

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) FACILITATED COUNSELLING AND NIGERIA'S EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT BEYOND 2020

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Abstract

This study investigated Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilitated counselling and Nigeria's educational development beyond Year 2020. It was guided by five research questions which were derived from five research purposes. The study relied on review of conceptual and empirical literature to answer the research questions. The literature search was done relying on academic databases like the *Google Scholar*, *JournalSeek*, *Directory of Open Access Journals* etc and the *Google* search engine. The findings of the study indicated that Year 2020 is of much significance to Nigeria; and that though ICT-facilitated counselling is very relevant to Nigeria's educational development, the prevailing status of ICT-facilitated counselling in Nigeria is very low; amongst other findings. The study then recommended that based on its findings, stakeholders including government, counsellors, universities etc should adopt policies and show commitment to encourage the adoption of ICT-facilitated counselling by counsellors.

Keywords: ICT, facilitated counselling, online, educational development, 2020, Nigeria

National planning is a global practice where nations of the world document blueprints that guide their actions as nations, to achieve national development; such national development translates to improvement in the welfare of the citizenry. Nigeria is not an exception to this global practice. Year 2020 is a critical year in Nigeria's development plan. It is the year that Nigeria aims to become one of the 20 largest economies of the world (Nigeria High Commission, 2009). Nigeria Vision 20:2020 relies on education as a veritable tool to achieve the target, while also seeing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as essential in facilitating the achievement of the goals of Vision 20:2020 (FRN, 2010). Moreover, *The National Policy on Education* (NPE) asserts that counselling is an essential service that will aid the realization of the goals of education (FRN, 2004). This creates a picture of a relationship between Year 2020, education, counselling and ICT. This relationship therefore justifies a study to ascertain the place of ICT-facilitated counselling in Nigeria's educational advancement even beyond Year 2020.

The *National Policy for Information Technology* (FRN, 2007) describes ICT as computers, software and Hardware, ancillary equipment, and services (including support services) and related resources. This according to the policy "includes any equipment or interconnected system or subsystem of equipment that is used in the automatic acquisition, storage, manipulation, management, movement, control, display, switching, interchange, transmission or reception of data or information."

ICT-facilitated counselling is sometimes referred to as online counselling, e-counselling, cyber counselling etc. According to Sanders and Rosenfield (1998), e-counselling is a method of delivering counselling services to the client using information and communication technology as the medium. Examples include offering counselling through the telephone, internet, teleconferencing, and video conferencing. Put differently, ICT-facilitated counselling is simply the application of ICT in counselling. It also implies the use of ICT facilities to make counselling services available to the clients.

Considering the professed confidence that Nigeria has on education as a tool for national development, and the equivalent expression of faith on ICT and counselling as having pivotal roles to

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play in Nigeria's national development, this study sought to establish the role of ICT-facilitated counselling in Nigeria's march towards becoming one of the world's 20 largest economies by the year, 2020.

Purpose of the Study

The study was guided by five purposes. The study aimed at establishing the role of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) facilitated counselling in Nigeria's educational development beyond Year 2020. Specifically, the study sought to establish the following:

1. The significance of Year 2020 to Nigeria.
2. The prevailing status of ICT-facilitated counselling in Nigeria.
3. The relevance of ICT-facilitated counselling to Nigeria's educational development.
4. The roles of ICT-facilitated counselling in the attainment of Vision 2020.
5. The prospect of ICT-facilitated counselling in Nigeria's educational development beyond 2020.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What is the significance of Year 2020 to Nigeria?
2. What is the prevailing status of ICT-facilitated counselling in Nigeria?
3. What is the relevance of ICT-facilitated counselling to Nigeria's educational development?
4. What are the roles of ICT-facilitated counselling in the attainment of Vision 2020?
5. What prospect does ICT-facilitated counselling hold for Nigeria's educational development beyond Year 2020?

Research Method

The study relied on review of literature to answer the research questions. The reviewed literature provided conceptual and empirical insight into the areas of focus of the study. The literature search was done relying on academic databases like the *Google Scholar*, *JournalSeek*, *Directory of Open Access Journals* etc and the *Google* search engine. Keywords used for the search included the following words, their derivatives, and phrases: Nigeria's Vision 2020, ICT-facilitated counselling, ICT in Nigerian schools, Guidance and Counselling and ICT. Both empirical and conceptual literature was picked if they were relevant to answering the research questions.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: What is the significance of Year 2020 to Nigeria?

Humanity has come to appreciate planning as a near-indispensable part of the process of growth and development. The essential role of planning in human progress cuts across the whole spectra of individuals, group of individuals, nations and group of nations. Nations of the world therefore plan their development and break it down into phases which are either short, medium or long terms. This national plan is a deliberate strategy to prioritize needs, allocate and utilize scarce resources with the aim of improving the standard of living of the citizenry (Ibietan and Ekhosuehi, 2013). To enhance the understanding of the discussion on the significance of Year 2020 to Nigeria, a brief historical perspective of Nigeria's national development plans would suffice.

Nigeria is known to have keyed into this trend of national planning; the country has an interesting history of national planning. What is generally accepted as Nigeria's first national development plan was launched in 1962, and covered the period 1962 to 1968 (Ejumudo, 2013; Kolawole and Ojapinwa, 2013). The plan aimed at achieving a growth rate of at least 4.0% per annum, developing opportunities and enhancing access to education, health and employment (Ejumudo, 2013). The first national development plan also targeted saving about 15% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 1975, and investing 15% of the GDP annually throughout the plan period (Ibietan and Ekhosuehi, 2013). The country's political crises which climaxed in a 30 month civil war (1967 – 70) however truncated Nigeria's first national development plan.

After the civil war, the country also had other national development plans. These included the second national development plan (1970 – 1974), the third national development plan (1975 – 1980) and the fourth national development plan (1981 – 1985) (Kolawole and Ojapinwa, 2013). According to Ejumudo (2013), the second national development plan had lofty goals including rehabilitation, reconstruction and reconciliation as the country was just coming out of a devastating civil war. However, its implementation was bedeviled by profligacy and financial indiscipline occasioned by the oil boom of the era which saw the planned budget of N3.2 billion revised upward to N5.3 billion (Ibietan and Ekhosuehi, 2013). The third national development plan is described as an attempt to lay a foundation for the country's industrial development through the strategy of self reliance and import substitution (Ayodele, Obafemi and Ebong, 2013). It had increase in per capita income, diversification of the economy, reduction in unemployment, even distribution of income, amongst others as its objectives. The third national development plan is reported to have achieved a 5% annual growth in GDP, while the manufacturing sector recorded the fastest growth averaging 18.1% annually. There were also significant growth in other sectors but the critical projects that were earmarked to lay the foundation for self reliance and sustainable growth were either not completed or could not take off at all. Examples of such landmark projects include Oku-Iboku Newsprint Paper Mill; Ajaokuta Iron and Steel Complex; The Eleme Petrochemical Complex; and the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) plant at Bonny. This was despite the adjustment of the total expenditure for the period from N30 billion to N43.3 billion and later to N60 billion (Ejumudo, 2013; Ibietan and Ekhosuehi, 2013). The fourth national development plan was directed at consolidating the previous development plans and achieving even development of the different sectors of the economy and geographical areas of the country. But the period witnessed dwindling oil revenue amidst increment in import bills. The dwindling revenue and defective implementation, amongst other factors, resulted in a dismal performance of the national development plan (Ejumudo, 2013; Ibietan and Ekhosuehi, 2013).

The country's civilian administration was ousted in a coup d'état in 1983; this was closely followed by another coup d'état in 1985 which sacked a military government. These political developments led to a three year break, while the fifth national development plan was scheduled for 1988 – 1992, though this was never launched. It was rather substituted by Bretton Woods supported Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), implemented between 1986 and 1992 (Ayodele, Obafemi and Ebong, 2013). SAP was anchored on deregulation of the Nigerian currency, removal of subsidies on government-provided goods and services, privatization and commercialization etc; all geared towards restructuring and diversifying the productive base of the economy, enhancing the growth of the private sector and improving the efficiency of the public sector, amongst others (Ibietan and Ekhosuehi, 2013). In 1989, the then military government jettisoned the traditional five-year development plan and adopted a two-pronged development plan (Kolawole and Ojapinwa, 2013). These were the Perspective plan which was to cover between 10 and 15 years, and Rolling plan with a three year duration.

Nigeria also had another development initiative articulated in 1996 and titled Vision 2010. The objective was to transform Nigeria into a united, industrious, caring and God-fearing democratic nation; and a nation committed to making the basic needs of life affordable for everyone. There was also the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), a medium term development plan from 2004 to 2007. NEEDS focused on wealth creation, poverty reduction, value re-orientation, employment generation etc (Ayodele, Obafemi and Ebong, 2013; Ibietan and Ekhosuehi, 2013).

The current development initiative is a long term development goal tagged Vision 20:2020. This development initiative is targeted at making Nigeria one of the 20 largest economies of the world by the Year 2020. It seeks to make efficient use of the country's human and natural resources to achieve rapid growth of the economy and equitable social development of the citizenry. The commitment is to ensure that in Year 2020, Nigeria joins the club of the top 20 economies of the world (FRN, 2010; Ayodele,

Research Question 2: What is the prevailing status of ICT-facilitated counselling in Nigeria?

Researchers have conducted studies to establish the prevailing status of ICT-facilitated counselling in Nigeria. In a study on the “professional challenges to counselling practice in Akwa Ibom State” Modo and George (2013) adopted a survey design, and an instrument called Professional Challenges to Counselling Questionnaire to establish the challenges facing counselling practice in Akwa Ibom State. Using stratified random sampling, they selected 80 practicing counsellors from the three Senatorial Districts of the state for their study. They reported in their findings that “most professional counsellors in Akwa Ibom State are not making use of ICT in their professional practice.” In another study, Anagbogu, Nwokolo, Anyamene, Anyachebelu and Umezulike (2013) sought to establish the professional challenges to counselling practice. They adopted a survey design and used the entire population of 441 counsellors in primary schools in Anambra state for the study. Their findings indicated that “lack of computers” and “unavailability of internet facilities” were among the predominant challenges facing counselling practice.

Nwoye and Igwe (2013) also conducted a study to ascertain the extent to which counsellors in Nigerian universities employed ICT for knowledge update in their professional life. They adopted a survey design, using a 46 item questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. Using stratified random sampling, they selected two federal and two state universities each from the South South and South East geopolitical zones of the country; implying a total of eight universities used for the study. Their findings agreed with the other presented empirical studies. They reported that counsellors were not utilizing ICT in their professional services; adding that specific activities like “browsing the internet for information concerning guidance services for the clients, brainstorming through online chatting, use of Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI) and Computer-Managed Instruction (CMI) among others were utilized to a low extent by the respondents.”

Furthermore, Anyamene, Nwokolo and Anyachebelu (2012) conducted a study to establish the extent of availability and use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) resources for counselling university students in South East Universities in Nigeria. They used questionnaire to gather data from 10,800 sampled students from nine universities in the South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Their findings indicated that Information Communication Technology (ICT) facilities for counselling were limited in the universities in the South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The results of the study also indicated that Information Communication Technology was rarely used in counselling students. This implies a very low level of application of ICT in counselling.

The foregoing empirical review gives a clear picture of the prevailing status of ICT-facilitated counselling in Nigeria. All the empirical studies reviewed are unanimous in their findings that the application of ICT in counselling is low. This means that the prevailing status of ICT-facilitated counselling in Nigeria is abysmally poor and very low.

Research Question 3: What is the relevance of ICT-facilitated counselling to Nigeria’s educational development?

Before the consideration of the relevance of ICT-facilitated counselling to Nigeria’s educational development, it is very pertinent to underscore the role of counselling as a whole, in Nigeria’s educational development. Nations of the world take deliberate steps to attain the development of their nations; such development entails the attainment of better welfare for the citizenry. Nigeria is not an exception to this global practice. In her supreme national document, specifically in Article 14(ii)(b) of *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999* (as amended), the country makes a commitment that “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government” (FRN, 1999). To achieve this fundamental objective, Nigeria as a nation has also consciously acknowledged the place of education in

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the development of the nation. In article 18 of *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999* (as amended), Nigeria resolved to ensure equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels, eradication of illiteracy, provision of free, compulsory and universal primary education, free secondary and university education and free adult literacy programme (FRN, 1999).

Having established the foundation in the constitution of the country, Nigeria went further to profess her reliance on education for national development in the country's topmost document on education, *The National Policy on Education* (NPE). In the said document, it is stated that "education is an instrument for national development." It added that in this wise therefore:

Education shall continue to be highly rated in the national development plans because education is the most important instrument for change; any fundamental change in the intellectual or social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution. (FRN, 2004:8)

Furthermore, the NPE establishes the relevance of counselling in Nigeria's educational development as it acknowledges counselling as an essential educational service that facilitates "the implementation of educational policy, the attainment of policy goals and the promotion of effectiveness of educational system." So for the country's development, education is seen as a tool, while counselling is conceded as the catalyst that helps education to attain its target.

However, the role expected of counsellors in the educational system seems quite difficult due to the fact that the number of available counsellors is grossly inadequate. Aluede (2007) captured the scenario succinctly when he lamented that despite the fact that the Federal Ministry of Education suggested one counsellor to 300 students, a counsellor is actually attending to a student enrolment of between 480 and 1700. He raised alarm on the insufficient number of counsellors in Nigeria, pointing out that in Edo state for instance, only 22 out of the 625 public Junior and Senior secondary schools have one or two counsellors. He added that the state, with a population of about 2.5million people and with over 200,000 secondary school students, is having only 25 counsellors. He wondered how the counselling needs of this number of people can be met by 25 counsellors. Omoni (2013) confirmed this when "low numerical strength of counsellors" was listed as one of the multiple challenges of counselling in Nigeria.

The foregoing makes a strong position that education is the tool for the attainment of national development, and that counselling provides the pillar of support for education to attain the expected role. However, there is a short supply of counsellors in the school system in particular and the society in general. This is where ICT-facilitated counselling comes in. ICT-facilitated counselling is relevant to Nigeria's educational development as it bridges the gap between short supply of counsellors and the critical role of counselling in the educational sector. This it does by enhancing the ability of the few available professional counsellors to attend to the counselling needs of a larger segment of the population that are in need of counselling services. ICT-facilitated counselling is therefore very relevant to Nigeria's educational development.

Research Question 4: What are the roles of ICT-facilitated counselling in the attainment of Vision 2020?

Nigeria Vision 2020 aims at ensuring that Nigeria becomes one of the 20 largest economies in the world by the Year 2020 with a minimum GDP of \$900 billion and a per capita income of not less than \$4000 per annum (Olaseni and Alade, 2012). According to Ayodele, Obafemi and Ebong (2013), the broad strategy for achieving vision 2020 is making efficient and optimal utilization of the country's human and material resources to achieve economic growth and social development. Emphasizing on the place of human capital in achieving Vision 2020, the authors averred that education is the bedrock of development. They therefore called for a more serious commitment to funding education.

Similarly, the Vision 2020 has identified human capacity development as one of the critical priority areas demanding immediate attention (Nigeria High Commission, 2009). The Vision 2020 also

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seeks to achieve a “modern and vibrant education system which provides the opportunity for maximum potential, adequate and competent manpower” (Accenture, 2009; Usman, 2010). Specifically and relating to education, the *Nigeria Vision 20:2020* states:

The Vision considers education as both a basic human right and a critical element in human development. NV20:2020 seeks to re-focus the country’s educational system in terms of access, equity, quality, infrastructure, teacher quality and development, curriculum relevance, funding and planning . . . to provide skilled manpower in applied science, engineering technology and commerce to operate, maintain and sustain the nation’s economic activities for rapid socio-economic development (FRN, 2010:9).

Also, obviously professing its faith on the pivotal role of quality education in the nation’s economic development and the necessity of ICT in the educational process, the *Nigeria Vision 20:2020* document affirms:

The decline in the standard of education has seriously affected the competitiveness of Nigerian graduates in the national and global labour markets, making it difficult for them to get jobs globally, especially in the ICT sub-sector. The Vision plans to make the curriculum in schools more relevant to the needs of the labour-market. To this end, emphasis will be on ICT diffusion and targeted skills development (FRN, 2010:10).

The role of ICT-facilitated counselling in the attainment of Vision 2020 can be better understood if one understands the place of ICT-facilitated counselling in educational advancement and the indispensable role of education in the attainment of Vision 2020. It has been established that ICT-facilitated counselling will enhance the provision of counselling services to the majority of the population that are in need of counselling and that such provision will boost educational outcome; it has also been established that education is a critical tool for achieving the goals of Vision 2020; it can therefore be extrapolated that ICT-facilitated counselling is a critical tool for achieving the target of Vision 2020.

Research Question 5: What prospect does ICT-facilitated counselling hold for Nigeria’s educational development beyond Year 2020?

ICT-facilitated counselling holds a positive prospect for Nigeria’s educational development beyond Year 2020. Considering the grossly inadequate number of professional counsellors and the very huge population of prospective clients, the hope of reaching out to a sizable proportion of the population lies on the adoption of ICT-facilitated counselling. It is also noteworthy that the Vision 2020 has projected the Nigerian population to be over 200 million by the Year 2020 (Nigeria High Commission, 2009). This projected population implies a further growth in students’ population at all levels. Nigeria’s educational development beyond Year 2020 would rely on counselling to positively influence the outcome of the educational process; counselling would also depend on ICT-facilitated counselling to cater for the huge population which has indisputably overwhelmed the number of available professional counsellors.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of this study have indicated that Year 2020 is a very significant year for Nigeria. As acknowledged by Nigeria as a country, the educational sector has a pivotal role to play in the attainment of the goals of Vision 2020; while the outcome of the education process is influenced by counselling services. However there is dearth of professional counsellors in Nigeria, thus making the adoption of ICT in rendering counselling services a necessity. The study has however indicated that the extent of application of ICT in counselling in the country is very low. This therefore prompts a recommendation that the government, counsellors, Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON), Universities and other stakeholders should show commitment in ensuring that ICT-facilitated counselling is adopted by counsellors in the country. This would help to bridge the gap created by inadequate number of

professional counsellors; hence making it possible to offer counselling services to a larger segment of clients, and the concomitant positive contribution to national development.

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