

THE PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY BASED TRAINING IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the growing application on Information Communication Technology revolution and how it is transforming training programmes in both private and public organizations in Nigeria. It then discusses state of computer based training in Nigeria, identifying the use of Information Communication Technology in some selected institutions and organizations, the nature of the delivery platform used. The prospects and Challenges in introducing computer based training in Nigerian organizations are also discussed. Finally, it offers suggestions to overcome the challenges confronting technological based training in Nigeria.

.Key Words: prospects, challenges, information computer technology, delivery, organizations, training.

INTRODUCTION

Information and communication are human needs. Without information decision making would be subjective. Communication is central to all forms of social and economic growth. Today, information and communication have significant impact in all spheres of life – social, educational and commercial - through the aid of technology. Technology helps to overcome the barriers - time, cost and distance - associated with these needs. Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has become a major tool for learning, work, recreation and innovation. ICT enables utilization of information in the workplace, in the provision of public services and in the performance of the private sector. Information, knowledge and opportunity epitomize the digital era. This is the age of information. The benefits have made ICT an essential requirement for survival and progress.

All professionals need ICT to improve their effectiveness and impact on the populace. Generally, ICT enables effective fast storing/sorting and transmitting of information, reduction of information quantity and improving strategies for professional operations with high degree of reliability. Olatoye (2009)

3.1 What is ICT?

ICT is an acronym that stands for **Information Communications Technology**

However, apart from explaining an acronym, there is not a universally accepted definition of ICT? A good way to think about ICT is to consider all the uses of digital technology that already exist to help individuals, businesses and organisations use information. ICT covers any product that will store, retrieve, manipulate, transmit or receive information electronically in a digital form. For example, personal computers, digital television, email, robots. So ICT is concerned with the **storage, retrieval, manipulation, transmission or receipt** of digital data. Importantly, it is also concerned with the way these different uses can work with each other. ICT also includes any communications device – encompassing radio, television, mobile phones, computer and network hardware and software, satellite systems and so on, as well as the various services and applications associated with them, such as videoconferencing and distance learning

ICT Education in Nigeria

Computer education and training is provided by public and private institutions, polytechnics, training institutes, some vendors amongst others. A lot of vendors and training institutes now offer certification programmes to qualify as computer professionals. In, addition improved internet availability makes it easier to access training opportunities on the internet.

Three categories of institutions identified as providing Computer Education in Nigeria are:

1. Tertiary institutions setup by statutes e.g. Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Technology, Colleges of Education, etc
2. Institutions that run professional computer education courses and training for public exams and international certifications, e.g CPN, BCS, IDPM, International certifications developed by Microsoft, Cisco, Hewlett Packard, Oracle, Sun Microsystems, etc.
3. Institutions that run computer literacy programmes including computer awareness, appreciation, computer utilization and use of computer packages

For (1) and (2), of such educational programs the aim is to produce professionals with expertise in high demand areas such as Programming, Technical Support, Engineering, Database, Information Warehousing, Networking, Web Development, Research, Internet and E-Commerce. Since ICT is the infrastructure of the Knowledge economy, such skilled professionals are needed to create, operate, design, maintain, program and deploy information and communication technology solutions. In addition for (1), Computer Science and Engineering graduates produced can be involved in conducting hardware and software research and development. For (3) the aim is to produce improve the level of computer literacy of students and working professionals irrespective of their course of studies or profession. The Knowledge economy requires knowledge workers who are IT savvy.

ICT IN THE HEALTH SECTOR

Based on the gaps that were observable in the health sector at the time of the development of the national ICT4D strategies, the following are the summaries of the issues and the strategic plan suggestions under the areas identified for which the deployment of ICT can bring very significant contribution and positive change in the performance of the health sector in Nigeria

Enhancement of Data Exchange and Knowledge Sharing among Health Practitioners

It was expected that enhancing data exchange and knowledge sharing among health practitioners will improve access to the national health system causing better health delivery and provision. It will also improve networking and collaboration between practitioners of health care service delivery

Promotion of Telemedicine

The distance between care providers and patients coupled with the difficulty that is often experienced in the physical transportation of the patients to the medical practitioners, make it necessary to have health care rendered through some remote interaction. The remote interactions between a health care provider and one who needs the care can only be guaranteed by their connection through some ICT equipment – Computer, Internet, PDA, Telephones (Landlines and GSMs) and Radio links.

Provision of a National Health Information System

The policy objectives here are to use ICT for the establishment of Health-care Information Systems (HIS) cutting across primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare systems, to improve the efficiency of patient care, reduce cost and improve productivity of healthcare administration and delivery and to deploy ICT for the development of drug information, records and bibliographic records.

Promotion of the use of ICT in Human Resource Development, Training and Capacity Building

The strategy here is based on improving access to ICT resources within the Health system to facilitate Healthcare service provision and delivery. To achieve this, it was planned to include all medical schools and health training institutions in the system and use ICT for the enhancement of the dissemination of medical information and knowledge, and other aspects of healthcare education. Also, it was planned to promote and support the inclusion of ICT skills into the healthcare education curriculum and use ICT expertise for recruitment, retention, promotion and recognition of medical personnel. The specific action plans that evolved here were to mainstream the deployment ICT as a research tool and means of disseminating information within two years, to deploy ICT for use in distance

learning for medical professionals, to incorporate the acquisition of ICT skills into the curriculum of all medical personnel within two years and to use ICT based information system in healthcare education.

Promotion of Public Awareness in the Prevention of the three main infectious diseases - HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis

The objectives here are to promote the use of ICT in the dissemination of information, collaboration and the evolving of methods in the solutions of the problems of HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis, to identify and encourage the use of unique features of ICT that reduce stigma and ignorance in public awareness of priority diseases and health problems, and to use the lessons that will be learnt in these areas as a basis of dealing with the solution of other prevalent diseases. The plans with which to achieve these are to provide various media with ICT aided information for public awareness in the prevention of these diseases, to mainstream ICT methods for promoting awareness, networking on issues relating to priority diseases and health problems within one year, and to engage the grassroots in adequate information sharing through ICT that will support proper action for the containment of the infectious diseases in all local governments within one year.

I C T IN THE BANKING SECTOR

In Nigeria, ICT usage especially in the banking sector, has considerably improved, even though it may not been as high as those observed for advanced countries.

The revolution in ICT has made the banking sector changed from the traditional mode of operations to presumably better ways with technological innovation that improves efficiency. ICT can enhance efficiency via its use and in recent times banks have been encouraged by the rapid decline in the price of ICT gadgets. This has perhaps increased the bank level of ICT usage. The increase might have also be attributable to business environment that became relatively flexible to accommodate new forms of technological change as a result of reforms in the country. Banking is becoming highly ICT based and because of its inter-sectoral link, it appears to be reaping most of the benefits of revolution in technology, as can be seen by its application to almost all areas of its activities. It has broadened the scope of banking practices and changed the nature of banking as well as the competitive environment in which they operate. A broad opening has been experienced around the world for banks and they are currently taking due advantage of these innovations to provide improved customer services in the face of competition and faster services that enhance productivity.

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING ICT BASED TRAINING IN NIGERIA

While I C T based training holds promises, a number of obstacles will have to be addressed before it can be fully utilized in Nigeria.

The erratic supply of electricity is one of the major challenges of ICT based training in Nigeria. Most of the private and public organizations depend on private power generating arrangement which is very expensive.

There are a number of technological constraints that hinder computer based training. Telephone and other communication infrastructures outside of major cities remain inadequate. Connectivity beyond major capital cities poses a potential problem in creating a national distance education and training strategy.

Another challenge is the lack of a trained cadre of professionals to support the implementation of computer based training. The effective use of I C T based training demands that faculty be properly trained in using distance

education as a delivery mode. To date, few Nigerian trainers are familiar with teaching in an online environment. This situation poses a major challenge in introducing and implementing computer based training.

Lack of effective implementation of government policy on I C T in Nigeria poses another challenge. Policies are needed to provide a framework for the development of computer based education and training.

Access to connectivity remains one of the major challenges in Africa I C T based training programmes are always by low band width and small speed internet connectivity.

Closely related to these connectivity issues are financial matters. Computer based training facilities and equipments are still very expensive unaffordable by many public and private organizations.

Lack of Statistics - There is a dearth of statistics on the ICT sector and the effect of ICT on other sectors. Such information is critical for planning, policy analysis and decision-making.

PROSPECTS

The 21st century offers another unique opportunity in the shift to the knowledge economy. This is another opportunity that Nigeria must not fritter away; if not for any other reason, for the fact that oil is losing its vantage position in the global landscape of political economics as more African countries now discover oil and developed countries intensify their quest for alternative energy sources; all pointing to uncertainty in the international oil market. Add to this, the terrifying fact remains that Nigeria's oil reserves may not be exactly as boundless as our nonchalance would suggest.

.The development and deployment of ICT by countries such as India, Japan, China, the US and some countries in Europe, for research purposes etc, have catapulted the economies of these countries and the result today are the continuous barrier breaking innovations in every field of endeavour .Nigeria needs to develop her capacity for advancement in knowledge based economy through the development of ICT. Nigeria is a developing country that can achieve her overall socioeconomic goals through the use of ICT

. ICT AND EMPLOYEES TRAINING

In a study conducted by Olatoye (2009) it was revealed that there was a significant positive relationship between ICT training and utilization. Therefore, the higher the level of ICT training, the higher the ICT utilization. It is necessary for ICT users to improve their knowledge because of new challenges that constantly come up in ICT operations. It is necessary for organizations to train their professionals to make them current and up to the task of using latest ICT facilities. Heathfield (2004,) noted that training and development of professionals increase employee motivation, retention and development of career- enhancing skills. Owodunmi (2002.) asserted that the quality of human resource of any organization determines its success. Workers' training determine the so called quality and such constant training of workers is a determining factors in the attainment of required skills for better job placement and manpower development in organizations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Thus for Nigerian government to realize the Millennium Development Goals and improve computer literacy level, there is need to deliberately encourage computer training, sensitise every literate citizen on applications of computers so that they will appreciate computers and therefore get motivated to use them. Computer instructors need to disabuse the mind of students and all computer learners on all they have erroneously believed about computers. The computer educators should also emphasise the flexibility and wide applications of computers and

availability of user-friendly computer training software manuals. Also, organizations, both publicly– and privately – owned should provide computer systems for their employees. Adequate training in the use of computer tools should be stressed in the university curricula so that graduates of different programmes will be computer literate

CONCLUSION

ICT is important in enhancing the quality of life and economic development of any nation .Effective utilization of ICT by different professionals will no doubt increase the level of production in work organizations. Level of computer training however has a positive relationship with computer utilization. There is need for effective policy coordination at all levels – Federal, State, Local – of government as well as consistency in economic decision making. Strong leadership is required by government to support ICT as a priority sector.

Human capacity needs to be developed in the public and private sectors to meet the challenges of the Knowledge Economy. Brain drain is a reality. The present education system is not doing enough to incorporate digital entrepreneurship and innovation

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