros’ patriotism and love of Ethiopia and his achievements towards civilizations were dealt with. A cartoon film on fish and sharks broadcasted. Tale was presented in a video. The theme of these programs was through participation children exercised participation rights. Besides the rights of children, this program announces their duties. It teaches ethics and advises them to love their country. The following text is extracted from the program which was broadcasted on February 15/2023.

Two boys introduced the program. Next, Amharic music “Burie bura burie, lamie bora” song was sung. That day’s the children the best practice, and plays program was produced at Beza Bizuan Academy at Bahir Dar. One of the Beza Bizuhan Academy teachers taught about ethics. The contents were about loyalty, honesty, self-respect, respect for others, no fighting, forgiveness, politeness, etc. Students played a game in Amharic, “Injera with local dish” and “Queen Saba, a play which more than 10 children play together”. From that school, one student good experience and his family support were presented. The student whose name was Daniel. He liked drawing. He expressed his feeling through it, and his family encouraged him. Introducer’s package, the journalist introduced Debre Markos town which is the capital of East Gojjam Zone of Amhara National Regional States. A Beza Bizuhan Academy teacher told a tale. The theme was forgiveness. The following text is extracted from the Program of March 22/ 2023.

During that production, children's producers were not found on the stage. Ethiopian Amharic song “Zinabu meta” meaning the rain is coming plays on how to share parents’ resources between three children (two males and one female). Children's plays were done at Zenzelima primary school, at Bahir Dar. It was „Gebeta”, a cultural game. Tale was presented about doing bad was not a good experience; instead, good deeds were recommended. The main theme of the program was fairness. Children were advised to get their turn. They should not develop an egoistic personality. Getting the necessary resource from parents was sharing equally and equitably was the moral of the plays. The following text is extracted from the Program of April 10/ 2023.

Two children from Washera Academy introduced the program. The theme was about nation nationalities of Ethiopia competition saying every one of them

was believed as number one. Then, elders negotiated to respect each other instead of wrongly competing might lead to conflict. Second, the event was conducted at Meshenti primary school. A Meshenti primary school student, Kalkidan, sang beautifully. She advised others to take part in art. Students at Meshenti sang to admire their hero by saying, “Andie lemedie away gudie/ Andie lemedie away gudie; eziga jebena eziyaga jebena Esayas Afework ye Erteria jegna” etc. Third, the introducers program was announced by Kulkual Meda primary school students. They visited the Amhara Media Corporation. They liked what they saw. Visitors advised students to participate in co-curricular activities in their school. A tale was presented by journalists. The theme was children ought to identify their friends. They should accept elders and parents. Overall, that day’s program was presented from three different schools in and around Bahir Dar.

The theme was children have the right to participate in art, music, game, etc. Besides, children should be protected from dangerous friends that are they were told about survival and protection rights. Students were also advised on moral and cognitive development. Finally, children have the right to join associations and peer relations without affecting others. The following text is extracted from the Program on August 11/ 2023.

The journalist asked children how they spend their summer vacation. One of them, Yonatan, won the drawing competition and he advised parents to understand their children's interests. Children's books are inaugurated and written by a child. The writer was Selamawit. She has grown by listening to tales and hearing stories from her elders. Next, the introducer package produced cultural and religious holidays, „Shaday and Solel,” in the northern part of Ethiopia. The holiday's historical background, celebrity, clothes and time of celebrity were introduced. The themes of these packages where children should be recognized as valuable contributors. For example, children's book was written by children. Next, parents should respect children's interests. Summer vacation was not simply vacation; besides academics, children practiced their interest. The following text is extracted from the Program on October 23/ 2023.

Children presented their experience at „Nigus Tekle Haimanot” School at Debre Markos. The program explained about school’s establishment to the current status. Children were asked about what they did in the previous summer vacation. They reported that some of them helped their parents. Others of them visited their relatives; read books; they played games. Family and teachers are responsible for the care of children at home and at school. The introducer program introduced Mahatma Gandhi, a freedom father of Indians. The tale was presented by journalists. It was told that donkeys went to hyenas’ village to feel the grievance. Unfortunately, the hyenas ate donkeys as if



donkeys pretended to laugh. The theme was children should not be the place where they might be harmed. The following text is extracted from the Program on June 27/ 2023.

A journalist introduced the program and they watched Carton music. Then, one of Debre Tabor town DT academy students presented her experience about innovations in insecticide, engine oil, and powder soap. She was motivated to help farmers who saw in the nearby kebeles. Moreover, girls presented songs and puzzles. The theme was children are not threats, but rather potentials of the future.

### **Thematic analysis**

The information obtained through in-depth interviews has been organized into the following key themes: Their training and motivation to work in children's programs, as well as the short and long-term training they gained, the way they were assigned in that program, and the challenges they faced during production. The goal of children's programs, the allotted time and day of the programs, human and material resources assigned and allocated, in comparison to other local television children's programs. Interviews were conducted with five editors (two women and three men).

### **Program aim**

The respondents said they did not achieve the goal of children's programs due to several factors. From there, they claimed that they did not satisfy children within the very limited time and interrogated how creating an educated, informed, entertained, ethical, and responsible generation would come without well-planned and devoted efforts between stakeholders, like media organizations, interviewee one said:

The Amhara Media Corporation children's program has broad and core missions as it is believed to create educated, informed and ethical future generations of the region and the nation. Its mission is to create an informed, educated and entertained generation. The problem is not formulating the goal and mission; rather we journalists and producers are not doing effectively to attain that mission. There are several reasons for journalists not doing children's programs effectively. For instance, journalists underestimate the program and children. Second, the institution also launches the program as it has to have only (Personal interview, on March 3, 2023).

"Personally, knowing the aim of children's program is not a big deal. The issue is how that aim could be implemented," interviewee four said.

Respondents added that to implement its mission, the AMECO should assign sufficient human and material resources practically; otherwise, the mission and vision would be only for paper values. They added that looking at children's programs as an observer is different from as a producer.

**Broadcasting time, day, packages and resources.**

It was found that the total time allotted to the children's program was once a week, every Friday from 5:00 to 5:30 for thirty minutes. Respondents were asked about the reason Friday has been chosen since most of the other local television channels broadcasted children's programs at the weekends. They said that they did not exactly know why Friday has been chosen, but they guessed the weekend has many television viewers; therefore, commercialization may be a reason. In their experience, promotions were not common during children's programs. To support this interviewee two said:

Interviewee two: Amhara's television children's program has six packages (music, good practice, introducers, film, plays, and tales) which could be produced every week. These packages are expected to be aired within thirty minutes, but they cannot be. I think the allotted is sufficient for the number of producers. However, our organization should assign sufficient human resources, and then time and appropriate date of broadcasting (Personal interview, March 07, 2023).

Respondents explained that the packages have been six. Those were tales, introductions, best practices, films, songs, and plays. They added that they covered programs in and out of the studio though it was tough to satisfy children's needs. Editors did what they could. Interviewee four said, "I believe the program has to have sufficient time as the Amhara Media Corporation program air time is increasing from an hour to eighteen hours drastically; paradoxically, children's program time is declining from forty-five minutes to thirty minutes." Interviewee five said, "I think the focus of AMECO is on current and sponsored issues instead of pre-planned programs."

**Challenges to work in children's programs**

The rights of children are designed in UNCHR declaration and also in the Ethiopian constitution. The question is whether these rights are understood and produced by journalists in the Amhara Media Corporation children's program. The majority of the respondents said that directly or indirectly they were promoting the rights of children. Regarding training, among five editors, only one of them got two-day training. She explained that the training was very helpful; she got good experience with other media house journalists. She

reminded me that unlikely, and immediately after the training, she shifted from children's program editor to another department. Interviewee one claimed the reason:

When I was assigned as editor of the children's television program, I was glad to contribute something helpful for future generations though I did not have any special training about how to produce children's programs and children's rights issues. Practically, our programs are more of entertainment as we believe children need them. Through entertainment, they are expected to learn many things. Some programs educate the rights of children; for example, „Yehitsanat parlama“ which means children's federation. This program teaches children to exercise their democratic rights (Personal interview, March 03, 2023).

Respondents said that their programs frequently advised children what to do and what not to do. Parents, teachers, and communities' responsibility in implementing the rights of children are commonly presented in the program. For example, currently, schools are closed due to the Corona pandemic. In the previous week, they announced parents' responsibility to take care of their children through personal hygiene; and then, they reminded children, so as not to forget their education although schools have been closed. Interviewee three supported the expression by saying:

Children program producers need to have special to approach children to know international and national declarations related to the rights of children and responsibilities. I graduated in Journalism and Communications, but I did not remember exactly which courses were designed and what could be done while producing a children's program (Personal interview, March 09, 2023).

The respondents explained that sometimes they used to cover the allocated time by directly taking cartoons which were done by foreign media. They added that they did it without contextualizing their cases. They did not get any training which filled the journalist's skill gap about the rights of children and how to produce children's programs. They were assigned randomly. They did it by their effort; interviewee four supported:

Amhara Media Corporation authorities, reporters, and producers underestimate children unknowingly. That is why the program is given only thirty minutes. Besides the allotted time, it has only one reporter and one editor. I can say many of us (journalists) believe that working in a

children's program is an easy task, but the reality is different. Moreover, journalists are community members. The community gives children in the lower position so do journalists. Underestimation is violating the rights of children. Therefore, the challenge begins from the expectations (Personal interview, March 11, 2023).

Interviewee five also explained the training by saying:

We (the editor) did not get any training to produce children's programs, but in our daily meetings, we asked to employ, „Yeteret Abat weyim Yeteret Enat“ which means puzzle or fables storyteller father or mother, to buy children's books, etc. Now books are solved, but still, the lack of human resources is a big challenge (Personal interview March 17, 2023).

A superior attitude towards children and youths severely limits the space that children could get in the mainstream media and excludes their voices from public debate on the rights of children. However, at least the children's program gave the children to be heard. There is a lack of important, realistic and publicly relevant media coverage or information flow on issues on the rights of children and protection.

On the other hand, the children's program producers focused on limited age and geographical groups. Respondents stated that broadcasting on the rights of children was not widely acknowledged as a specialized field and this meant that many journalists were not motivated and incapable of producing profound coverage of children's issues. They added this neglect started in journalism schools and extends to almost all newsrooms and media houses and also neglect short-term training.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study illuminate the dual role of the Amhara Media Corporation's (AMECO) children's program in advancing child rights awareness while revealing entrenched limitations in production practices and representational equity. Drawing on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), which delineates four core guiding principles survival, protection, development, and participation the analysis confirms that AMECO's programming engages these domains, albeit unevenly and often implicitly through entertainment formats. However, the observed discrepancies between content analysis and stakeholder perceptions, alongside imbalances in coverage, underscore how journalistic framing and agenda-setting

processes mediate the visibility of child rights in Ethiopia's regional media landscape (Entman, 1993; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This discussion integrates these insights with Social Responsibility Theory (SRT; Siebert et al., 1956), which posits media's obligation to serve diverse societal needs beyond commercial imperatives, to critically interpret how AMECO both promotes and constrains child rights realization. By transcending descriptive summaries, the ensuing analysis elucidates institutional dynamics, cultural reinforcements, and capacity gaps, offering pathways for theoretically informed reform.

Quantitative content analysis of 41 episodes revealed substantive, if sporadic, integration of CRC principles, with participation rights most prominently featured, followed by development. Survival rights, encompassing basic health and sustenance, appeared least frequently, often subordinated to narrative entertainment. These patterns align with Parajuli's (2004) assertion that media can amplify children's agency through participatory formats, validating young voices as societal contributors rather than passive recipients. Yet, the predominance of participation over survival reflects agenda-setting priorities in resource-scarce environments, (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This selective emphasis risks side-lining vulnerable children's immediate needs, as evidenced by ILO (2010) data showing urban media bias in developing contexts, thereby constraining holistic rights advocacy.

Qualitatively, interviews with producers and experts corroborated this thematic skew, attributing it to ad hoc scripting that favours accessible, studio-based content over field reporting on survival issues. Such findings resonate with UNICEF (2007) guidelines, which advocate balanced implementation across CRC articles 43–54 to ensure governmental and institutional accountability. Critically, this uneven coverage not only mirrors but potentially perpetuates Ethiopia's socioeconomic disparities, where child mortality from preventable causes remains high (Central Statistical Agency & ICF, 2016), highlighting SRT's call for media to prioritize "voiceless" groups like rural or impoverished children (Siebert et al., 1956).

The perceptual-content mismatch can be analytically unpacked through Framing Theory, which posits that media selectively emphasize attributes to shape interpretations (Entman, 1993). Here, producers' framing of rights as "entertaining morals" (e.g., implicit lessons in tales) fosters optimistic self-assessments among stakeholders, yet dilutes analytical rigor, rendering violations as anecdotal rather than systemic. Agenda-setting complements this by explaining institutional orientations: Generalist journalists, lacking rights specialization, prioritize "newsworthy" participation narratives over protection gaps, elevating them on the public agenda while marginalizing others (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Skjerdal, 2017).

These dynamics are institutionally rooted in Ethiopia's media ecosystem, where post-2022 reforms have expanded freedoms but not capacities (Skjerdal, 2009). The resultant "echo chamber" effect where perceptions amplify surface-level successes undermines accountability, as audiences may overestimate media's protective role. These echoes Lebow's (1992) critique of infotainment's dual edge: It disseminates rights knowledge accessibly but risks interpretive ambiguity, particularly in low-literacy contexts like rural Amhara.

The translated cartoon episode exemplifies this framing peril, where a mother's derogatory insult ("talkative, fierce animal of chocolate") ostensibly critiques emotional abuse yet inadvertently normalizes it through comedic delivery. Content analysis coded this as a protection theme (score: 2/3 for implicit awareness), but qualitative review revealed how such portrayals mirroring Ethiopian disciplinary norms like threat-based bedtime routines (e.g., invoking hyenas or monsters) can reinforce cultural acceptance of verbal humiliation as "discipline" (WHO, 1999). Framing Theory elucidates this contradiction: By embedding critique within familiar, non-confrontational humour, the media frames abuse as relatable folklore rather than rights violation, potentially desensitizing viewers and perpetuating cycles of neglect (Entman, 1993). This aligns with Goddard and Saunders (2001), who warn that child-focused media often unwittingly embeds societal biases, undermining CRC protection mandates.

Further analytical depth reveals representational inequities, with majority of episodes sourced from urban Bahir Dar sites, particularly private schools, neglecting rural government institutions and early childhood programs. This geographic bias, as quantified in coverage frequencies, contravenes SRT's ethos of equitable service to all societal segments, including the "voiceless" rural majority comprising 80% of Amhara's child population (Chan & McNeal, 2006; Siebert et al., 1956). Agenda-setting theory attributes this to logistical framing producers' urban-centric access elevates elite narratives, side-lining rural exploitation stories despite their prevalence (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; ILO, 2010).

Such imbalances not only distort the child rights agenda but also entrench urban privilege, as private school features (e.g., art events) frame participation as an affluent entitlement rather than universal right. Linking to broader Ethiopian contexts, this mirrors national media trends where rural children receive 40% less exposure (Assefa & Tefera, 2020), constraining development equity and violating CRC participation articles. SRT demands redress through inclusive sourcing, such as mobile production units, to democratize visibility and foster national solidarity.

Underpinning these issues is a profound capacity shortfall: most of interviewees reported no specialized training in child rights or program production, with editors assigned randomly per generalist norms (Skjerdal, 2017). These echoes Bizimungu (2017) and UNICEF (2017) calls for systemic journalism education reform, yet extends analysis to institutional levels budget constraints and regulatory silos hinder ongoing professional development, framing rights coverage as peripheral rather than core (Entman, 1993). In SRT terms, this abdication of training responsibility curtails media's societal watchdog role, yielding superficial content that, per Middleton (2009), fails as a primary information source on child rights.

In synthesizing these threads, AMECO's programs emerge as a microcosm of Ethiopian media's ambivalent child rights posture: Empowered by participatory flair yet hobbled by framing biases, inclusivity lapses, and capacity voids. Theoretically, SRT and agenda-framing lenses reveal how these constrain realization, yet also spotlight levers for change targeted training, balanced sourcing, and rights-embedded production could elevate media as a CRC implementation ally (UNICEF, 2007). For regional broadcasters, this implies a shift toward specialist roles and evaluative metrics, ensuring programs not only entertain but critically interpret rights in culturally resonant ways. Ultimately, as children embody national futures, fortifying media's interpretive depth is imperative for equitable development, aligning with global advocacy for rights-literate generations (Parajuli, 2004; Severin & Tankard, 1997).

## **Conclusion**

Although individuals and organizations believe to promote the rights of children and to eliminate all forms of child exploitation, this paper concludes that such efforts will only have a lasting impact if the media can raise awareness and mobilize the public to this end. Journalists should, therefore, place the rights of children issues on their agenda by giving children fair representations. The finding inferred there was significant coverage of the rights of children in the Amhara Media Corporation children's program. However, the coverage neglected early childhood children. Moreover, the coverage of children programs in the authentic situation discriminated rurally and the government school children since most of the programs were produced at Bahir Dar and in private school settings.

Whereas, the coverage of the types of rights of children was balanced between development, participation, survival, and protection rights since the targeted children are early childhood groups. However, children whose ages are above thirteen were forgotten. That is why labour and sexual exploitation themes were left empty all over the programs. Therefore, it is concluded that the name



children should be changed to early childhood programs or should address all children up to 22 years of age. The finding inferred that the rights of children were presented in both deductive and inductive ways. It is concluded that time is not a factor in selecting the kinds of the right of children.

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### **Conflict of interest**

The author declares there is no conflict of interest

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