

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) AND THE FAMILY: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Precious N. Olumati

Abstract

This paper defines ICT as the science and activity of processing, storing and sending information by using computers and related facilities. It also states that ICT and IT (Information Technology) can be used inter-changeably. The major emphasis is on the various ICT systems available and how they can be applied in the daily activities in the family. It also highlighted the benefits of ICT in the family, barriers to the use of ICT by families and makes appropriate recommendations.

Introduction

Several opportunities are opening for Information and Communication Technology's (ICTs) in education in transforming the teacher/learner relationship, the means of transmission of the educational message, the production and use of educational materials, and the organization and function of educational structures (Ajadi and Adeoye, 2005). This is because we are now living in a technology-driven economy. Every profession tends to move with the tides so that it would not be left behind. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is no longer a prerogative of the developed countries. The developing countries of the world have now given attention to this developing trend even within families.

The innovation has been found to be useful and relevant to all aspects of life such as banking, education, business, religion, politics, communications, family living and so on. It is common now to hear of e-governance, e-banking, e-mail, e-counseling and so on. The application of ICT into family living for the transmission of instruction is therefore not out of the place. With the new century, ICT is expected to play a more prominent role in family living.

What is ICT

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Information Technology (IT) can be used interchangeably. Information can be seen as an idea conceived in the human mind, while communication is the transfer of that information from the original source to the destination where it is needed with the intention of producing a change in behavior of the receiver (National Council for Educational Technology, 1995; Ekingbwo, 1998; Adekomi 1999).

ICT can also be defined as the science and activity of processing, storing and sending information by using computers (Badru, 2002). Badru further defined communication technology as the use of hardware and software to enhance communication. In other words, there is an overlap between the function of information technology and communication technology. Badru holds that, it is due to this great similarity in the function of IT and ICT that the two became fused into ICT. ICT therefore, is the means of accessing or receiving, storing, transferring, processing and sending idea, perception or information through computers and other communication facilities.

ICT systems and the Family

The family denotes a group of people affiliated by consanguinity, affinity and co-residence (Wikipedia, 2008). Many sociologists and anthropologists believe the primary function of the family is to reproduce society, either biologically, socially or both. The family serves to locate children

socially and plays a major role in their enculturation and socialization. In societies with a sexual division of labor, marriage and the resulting relationship between two people is necessary for the formation of an economically productive household (Wikipedia, 2008). Nigeria, as a developing nation needs the family which is the highest school of education – the school for teaching almost everything, (Ickchan, 2008).

Roseinberg (2001) has shown that the importance of ICT is not just about tools. He asserted that it must be more than the technology itself and the content it carries. In his opinion, it must focus on building a learning culture, true leadership support and sustenance of the change in the nation. This implies that the family as a tool for development needs to be more dynamic and pragmatic to reflect the present state of globalization.

Different ICT systems have been used in developed countries to take care of most family and consumer science education problems. These have been through the introduction of a wide range of IT applications that are also regularly used in homes. They include:

1. Business and economic games and simulation: This is an activity which produces artificial conditions that are similar to real life situations. For instance, there are simulation models in the form of computer games for kids, simulation of how the planet functions that can engage children in activities that keep them informed of what is happening globally rather than spending all their time playing or watching television.
2. Databases containing economic or business data: There are lots of softwares or applications that contain economics or business data or information as for example a customer or consumer details.
3. Graphical packages to display economic and business models with a graphical representation of various economics, products, business designs and methods. This is supported by Anyakoha (2002)'s statement that information technology has become an enabler of greater convenience. Individuals can now see their bank statements on personal computer screens (PC screens) even in their bedrooms. Grocery shopping can be done through the internet by the use of this model.
4. Word Processing: For communications, assignments and research projects for students and teachers.
5. Spreadsheets: To analyze business accounting data (Ian, 2007).
6. Electronic Mail: Family-owned computers are used for a number of purposes to store, retrieve and send mails to friends, and other family members. It can also remind people of such records as birthdays and other important family dates, appointments, and dates for payment of bills and financial records. Household inventories and family incomes and expenditures can be kept on computer files (Thomas, 1984 in Nwankwo 2003). Individuals can also store and access numerous recipes and menus through the internet (Nwankwo, 2003).
7. Electronic Commerce: (e-commerce) which means enabling and supporting the exchange of information goods and services between companies and their consumers. Essentially e-commerce is the buying and selling of goods and services over the internet (or through electronic medium). E-commerce technology enables enterprises exchange information instantaneously, eliminating paperwork while also facilitating and advertising their products and services in global market.

Benefits of ICT to the Family

ICT systems are able companion. Alkamu (2007) stated that ICT takes care of the dearth of qualified teachers. He also summarizes the benefits of ICTs thus:

- ICT provides individualized instruction and can be used with a large number of students of varied locations and background.
- Sharing and reuse of resources: ICT can reduce the need for the resources and allow for their sharing among families.
- Many banking processes and procedures are conducted by means of computers thereby, saving time and energy. The use of the Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT) by banks has made banking, buying and selling in addition to use of money easier and less risky. This prevents the carrying of large sums of money and the use of cheques. (Nwankwo,2003).
- It helps to exploit fully the resources available.

Barriers to the use of ICT by Families

Although the benefits of the use of ICT are numerous, the family which is the most important factor in the globalization effort is faced with some barriers to the use of these IT applications. These as identified by Adedokun (2002) include:

- Low level of computer literacy.
- Lack of inner drive for family members.
- Lack of enough time to watch and listen to radio and be informed about the uses and importance of ICT in the family and nation as a whole.
- Lack of interest on the part of family members.

Gbenga (2004) also listed actual/perceived barriers to the uptake of ICT by teachers as follows:

- Resistance to change and negative attitude
- Impact of public examination
- Low level of confidence and teachers computer anxiety
- Low level of competence
- Lack of access to resources for families that cannot own their own personal computer (PC)

Suggestions/Recommendation

1. Parents, teachers and students should be trained on ICT use so that they can move with the trends and cope with the changes that arise through globalization.
2. Parents and children should be supported in every way possible to acquire ICT knowledge through training.
3. Since change is dynamic, it is imperative that the curriculum be reviewed periodically to meet with the changes in systems and technology.
4. The use of ICT should be encouraged by ways of provisions of equipment in institutions of learning by the government, the private sector and in homes for families that can afford it.
5. It is imperative that the various ICT systems be integrated into Home Economics education as a tool for its development in Nigeria. This can be done by the inclusion of this ICT system in the curriculum. Monthly, quarterly or yearly training of teachers and instructors should be encouraged in institutions of learning and collective support of all stakeholders in the teaching and learning of Home Economics education in Nigeria will also be another helpful means.

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