

Empowering Youth for Future Sustainable Development Through Integration of ICT Using Computer Education for Youth Capacity Building And Emancipation

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Abstract

Youth remains one of the greatest assets that any nation can possess. Potentially, they are the greatest investment for a society's sustainable development and future. This is why it is globally and universally acknowledged that positive fundamental and meaningful changes across economic, political and cultural settings are usually engineered, fostered or shaped by the generation of youths in that society. Therefore, all culture, community and nation, whether macro or micro will allow a good percentage of her youths to be positively engaged to have her future viability and survival sustained. In Nigeria, youth empowerment has brought about a decrease in breakdown of law and order, low crime rate and intra-ethnic hostilities, increase in job creation and high productivity which have elicited national development. Youth empowerment is the most recent slogan in the mouth of contemporary global leaders and well-meaning stakeholders and citizens. Computer education is one of the main keys to economic development and improvements in human welfare. As global economic competition grows sharper, Computer education becomes an important source of competitive advantage. This paper examines empowering youth for a sustainable future through computer education. It was concluded that youth empowerment is a panacea for sustainable future and national development. Areas of concern are integration of Computer education for youth capacity building and sustainable development. The paper recommended that youths should be geared towards developing human and material resources, process and technological skills through computer education. This will sustain them occupationally and equip them better for technical work and self-employment to build the nation and bring sustainable development.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Using Computer Education, Youth Capacity Building

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Introduction

Youth is a concept that connotes varying meanings, implications and applications. Religions, societies, professions like Law, Sociology and Medicine conceive youth differently. For instance, Christianity (Catholicism in particular) classifies youth as any unmarried male or female who does not belong to Christian fathers' or mothers' organisations. In medicine, youth is referred to as the period of life from puberty to the attainment of full growth, maturity or adolescence, between the period of 11-15 years old Jarvis (2009). Sociologically, (Davis, 2013) insists that the term youth is not just a biological category, it is also a societal invention. Lesko (2012), a sociologist, contends that youth is anybody under the administrative gaze of teachers, parents, psychologists, play reformers, scout leaders and juvenile justice workers. Legal perspective of youth is in line with the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) conception of youth as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence and awareness of independence as a member of a community (UNESCO, 2009). (United Nations, 2015) defines youth as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by member states. African Youth Charter (2006) extends the age of youth to 35 years. Within the context of our research, we agree with United Nations stipulated ages of 15-24 and further see youth as between the age where he or she may leave compulsory education, that is, primary and secondary education, and the age at which the person can find and accept first employment. While we accept the United Nations' statistical basis for definition of youth, and the fact that it is socially constructed category (Furlong, 2013), scholars like Tyyska (2005) argues that age-based definitions have not been consistent across cultures or times and that it is more accurate to focus on social processes in the transition to adult independence for defining youth. Thus, far back 1966, Robert (1966) argues: This world demands the qualities of youth: not a time of life but a state of mind, a temper of will, a quality of imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over the life of ease. Robert's assertion is in line with the concern for youth empowerment which necessitates appetite for adventure over life of ease. Yet, we have to acknowledge the peculiarities of that stage in life and put it in proper perspective. Thus, youth is the stage of constructing the self-concept necessitated by variables such as peers, life style, gender and culture (Thomas, 2003), as well as the time of a person's life in which he or she makes choices which will affect one's future (Wing, 2012). Within the context of our research, we further view youth as a stage

in life where one may take unpaid work and therefore, rely on their families emotionally and economically (Furlong, 2013). It is a time in life where one is young, the time between childhood and adulthood (Holtzbrinck, 2013). This time or period in life is characterised by freshness, vigour, spiritedness (George & Charles, 2012) and a particular mindset of attitude (Thomas, 2003).

Empowerment is another concept that is dear to this research. It is a term associated with business that has entrepreneurial orientation. Rappaport (1984) offers a functional definition of empowerment as a process; the mechanism by which people, organisations, and communities gain mastery over their lives. The mastery over one's life is at the core of the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of education. Thus, a comprehensive education is that which integrates ICT as an instrument of empowerment. Adams (2008) conceptualises empowerment as: The capacity of individuals, groups and (or) communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals, and the process by which, individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and others to maximise the quality of their lives.

Both Rappaport's and Adams definitions contend that empowerment has to do with individual and group application. At the individual level, empowerment ensures the building of confidence, insight, understanding and developing personal skills, while at the group or community level, empowerment guarantees the building of trust, co-operation and communication between members of the society or community. At whatever level, empowerment defines all the measures meant to reinforce, broaden the potency of autonomy and self-determination in people and communities for the purpose of enduring sustenance. Empowerment at the individual level relates to our basic concern of youth empowerment. Having known who a youth is above, youth empowerment, therefore, entails the process through which youth acquire knowledge, foster self-confidence, expand choices in life, participate in decision making and improve access to and control over resources. Kar, Paschal and Chickering (1999) define youth empowerment as the process where children and young people are encouraged to take charge of their lives by addressing their situation and then take action in order to improve their access to resources and transform their consciousness through their beliefs, values and attitudes.

Ledford and Lucas (2013) add that youth empowerment focuses on creating greater community change which relies on the development of individual capacity. From the foregoing, we can see the intricate need for harmonisation of the concepts.

Concept of Empowerment

The concept of empowerment came to the limelight in the 1980s when it was embraced by community development specialists who saw citizens' political and social roles as critical ingredients of development (Independence Policy Group, 2003). To them, once citizens are empowered to play these roles they can change their condition now and for the future, and the total awareness of the concept of values for self-sustenance and reliance is a *sin-quo-non* to every growing youth (Isibor, 2011). For youth empowerment for a sustainable future to be realistic, they must be inculcated with proper education for work and living with visual practical work. With appropriate skills and compliance, youths should be able to work with their hands. Youths who undergo training and studies are conceptualised in the transformation of known facts and accepted principles, skills and attributes into potentially profitable new applications for national development.

Bello (2004) analysing the population of youths in Nigeria used the 1991 population census as his yardstick to classify the population of Nigeria youths, between 15 and 34 years as one third of the nations' population. Youths are the most vulnerable segment of the population socio-economically, emotionally, culturally, religiously, politically and otherwise. Their group of people lives with peculiar and unmet needs and aspirations which lead them into a lot of socio problems. The problems range from poor or inadequate parental care, poor education, cult activities, which have grown to a higher level of militancy, unemployment and underemployment, moral decadence, health and negative political manipulation of youth organisations, disabilities without adequate rehabilitation centres and ill- equipped vocational training. According to Isibor (2011) approximately 33% of youths in Nigeria have no access to formal education, youths that lack protection from their families or responsible adults have turned to take the streets, unoccupied buildings, wastelands, bus stops, abandoned vehicles, under bridges, etc. as their place of abodes as well as source of livelihood. To this end, youths empowerment is imperative in Nigeria to sustain their future for national development. Young people are empowered when they acknowledge that they have or can create choices in life, are aware of the implications of those choices, make an informed decision freely, take action based on that decision and accept responsibilities for the consequences of those actions. Empowering young people means creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf, and on their own terms rather than at the direction of others.

These enabling conditions include:

1. An economic and social base.
2. Political will, adequate resource allocation and supportive legal and administrative framework.
3. A stable environment of equality, peace and democracy.

4. Access to knowledge, information and skills, and a positive value system.

Youth empowerment occurs in homes, at schools, through youth organisations, Government policy-making and community organising campaigns. Major structural activities where youth empowerment happens throughout society include community decision-making, organisation planning, and education reforms. Youth Empowerment is an attitudinal, structural and cultural process where young people gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement changes in their own lives and lives of other people including youth and adults (Vavrus and Fletcher, 2006). Youth empowerment is often addressed as a pathway to intergenerational equity, civic engagement and democracy building. Many local, state, provincial, regional, national and international government agencies and non-profit community-based organisations provide programmes centred on youth empowerment. Activities involved therein may focus on youth-led media, youth rights, youth councils, youth activism, youth involvement in community decision-making and other methods (Sazawa and Young, 2006).

Youth Empowerment in Nigeria for Sustainable Future

1. YOU WIN

The YOU WIN project is a youth empowerment and entrepreneurship programme conceived by the Nigeria Ministry of Finance in conjunction with the Nigerian Ministry of Communication and Technology, Nigeria Ministry of Youth Development, the private sector and the World Bank.

2. Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas Youth Empowerment Scheme (NLNG YES)

Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas Youth Empowerment Scheme (NLNG YES) NLNG YES is a sustainable development initiative of the following companies: NNPC, Shell Gas B. V., Total LNG Nigeria Limited and Eni International, specifically targeted at youths within NLNG communities to make them more economically and socially responsible and self-reliant via business and vocational skills acquisition through technical and managerial training. YES, is the product of a paradigm shift in community development and is a conscious effort to promote self-reliance, encourage the growth of small scale businesses and promote economic empowerment.

3. Youth Empowerment in the School System

Youth Empowerment in the School System, the quest for youth empowerment is a project that has gained both national and international concern. The political consciousness being expressed worldwide in youths nowadays is a strong indication. The emergence of youths in the field of arts, sciences and beyond has shown that the huge investments made on them are already yielding positive results (Okoye, 2007). The school system is serving as a very strong platform for youth empowerment in terms of human investment and development which encourages the youth to acquire formal education, leadership skills and full self-realisation in all endeavours. This has enabled the youths to be able to face and manage life challenges and to participate in changing the world for the benefits of mankind.

4. Youth Empowerment for Innovation

Youth Empowerment for Innovation Jidaw (2012) opined that a sustainable future must include the youths but it is not just about being young. The youths are not going anywhere unless empowerment and innovation are in the picture. Not youth activities that are limited to excitement or stimulation but purpose driven youth issues that drive positive change.

5. I.T and Youth Empowerment in Nigeria

The acronym ICT (Information and Communication Technology) is fast becoming a popular one in the country today. In fact, one of the greatest achievements of the present government which has been repeatedly touted by many at a symposium, press conference and party convention is the remarkable in-road made in the telecommunications sector in the form of the Global System of Mobile (GSM) communication revolution. Recently, the Nigerian Information Technology Development Agency (NIITDA) commissioned its Mobile Internet Units (MIUs) to enable greater access to the internet by Nigerians. All these are commendable but much still needs to be done in terms of meaningful ICT growth in our country. Also, the president of Nigeria talked about the Computer-In-School-Initiative (CISI) which was a programme that was also very commendable as it was meant to serve as a platform for leapfrogging the Nigerian youth into the ICT age and also empower them to be self-reliant.

INTEGRATION COMPUTER EDUCATION FOR YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development is not about balancing anything. It does not mean striking some lowest common denominator equilibrium between environmental, social and economic factors. It is about maintaining the basic environmental conditions without which economic development cannot take place at all. Indeed, in the case of the climate, it is about maintaining the fundamental environmental conditions for civilization itself.

Capacity building is the equipping of the human resources with skills and knowledge that will enable them to increase their productivity. Teacher capacity building therefore, is the training of teachers to equip them with

the skills and knowledge required for enhancing their teaching output. Capacity building for teachers through Computer education will enable and equip teachers that are ill-equipped in the use of Computer tools for teaching and learning to be able to do so. The integration process will entail planning, curriculum review patterned to suit Computer integration, development of software that is compatible with the curriculum designed, training of curriculum experts, training of Computer education resource person's, training of lecturers in teacher training institutes in the use of Computer education, creation of awareness to all the stakeholders of education.

The first step to take for successful integration of Computer education in teacher education is the critical examination and assessment of the teacher training institutions (Agabi, 2008). Policy planners must assess the activities of the institution, if required facilities are available; ascertain their staff strength, staff qualifications, number of students the Computer education equipment present can accommodate, and other necessary information. Also to be ascertained is what the institution seeks to achieve and efforts made to achieve them. This will be done because the school personnel (academics and non-academic) will be used, ascertaining this will determine the extent to which the aim of the programme can be achieved. In other words, the vision of the institution must be known. To ascertain as well is the course and various disciplines covered by the institution. The course contents have to be evaluated if it can accommodate Computer education integration and if it is such that it can equip the students and teacher to be able to face the challenges in the discharge of the duties. Methods used in teaching and learning are also important to be verified. This will be done to know how relevant the teaching methods used can be compatible with the technology to be introduced, if the method(s) are suitable for Computer education. If found otherwise, it is important that teachers in these schools be equipped with Computer education skills and knowledge used in teaching and learning. This is because if they are, they can be used as resource persons in the instruction of Computer education used in teaching and learning. Moreover, the extent of the institution's achievement or their level of contribution to the development of the individual, society and the nation at large will be considered. It will involve ascertaining outstanding achievement records, in terms of school achievement, achievement of staff and students.

Curriculum Development: Secondly, teacher training curriculum has to be reviewed by curriculum designers. This process will be done to ascertain if the curriculum is suitable to achieve the desired result. If not, it will be restructured in a way that the outcome of the Computer education integration will solve the problem it is aimed at solving.

ICT Software Development: Instructional aid designers and computer software designers have to work together to develop software that will be compatible with Computer education to be introduced. This is because, teacher ability to link technology and curriculum is important in attending effective Computer education integration. Teachers must be able to appreciate and see the usefulness of Computer education use in their everyday work. So, development of Computer education software that will be compatible with the curriculum is important. This must be developed in a way that teachers can interpret and apply same in the teaching and learning process. This task is quite enormous and challenging therefore, workshops for school heads and teachers on how curriculum can be used with Computer education tools and the importance of using Computer education in teaching and learning must be done.

Funding: Oil companies and Non-governmental organisations (NGO) that contribute to the development of the nation have a role to play in achieving this venture. They can contribute their quota by donating computers to teacher training institutions and schools. As well as organise Computer education professional skill training from school heads and teachers. All these had to be done because; it is believed that when teachers perceive Computer education as a tool to meet curriculum goals, they are more likely to integrate Computer education in their lessons. Therefore, to achieve effective Computer education integration in teacher education, training in Computer education must involve skills and knowledge learnt in school setting (classroom) (UNESCO Bangkok 2004).

Creation of Awareness: School heads and teachers must be sensitised and trained on the use of Computer education in effective teaching and learning this process can be done on local government bases.

Sensitization and Training for Lecturers in Teaching Institutions: The lecturers to be used as resource persons in the Computer education integration programme must be trained on the Computer education tools to be used and how these tools can be used with the curriculum of different discipline and how the knowledge acquired can be transferred to the students.

Incentives and Motivating Environment: Effective Computer education integration also requires introduction of incentives and provision of a motivating environment. Every individual likes to be motivated to perform better or bring out the best in him. In the same way, teachers require motivation and incentives like allowances, recognition and award of prizes for outstanding performance, creativity and innovativeness. Governments and well-meaning individuals can do this to spur teachers' commitment in the training. Moreover, a conducive and motivating environment is important in Computer education integration success. Computer education laboratories must be constructed to be teaching - learning friendly and all facilities needed for the training must be available. Moreover, outstanding students can be made resource assistants to help the resource

person's; this will be a strong motivation. In line with the above statement, Carlson and Gadio (2002) said that to foster an environment that is supportive in learning how to teach effectively with technology, implementing an incentive system and motivational strategies are important. Because teachers are usually reluctant to change their teaching style. In other words, a good number of teachers refuse change; they require additional motivation and incentive to participate actively in professional development activities especially if they have been in the field of teaching for long.

Barriers to Youth Empowerment in Nigeria

Generally, youth empowerment is often than not confronted with myriads of problems. The challenges range from a sense of hopelessness among some youths, social marginalisation of some youths, insufficient opportunities for youth to participate in a meaningful way, lack of communication between youth and adult groups, adults' negative perception of youth and lack of civic knowledge and skills' (Balsano, 2005). Other barriers to youth empowerment include illiteracy, inferiority complex, and lack of incentives after empowerment training and poverty. But within the context of this research, the following barriers were identified: incompetent and inefficient Educators, lack of interest from students, unavailability of teaching aids, poor enrolment in schools due to poverty and students' misplacement of priorities.

Inefficient and unskilled teachers greatly affect the progressive integration of ICTs in secondary schools. Most secondary schools in Nigeria have Computer studies as subjects while in the universities and polytechnics, it is taught as Computer Science or Computer Science Technology. ICT, in most cases, is not taught as a course under any of the departments or subjects. Many secondary schools do not even have computer teachers at all. In schools that offer computers as a subject, the teachers are either NCE or ND holders in computers. Those with BSc or HND in Computer Science hardly accept teaching job in secondary schools, more so now that Nigerian secondary school teachers are not motivated. For this, we have unskilled or quasi-skilled computer teachers, who are not ICT compliant. Ironically and regrettably, many students in the secondary schools explore all kinds of cellular phone applications more than the teachers themselves. More unfortunate and appalling is the situation where a HND Computer Science Technologist takes his faulty phone to a roadside youth for repairs. This type of ugly and pitiful scenario makes it difficult to integrate ICT in secondary schools.

Lack of interest in ICT tools from students clogs the wheels of the supposed integration. This point has a bearing from the first point. Students' interest on a particular subject is often a function of who teaches it and the person's mastery of the subject. Students become disinterested on a subject on their discovery of the incompetency of the teacher. Their interest may also be dampened if the school does not have the requisite teaching laboratory and other teaching aids. More serious reason why students shy away from participating in computer classes is the ban on the use of phones in school premises by school authorities (Onwumere, 2010). It is not possible to teach students ICT without computer aided teaching and learning tools such as computers, overhead projector, well equipped computer laboratory, internet connectivity, etc. All these resources are quite lacking in the Nigerian secondary schools. Some of them, however, are installed and used in some private schools. Many teachers of public schools, especially those in rural areas, may not be able to distinguish between laptop and desktop computers, not to mention accessing the internet for vast resources needed for computer aided teaching (CAT). The researchers observed in the course of this research that some state and federal government owned schools have computer laboratories with internet connections but they are not being put into use. They are built only for political experimentation. Students enter the computer laboratories and hold the mouse in pretence of usage only when the government wants to produce a pictorial score card of the administration for one year in office, political campaign for second term or any time a foreign country's ambassador or UN representative visits the country or state.

Poor enrolment in schools indeed challenges the implementation of integration of ICT in Nigerian secondary schools. This is owed to the ravaging poverty in the land. Many homes in Nigeria undergo abject poverty. They hardly take a meal a day let alone three square meals. Many parents, due to lack of wherewithal, force their children into street hawking, housemaid ship, prostitution and other immodest and humiliating jobs just to make ends meet. Some students drop out of school and join petty trading or undignified apprenticeship to help their parents. It is worse now that the world is experiencing an economic recession. Research shows that poverty and income affect the likelihood for the incompleteness of high school. Empowering the youth in ICT via the secondary school system is more or less a mirage in the face of this kind of situation. Subject like computer, for this category of students, is not worth-taking, let alone bringing in a semi-complex study of ICT, process where young people gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement changes in their own lives and lives of other people including youth and adults (Vavrus and Fletcher, 2006).

CONCLUSION

Youth empowerment should be geared towards development of human and material resources, process and technological skills. Gradually education in Nigeria is being shifted back to private and non-governmental

agencies, including religious bodies. As a result of this, those who are unable to meet the high fees end up at home and grow to become a problem to society. If the national goal of education of building a great and dynamic economy has to be achieved, entrepreneurial education should be encouraged, and for youth empowerment for a sustainable future to be realistic, they must be inculcated with proper entrepreneurial education for work and living with visual practical work. With appropriate skills, attitude and compliance, youths should be able to work with their hands which will elicit national development. Levels of development attained by any nation determine if the nation is developed, developing and or under-developed. For Nigeria to advance to be addressed as a developed nation, technology development of her workforce especially the teachers are required. This is because teachers are known the world over as nation builders; therefore, Computer education integration into teacher education is imperative. To achieve this, all education stakeholders' development needs can be met.

Recommendations

To further enhance youth empowerment in Nigeria, the following recommendations are made:

All stakeholders must strive to increase the participation of youths in civic processes of community and nation building. The bottom line is to empower young people to contribute positively to the economic and social progress of the nation and instil in them a sense of purpose and discourage youth violence. Since government alone no longer has the capacity to provide jobs for this large population, it has become pertinent to reach out to parents and other stakeholders who will assist to engage the youths in productive ventures while government provides the enabling environment.

Youth education should be geared towards developing human and material resources, process and technological skills. These will sustain them occupationally and equip them better for technical work and self

- a) There should be curriculum review as to integrate Computer education into teacher education curriculum
- b) Compulsorily, teachers should be trained in the use of Computer education in teaching.
- c) Leaders at all levels of education should be trained in the use of Computer education.
- d) There should be collaboration between all the education stakeholders in the provision of Computer education.
- e) There is a need to improve the power supply.
- f) Computer education should be incorporated into teacher training institutions.

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