

THE RELEVANCE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN NIGERIA: A FOCUS ON DISTANCE EDUCATION

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Abstract

The educational system globally and in Nigeria in particular is experiencing the dawn of a new era. This is due to the fact that modern technology has been introduced into it. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is a modern process of disseminating new ideas, discoveries and innovations in the educational industry, is now in use. This new development has enhanced the learning process. However, a lot of challenges have been posed in this sector. This paper seeks to examine the role of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting Distance Education in Nigeria. Problems affecting effective Application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Are Identified and suggested solutions are proffered.

The new technologies that are changing our world are not a panacea or a magic bullet, but are without doubt enormously powerful tools for development. They are transmitting education, health care, commerce, politics and more. The area in which we are concerned within this discussion is that of information communication and technology.

Information technology is concerned with mechanical and electronic devices capable of producing, manipulating, transmitting and storing words, number, picture and sounds. It can equally be seen as the acquisition, processing and dissemination of vocal, picture, textual and numerical information by

microelectronic base with combinations of computer and telecommunication.

Communication can be looked at as an act of transmitting information, ideas and attitude from one person to another's sense of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. It is a dynamic ongoing transaction, dynamic because it is constantly in motion and it has no fixed beginning transactions as elements occur simultaneously and the people communicating are independent. It may therefore be viewed as an interesting interaction, which manifests either within an individual or between two or more people / objects, resulting in achievement of desired objectives. Therefore, communication can be intra-personal or interpersonal; in a sense it is an issue of offer and acceptance. The employment of technologies in facilitating communication of information brings about communication technology.

Effective communication is such a crucial and fundamental phenomenon in life that no human endeavour can thrive without it. The basic goals and processes of reproduction, growth, teaching, learning, research, working, designed construction, manufacturing, manpower training, entertainment, governance and any other form of development cannot be accomplished in the absence of appropriate and adequate communication. Whether at the micro or global level of various institutions if human endeavour, successes and failures are traceable to adequate or inadequate communication.

New tools in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) are being developed and made available to help people rise to the challenges of life generally and to aid knowledge acquisition. Since Information and Communication Technology came into being it has given remarkable insight into the telecommunication sector. This innovation has brought along with it the globalization system of information and communication.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the Nigerian Education Reforms

Education raises the quality of life, it improves productivity in market and non-market work, it increases individuals access to paid employment and often facilities social and political participation. Any nation that is unable to develop the skills and knowledge if its people will be unable to develop anything, it is the formal educational system that is major mechanism for the development of such human skill and knowledge. Human resources can be developed and transformed through better education and training. This helps in achieving the highest productivity and most efficient interaction with the other factors of production (Anganwu, 1997). Investment in human resource therefore brings about increased productivity.

Education is now becoming information intensive ad information based. Networks being the carries of educational process, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has emerged as an effective distributive approach to managing educational matters and learning processes during this era of globalization. This has responded to educational needs and some societal problems facing educational management. It is fundamentally different from conventional educational management. In fact, the system is

transforming and fast reshaping the framework of traditional education.

Teaching and learning has taken advantage of information and Communication Technology (ICT) in providing functional rather than superficial information. Bate (1999) contented the introduction of network education will mean thorough re-examination of Che core practices of the system, delivery if material and assessment if students. This will help to analyze the most effective way of providing services through network in a multi-media environment.

In view of the emerging new technologies in information and communication, education is now experiencing a shift from formal centralized and segmented operation to increasingly complex, decentralized and integrated levels of organization. Teachers are to be innovative to face the challenges in information and communication technology so that they can meet the educational needs of the learners (Karl, 1996).

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Distance Education in Nigeria

Distance education is the linking of a teacher and student via technology that allows for interaction. It is an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted through the use of print or electronic communication media to deliver instruction in place and time (Easmonal, 1995). It is a teaching scheme whereby students are enrolled but not required to be present in a particular educational institution. It has a broader scope, which includes a large number of learning methods, from the corresponding courses. It can be administered on its own or integrated into a larger learning programme depending on the decision of the institution administrating the programme.

One of the earliest forms of distance education was the correspondence course. This

method was used for educating pupils in rural and remote towns and communities who had no facilities to set up schools in this method, teachers appear physically to pupils in certain places, give them lectures and leave assignments with the learners to work on their own. This form of learning was later replaced by the use of information and Communication Technology (ICT).

With the advent of information and Communication Technology (ICT), distance education has assumed a new dimension; this has improved the quality of educational output. Methods used in this new innovation are often classified according to the manner in which instructions and information in distance education is being delivered. The means through which information is being communicated is through audio graphic, audio telephone and computer. In addition, instruction under this programme is delivered through written documents, tape, videotapes as well as e-mail. As for medium of communication, choice of language for dialogue between two or a group of people must be one clearly understood by both parties. The mode of communication depends in scientific devices.

The different mode of communicating information in existence includes electronic amplifier, projector, videocassettes, compact disc, internet, radio, movies, television. Others are telephone such as global positioning system, global mobile telecommunication system facilities by communication satellites to mention but a few. These make distance education effective. These modes of communicating information have improved distance education in the Nigerian educational system greatly (Adeniji, 2005).

Promoting Distance Education in Nigeria

The advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has promoted distance educational system in Nigeria. For instance, the global university system, Nigeria Open University system, and other tertiary institutions in Nigeria have been boosted as there is an increase in learning opportunities. The range of institutions already offering courses through Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has increased greatly. This has given opportunity for many people to become educated at an affordable time frame. This has also brought education to the doorsteps of many learners (Eyitayo, 2000). This programme is now carried out in most African countries and has reached an advanced stage in most developed countries like United State of America,

It has promoted distance education by making learning flexible; which has produced. More autonomous: independent, self-directed and self-responsible learners within an interactive learning environment. One of the ways in which educators promote learners empowerment would be to adopts flexible learning whereby learners are given some control over what, how and when to learn. This also incorporates choice in dates of commencement and completion of studies, recognition of prior learning choice of assessment, choice of topics and subjects studied and choice of order in which they are studied.

There is improved delivery and quality of education in conventional university teaching, classroom presentation to students is prepared in isolation by lecturers, no review of such presentation, whether they include substantial artifact or not; this remains within the private domain of the lecturer and the students. Distance education supplements the contributions of the expert with complementary skills such as instructional and media design.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has given opportunity for new innovation. New forms of language, writing, reading, study and criticism are evolving from the digitized medium. Some contributors have observed new competencies in this new field; higher institutions are going for new ways of conceptualizing information and new convention in relation to scholarship.

More opportunities are open to having more and different educational information as these technologies are being used. Research results and new ideas are made available to learner by different institutions instead of just one. Since education develops the needed manpower and Job our efficiency leading to multiplier effect in the area of productivity as an important means for developing human resources, education should be made available to the citizenry. This can be done through information and communication technology as it is one of the quickest means through which education can easily reach the doorstep of the learner. Which in turn can make him productive.

Problem Affecting Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Programmas in the Nigerian Educational System

Information and Communication Technology (ICT), a new development in the education system has posed a lot of problems in the Nigerian Systems of education. Some of the problems identified among others include:

Lack of adequate equipment that can facilitate and promote information and communication technology in Nigeria. The equipment available are not enough to meet the demands of the growing populace in the educational sector. Most of the equipment used is imported and once it gets bad, it is difficult to repair.

Most teachers and students who are involved in the use of this equipment cannot use them well for lack of skills and knowledge. There is inadequate manpower in this area; in most cases foreign experts are employed to manage the available equipment in our institutions of learning. This situation has affected many educational programmes in Nigeria; especially in this era that distance education is gaining ground.

Most Nigerians are not aware of the importance of this new innovation and programmes transmitted by these media do not reflect the corporate existence of the people. There is inadequate connectivity to advanced telecommunication infrastructure and services. Many rural and sub-urban communities are not able to fully participate in the system,

There is the inability of many Nigerians to apply to real-life situations what they have been able to acquire through information and communication technology. This sometimes makes learning more difficult since they cannot articulate properly the proceedings in the programmes. This could be due to lack of proper mastery of the key points and technical skills and knowledge on how to use the equipment as well as poor exposure (Adeniji, 2006) government has not yet involved private individual and corporate bodies to partake in this viable exercise. They have not been given the license to possess, acquire and run private information and communication technology programmes outfits. These and many others must have constituted problems to the inadequate use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in our educational programmes.

Application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Educational Programmes in Nigeria: The Way Forward

In order to enhance educational programmes through Information and Communication Technology (ICT), government needs to involve private individuals and corporate bodies to partake in this important exercise by giving them licenses to possess, acquire and run private information and Communication Technology (ICT) programmes and outfits.

To cope with the challenges and changes that are taking place in the educational industry globally, Nigeria needs to produce, sell and manage the needed equipment. This will help in creating a conducive atmosphere for learning activities in the educational system in Nigeria (Aniebonan, 2002).

The global economy is becoming the real economy; government's performance in this new dimension determines the fate of the people. It is this reality that the Nigerian Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Professionals, managers of institutions and government need to come together and fashion the way forward. Government or its part should include in its budget an allocation of money that will be used for the development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Nigeria.

It must be noted that, developed human resources are critical. In fact, it is the essential infrastructure without which technology means nothing. Training in Information and Communication Technology (iCT) should be made compulsory in educational institution- This will help Nigerians to acquire the needed skills and knowledge as well as apply to real-life situations what has been acquired. It will also enable them to acquire the technical know-how in the area.

The training of teachers, reform of the school systems and the adoption of information and technology form one of the major issues in this new order, institutions of learning should play pivotal role in the development strategy (Ajayi, 2002). Educational Trust Fund (ETF) should direct her aids to institutions that have Information and Communication Technology (iCT) programmes. The curriculum on ICT should not be centered on Internet alone but should include newspapers, Prints and video. This will boost the development of ICT programmes in our educational institutions.

Conclusion

The advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has facilitated learning activities in the Nigeria educational system, information provided on the Internet, electronic mail and data bank or different research findings, scientific discoveries as well as books published on various subjects have promoted educational development in Nigeria. Latest scientific inventions and findings are released to others through the internet on a daily basis.

The modern global mobile communication system service has revolutionized communication in the educational system. It has served as a booster and facilitator. Presently, global mobile communication service system in Nigeria include: CELTELL, Telecom, ECONET-VODAPHONE, GLOBACOM (Global Communication of Nigeria). M-Tel and the MITEL mobile, which is perhaps at the embryonic stage.

Through Information and Communication Technology (ICT), many people have been given the opportunity to pursue higher education, which has made them efficient and productive. Indeed, the internet has tremendously encouraged cross-Fertilization of ideas on scientific Discoveries as well as research work between institutions and universities, in fact,

immense-contributions to education through Information and Communication technology (ICT) have made academic and research work less cumbersome and relatively much easier to ix: undertaken by both teachers and students.

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