

THE ROLE OF INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) IN FOSTERING NATIONAL UNITY IN NIGERIA

By

NATH. OLINYA

*Computer Science Education Department
Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu*

Abstract

The world is fast becoming a global village because of the interconnectivity that exists between countries, organizations, governments, and other bodies as a result of the development in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This paper examines the role of ICT in fostering National Unity. The contributions of ICT in fostering National Unity were discussed, such as, Globalization, Socialization, Security, Good Governance to mention but the four. Recommendations and conclusions were also put forward.

The world is fast becoming a global village because of the interconnectivity that exists between countries, Organizations, governments and other bodies as a result of development in information and communication technology (ICT). Information and communication technology is a force that changed many aspects of the way people live. If one was to compare such fields as medicine, tourism, travel, business, law, banking, engineering, and architecture etc, the impact of ICT across the past two or three decades has been enormous. Information technology (IT) according to Baikie in Olagunju (2003), is the integration of computer technology, mainly in the form of internet and information management. It provides opportunities for the use of hand texts and images, numbers and graphs, sound and music as well as enable them process information in the following ways: storage and organization, retrieving, storing and analyzing, presenting and communicating. In other words access to information is increased through computer based technologies (Nwagbo and Okoli ,2008). World Bank (2002) stated that the internet is a Powerful tool for improving the efficiency, quality of range of Public service, unity of countries and the world at large. The internet is a resource where individuals can access outstanding, current books, journals, Media, magazine, International conferences, as well as information on research focus and research grant. Internet has many associated resources which promote national unity such as e-commerce, e-learning, Newsgroup, e-conferencing, e-banking to mention but a few.

Information and communication technology (ICT) involves the use of computers and other electronic devices to process information. ICT education covers the use of computers, on line self learning Packages, interactive CDs, satellite, radios, optical fiber technologies, telepresence systems and all types of IT hardware and software (Akudolu, 2002), Adebayo, 2002). ICT also refers to a whole range of facilities involved in information processing and electronic communications, to be handled with skills and expertise for effective realization of its potential in both education and socio-

Pristine

economic development of Nigerian society (Olinya, 2011). ICTs are one of the major contemporary factors shaping the global economy and producing rapid changes in the society. They have fundamentally changed the way people live, learn, communicate, and do business. In order to function in the new world, individuals have to learn to navigate large amounts of information, to analyse and make decisions, and to master new knowledge and to accomplish complex tasks collaboratively. Overloaded with information, one key outcome of any learning experience should be for learners to critically, challenge the material collected in order to decide whether it can be considered useful input in any educational activity. This is the basis for construction of knowledge.

For Unity to be entrenched into any system their must exist peace and mutual understanding among individuals. Likewise, for families, towns, institutions, states, nations etc to move forward in achieving reasonable development there must be unity and peaceful co-existence among members.

The US Department of National Unity defines national unity as “a situation in which all citizens from various ethnic groups, religion and states live in peace as a united nationality giving full committment to national identity, based upon the Federal Constitution. This emphasises people being able to identify themselves with the country. It is also a feeling of being united as a country, especially in times of trouble. For instance, instead of being divided between east and west, a country feels united in the mist of war.

For any nation, national unity is important. It is a feeling that you are part of something, part of something bigger than you and it is worth your efforts to make it better. Thus, it helps to improve the overall functioning of the nation and that central feeling defines national unity. National unity is very important, however, it should be rational, with thought out and sober sentiment, one that should not be taken lightly or emotionally, and definitely should not be tampered with by any one.

Contributions of ICT in Fostering National Unity

The contributions of ICT in fostering National Unity of any country can never be overemphasized, as can be seen in the following areas.

Globalization

Globalization is commonly used as a shorthand way of describing the spread and connectedness of Production, Commodities, Technologies across the world. It is used by some to refer to the effort of international monetary fund (IMF), the world Bank and others to create a global free market for goods and services. It involves the diffusion of ideas, practices, technologies. It is something more than internationalization and universalization (Assessed from <http://www.infed.org/biblio/globalization.htm>). The development in ICT is fast bringing the whole world together into a global village as a result of interconnectivity that exist between countries, Organizations, governments

Nath. Olinya

and other bodies, thus fostering peaceful co existence and mutual understanding (national unity) among parties.

Castells (1996) argued persuasively that in the last 20 years or so of the 21st century, a new economy emerged around the world. He characterized it as a brand of capitalism that has fundamental features, Productivity and competitiveness are, by and large, a function of knowledge generation and information processing; firms and territories are organized in network production, management and distribution, the core economic activities of global- that is, they have the capacity to work as a unit in real time, or chosen time, on a planetary scale (Castells, 2001).

Socialization

Socialization according to Obiadi (1985) is the way in which man learn all that he needs in order to function as a member of a specific society. Uche (1980) defines socialization as a process of learning and adjustment whereby an individual acquires and internalizes the values, beliefs and behaviours which are both customary and acceptable to the fellow. From the above, it is an interaction by which the individual learns the social and cultural requirements that make him a functioning member of the society. Agents of socialization such as Education, Religion, media etc help in promoting national unity.

In education, ICT hold out the opportunity to revolutionize pedagogical methods, expand access to quality education and improve the quality of the system (World Bank, 2002). Online teaching and learning allows for intensive interaction among the learners and instructors, thus promoting mutual understanding. Many developed countries have exploited the potentials of ICT to transform their educational system, thus making their citizens have a feeling that they are part of the society. The internet is an ICT resource where individual can access outstanding materials through e-commerce, e-learning, Newsgroup, e-conferencing, e-banking etc. This helps in bringing people from different ethnic groups, countries and continents all over the world to share ideas and resources thus promoting unity among citizens, ethnic groups, continents, institutions and so on. Most religious activities are aimed at promoting peaceful co-existence among individuals in a society. These activities are transmitted to the recipient through the Information Technology multimedia systems, Website (www), telecommunication systems etc, thus promoting national unity in Nigeria. ICT has revolutionized the media industries such as radio, television, newspapers etc and information are disseminated to the consumers on topics of National unity and it's like.

Security

National security connotes the protection and preservation of the citizens of a nation, presumably against premature death, avoidable ill health, the massive handicap of illiteracy etc. Also the avoidance of various indignities likely to confer injury, insult and contempt, on our lives destitution, penury, incarceration, exclusion, geographical displacement, extortion as in robbery and police harassment and the corrupt practices of bureaucrats in public service provides agencies of government (Sen, 2002 in Onyishi,

Pristine

2012). When the security situation of a country is ensured, the citizens of the country therefore strive for healthy competition among themselves and other nations which promotes national unity. This can be done effectively with proper utilization of ICT security gadgets. In line with the above, Amaefule and Sonwei (2012), report on punch newspaper that defense which is an instrument for national security needs to keep abreast with the best known technology in carrying out its constitutional roles, in doing so, efforts will not be spared in building capacity of our personnel in application of technology best practice.

Through automated security surveillance system, national security can be ensured. This is ICT-based multi-agency security room of the entire country situated in strategic places such as in Police headquarters, State Security Service, Presidency etc where the totality of the automated security monitoring activities across the country are displayed online with video, audio, data and graphics with command and rapid response channels (Nkanga,2010).Computer surveillance involves the monitoring of data and traffic ,example; Cell phone and broadband internet traffic (e-mail, web traffic , instant messaging etc) required to be available for unimpeded real time monitoring by Federal Law Enforcement Agencies. Many forms of technologies can be used such as surveillance cameras, social network analysis, biometric surveillance, data mining profiting, corporate surveillance, satellite imagery etc, to control armed robbery, terrorist, etc on major highways (Gbolade,2011).When the security of a Nation is ensured, it will help usher in national unity and peaceful coexistence among citizens. Data mining is the analysis step of the knowledge discovery in Databases. It is also an interdisciplinary subfield of Computer Science and it is the computational process of discovering patterns in large data sets involving methods at the intersection of artificial intelligence, machine learning, statistics, and database systems (Clifton, 2010). The overall goal of the data mining process is to extract information from data set and transform it into an understandable structure for further use. It involves database and data management aspects, data pre-processing, model and interface consideration, complexity consideration, post-processing of discovered structures, visualization and online updating. Data mining has been used to fight terrorists. Programs include, total information awareness (TIA) program, dissemination, visualization, insight semantic enhancement and the multi-state anti-terrorism information exchange (MATRIX) (Boukaert , 2010).

Social network analysis is the analysis of social network. It views social relationship in terms of network theory, consisting of (nodes) representing individual actors within the network and (ties) which represent relationship between the individual, such as friendship, kinship, organization, sexual relationships (Pinheiro, 2011). Social network analysis is also used in intelligence, counter intelligence and law enforcement activities. The National Security Agency (NSA) uses its clandestine mass electronic surveillance programs to generate the data needed to perform this type of analysis on terrorist cell and other network deemed relevant to national security. Biometric Surveillance involves scanning crowds for their facial characteristics of criminal. Biometric Surveillance is a strong deterrent to crime. Biometric surveillance tests

Nath. Olinya

crowd-scanning facial recognitions system, known as the Biometric optical surveillance system.

Also, the installation of a new surface surveillance system, under the regional maritime awareness capacity initiative is applauding. This surveillance system assists Nigerian Navy in enforcing maritime surveillance and prevention of illegal activities within the country's maritime domain. Also, it creates room for regaining the potential for lost national revenue through sea robbery and piracy (Omodara, 2011).

ICT tool can also be used to engage the public in gathering information that will enhance national security. The internet and electronic media are useful in gathering useful information to assist in the nation's security effort.

Good Governance

Today, society is demanding more transparency on the part of the governments, more decentralization, and more independence to express demands, desires, Prerogatives and priorities. Citizens Participation is one of the most important components of good governance, where leaders are effectively concerned and engaged in the satisfaction of the needs of the citizens. Good governance is understood to denote an interaction process between government and society. Good governance is safeguarded as long as governmental processes are transparent, individuals organize themselves, express their priorities and demands to government officials. Good governance promotes national unity.

The use of ICT in promoting National unity has necessitated the government innovative policy to provide facilities and necessary infrastructure for the promotion of ICT at all levels of government (FGN, 2004). According to Mani (2001), innovative policy are those efforts by Government that encourage the accumulation, diffusion, commercial use of new products, processes and services by security agents, education ministries and commerce at both federal and state levels.

Employment Opportunities

Poverty brought about by unemployment is one of the major causes of insecurity and lack of unity in Nigeria. ICT sees to the preparation of individuals for paid employment and self employment. It is regarded as an instrument for promoting environmentally sound, sustainable development and a veritable tool for alleviating poverty (FGN, 2004). For instance, deployment of first class information technology solution and services can make significant contribution to efficiency of business operations and the overall productivity and profitability of business.

When young people are trained and encouraged by the government at all levels, on basic computer application in various aspects of entrepreneurship, unemployment would be a thing of the past and national unity will be entrenched.. True knowledge of computer skills prepares an individual for paid and self employment. It provides for the opportunity for individuals to express their creativity, boast esteem, instill discipline and

Pristine

breaks social vices (Olinya and Ukwungwu, 2007). For instance, individuals can establish computer centers after training or be employed by big computer establishments, thus promoting national unity. The support by government at all levels immediately after computer training by provision of computer and its accessories is a step in the right direction, as this will help the unemployed graduate to establish call centers, business centers and cyber café, which will provide employment, thereby reducing poverty and unemployment in the country. Acquisition of skills and knowledge of ICT enables one engage in software development as a means of livelihood. Also, internet Forex trading is another dividend of ICT which has helped in alleviating poverty and maintaining self sustainability thereby encouraging national unity.

Conclusion

National Unity is a situation in which all citizens from various Ethnic groups, Religion and States live in peace as a united nationality giving full commitment to national identity based upon the Federal Constitution. For National Unity to be entrenched in modern Nigeria, a solid base in Information and Communication Technology is a sine qua non. The paper suggests that the government innovative policy to provide facilities and necessary infrastructure for the promotion of ICT at all levels of governance should receive full implementation.

Recommendations

In the light of the discussion above, the following recommendations were put forward.

1. Management of institutions and co-operate bodies should help in organizing seminars, conferences and workshops on the need for ICT in fostering National Unity.
2. Government should ensure that the innovative policy to Provide facilities and necessary infrastructure for the provision of ICT at all levels of governance should receive full implementation.
3. Management of institutions should ensure full integration and implementation of ICT in every institution of learning.
4. Government at all levels should ensure full utilization of ICT in Governance.

References

- Adebayo, A.A (2002), New Trend in Access to Information and Communication Technology: Its Implicating to the content of Africa. In M.A.G Akale (Ed.) *Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Science Technology and Mathematics (STM) Education*. STAN 43rd Annual Conference and Inaugural Conference of CASTME Africa Proceedings. 551-533.
- Akudolu, L.R. (2002). Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Centered Education: A Necessity for National Development. *Nigeria Journal of Computer Literacy*. 3(1), 8-10.

Nath. Olinya

- Amaefule, E. & Sonwee, S. (2012). ICT and Security Issues in Nigeria. *Punch Newspaper* march 16.3.
- Bouckaert, R.R.; Frank E.; Hallmark, A.; Holmes, G.; Pfahringer, B.; Reutemann, P. witt,L.H. (2010). Practical machine learning. *Journal of machine learning Research*. (11) 2533-2541
- Castells, M. (1996). *The Rise of the Networked society*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Castells, M.(2001). Information Technology and Global Capitalism. In W. Hutton and A.Gliddens (eds). *On the Edge Living with Global Capitalism*. London: Vintage.
- Clifton, C. (2010). *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Definition of Data mining. Retrieve 8/12/13 from <http://en.wikipedia/wiki/Data-mining>.
- Dzidonu, C. (2002) *A Blue Print for Developing National ICT Policy in Africa*. Nairobi: Newtee Concept.
- Ekuje, F.T & Akor, R.T (2007). The role of ICT in National Development. *School of Vocational Education Journal*. Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu, 4(1), 135.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria, (2004). *National Policy on Education*. Lagos: Federal Government Press.
- Gbolade,(2011). ICT Application can reduce Unemployment, Crime rate in Nigeria. Retrieved on 7/12/2013 from <http://www.tribune.com.ng/index>.
- Iromunta, C. (2000).Challenges Facing Information Technology and the Media. *Daily Times* May 4, 14
- Nkanga, E. (2010). Defending National Security with ICT. *This DayLive*. Nov. 17.
- Nwagbo, C. & Okoli, J.N. (2008). Status of ICT Training and Support for Science and Technology Teacher Educators in Some Universities in South Eastern Nigeria. In B.G Nworgu (ed). *Education in the Information Age: Global Challenges and Enhancement Strategies*. Proceeding of First International Conference of the Faculty of Education. University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Obiadi, G.O.A. (1985). *Essentials of Social Studies for Schools and Colleges in Nigeria*. Onitsha: Delight Press & Affa Publishers

Pristine

- Olagunju, A. M. (2003). Science Education Students level of Awareness and Utilization of ICT: Implications for Tertiary Institutions. In M.A.G Akele (ed). *Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Science, Technology and Mathematics Education*. 44th Conference Proceedings of STAN. 99-104.
- Omodara, J. & Adepegba, S. (2011). Nigeria Navy embraces ICT and RADAR Surveillance to boost maritime security. *Sunday Punch*. September, 2011
- Onyishi, T. (2012). Education and Human Security. *ESUT Journal of Education*. Faculty of Education, Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), Enugu.
- Pinheiro, A. R. (2011). *Social Network Analysis in Telecommunications*. Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/social-network-analysis>.
- Uche, U.W. (1980). *Sociology of Education for NCE Students*. London: George Allen and Union.
- World Bank (2002). *Information and Communication Technologies*. A world Bank group.