ICT and Youth Empowerment in Nigerian

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Abstract
Youth empowerment is the most recent slogan in the mouth of contemporary global leaders and well-meaning stakeholders and citizens. The clamor for youth empowerment is intensified considering the global economic meltdown and the ravaging economic recession biting hard on developing countries, especially African countries. The mass retrenchment of workers by multi-national companies, private and public sectors, and supposedly non-existent or perhaps, inadequate white-cola jobs make youth empowerment more needed now than ever. Youth empowerment is indeed the way to go. But such empowerment has to be Information and Communication Technology (ICT) driven. This informs the researchers' choice of Nigerian secondary school students as point of reference. In this research, concrete effort is made to clarify the key concepts of ICT, youth and empowerment. The research examines the integral relationship between ICT and youth empowerment, ICT as entrepreneurial strategy to youth empowerment and how Nigerian secondary school students can be empowered via ICT. The study also investigates the militating barriers to youth empowerment in Nigeria and finally makes recommendations, among which are reorientation and provision of ICT teaching aids.

Key words: ICT, Youth, Empowerment and Entrepreneurship.

Introduction
It is a truism that youths are leaders of tomorrow. Yet, more self-evident truth that leadership is a mirage to an un-empowered youth. Resources to genuine and enduring leadership accrue from meaningful youth empowerment; empowerment that is ICT compliant. The popular aphorism, ''catch them young", defines the need to target secondary school students in the empowerment project; thus, the concern of this research. For the Christians, the holy Bible insists that we train children when they are young so that they do not depart from right ways when they grow up (Prov. 22:6; 13:24). The salient need to reprogrammed and restrategize empowerment and bring it down to secondary school level is not compromisable. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are feasible if youths at this level are targeted. We are aware that in recent years, there has been growing interest on how computer and internet can be used to enhance and harness the efficiency and effectiveness of education at all levels. ICTs and other older technologies like the telephone, radio and television, have longer and richer history as instructional tools. Students of secondary schools, more than ever before, have keyed in to ICTs owing to their

capacity to improve their learning processes. Before now, e-learning was limited to students of tertiary institutions. Today, students of secondary schools are showing ardent interest in exploring all the capabilities that ICTs can offer. The capabilities include the aptitude for economic sustenance which comes from empowerment. Education without empowerment is like a beautiful talking drum without proficient instrumentalist or beater.

We agree that technology has great promise in increasing the economic empowerment of youth especially in developing country like Nigeria. Our worry, however, is the promise in reality. Our further, even greater concern is which technologies hold greater promise and how the technologies can be integrated into secondary school system. For us, ICT is that technology, and if integrated has the propensity of empowering the youth at secondary school level.

Conceptual Clarification
It is imperative, at this point, that we clarify our key concepts of ICT, youth and empowerment. This is to drive home our systematic argument. The three key concepts: ICT, youth and empowerment are not novel to an average contemporary man. Many experts' definitions have been offered on each of them. ICT is an acronym for Information and Communication Technology. Originally, ICT as a compound concept defines any communication device or application that has to do with information storage and dissemination. Such devices include radio, television, cellular phones, computer and network infrastructures. Today, it has assumed new meaning. Ugwoke (2011) conceptualizes ICT as a set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, disseminate, store and manage information. It is equally an embracing concept that includes hardware, software, processes and people that are involved with technologically oriented communication. Ekoja (2007) additionally refers ICT as the equipment used for capturing, processing, storing, transmitting an accessing information which has offered Educators and Leaners from all walks of life tremendous opportunities in information handling and utilization. Information and communication Technologies are basically driven from two core technologies — information and communication. While the information technology means the materials including the computer software and hardware that essentially store, retrieve and manipulate information, the communication technology defines the capacity to draw out data or information in the network for utilitarian purposes. ICT, thus, has become inevitable avenue to assessing global existing and innovative technologies, be it information or communication, which does not only support but also sustain empowerment.

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' organization. The holy Bible describes youth as period of vigor and strength (Job 33:25; Ps. 144: 12), as well as stage of inexperience (1 King 3:7; 1 Chron. 22:5; Jer. 1:16, 1 Tim. 4:12). 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, p. 2). Sociologically, (Davis, 2013, p. 1) 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. The 15 and 24 ages are the bracket for students of Nigerian secondary schools.

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 characterized by freshness, vigor, spiritedness (George & Charles, 2012) and 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, organizations, 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 instrument of empowerment. Adams (2008) conceptualizes empowerment as: The capacity of individual, 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 maximize 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 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 harmonization of the concepts.

The Relationship between ICT and Youth Empowerment

ICT shares an integral relationship with empowerment. ICT is the resource that drives youth empowerment. ICT symbolizes an exceptional enabling instrument for youth empowerment. Abbasi (2001) states that "ICT represents a unique knowledge-based social infrastructure". ICTs are the infrastructure of global digital economy. Youth empowerment aims to improve quality of life. ICT streamlines such quality of life and it can be achieved through participation in ICT programmes.

There are several indicators of empowerment. They include confidence and understanding, skills in analysis and communication, trust and caring, tolerance, communication and cooperation as well as access to information. All these indicators are harnessed with ICT. Communication and access to information are the hallmark of ICT which guarantees critical awareness. Critical awareness entails the process of providing youth with the information and resources necessary for analyzing issues that affect their lives and environment as well as strategize on ways to act as change agents in their communities.

Empowerment connotes economic opportunities. Well-meaning global leaders today clamour for economic empowerment of the youths; youths themselves desire it. Economic empowerment consists of giving youths the means to be in control of their own economic destinies and be typically self-sufficient. Today, the youth are already finding economic opportunity with ICTs. ICTs provide the youth with the requisite information and platforms for decision-making and encourage their active participation in harnessing and harmonizing the empowerment.

Again, (Edrain, Tibon & Tugas 2015) state that economic empowerment teaches entrepreneurial skills, how to take ownership of their assets and how to have income security Also, Kar, Paschal and Chickering (1999) gives us five competencies of a healthy youth which include positive sense of self, self-control, decision-making skills, a moral system of belief and pro-social connectedness. All these competencies and income security are realizable if the youth have access to information, communication and technology. The world is said to be a global village because information and communication technology exist. Information is power; communication is the crevice and footing, while technology is the potent apparatus. This is the tripod on which any meaningful and significant youth empowerment stands.

ICT as Entrepreneurial Strategy for Empowering Nigerian Secondary School Students

Young people, that is, the youth, especially those within our age bracket in our definition spend much of their lives in educational setting and their experiences in school can go a long way in shaping much of their subsequent lives. To therefore empower them at this stage in life is to provide them the substantial ladder with which they climb to the climax of their ambitions and economic sustenance. Several ICT entrepreneurial resources and strategies exist, that if successfully integrated in their studies would, in no small measure, make them self-sufficient in later life.

Web design and hosting, creating applications and piloting the application is very important ICT resource for empowerment. Web design and hosting, web advertisement and other related web-issues provide the empowerment. This helps to develop knowledge-base of service centres. Web host involves hosting other websites through one domain name. This is important in e-commerce and teleworking where one can act as an agent for other establishments outside one's country or country of residence. Web design and hosting does not require one going to the office. It can be done at the comfort of one's home. Closely

related to this web design and hosting is the Internet employment agency services. With increase in website designers, different innovative ideas emerge on daily basis via the websites. The websites provide job search engines within them. Agencies can be organized through the websites. Here, a prospective entrepreneur does not even need his own website; he can subscribe for space in other websites and then act as agent for the organization bureau that has need for it. He can also connect business to customers.

Internet centres, cafes and photocopying shops are other strategies for ICT empowerment. If deployed, the centres and cafes provide internet services such as browsing, e-mail services, etc. for people at minimal cost. Many people that need duplicate copies of credentials, text books, documents, etc. can do them in photocopy section of the internet centre. These ICT resources have the capacity of employing many people and improve their standard of living. This can even be expanded to a training centre where people can acquire knowledge on the uses of internet and so on.

ICT tools like computer, scanners, and other accessories to design graphics provide another entrepreneurial strategy for empowerment. Students of secondary schools can be groomed in the graphics which provide basic knowledge in printing business. Computers are used to make fine flyers and posters for certain producers and products, flex banners for burial, marriage ceremonies, church programmes and political campaigns. The graphic centres evolve from traditional business centres. The business centres originally provide people with services for communicating information to customers. Today, its scope has been expanded to include graphic designs.

In addition, printing and sales of airtime (recharge cards), sales of phones and network lines constitute veritable entrepreneurial resource in which students can be empowered. Sale of phones and their accessories, and that of recharge cards provide brisk business in Nigeria. Many Nigerian youths are already in this business. They have even gone digital because one can now purchase airtime around the clock (24/7) through his bank account and they are improving their standard of living with it. Many Nigerian youths have their kiosks and makeshift stores where they sell phone accessories and charging points. Many of them open the kiosks in the evening after school hours. What they require, however, is the intellectual knowledge and skills to sustain the business. This knowledge and skill can be provided in the classroom in the secondary schools. Closely related to this, is computer and cellular phone repairs. Many Nigeria youths are also already in the business. Our research, however, shows that those into it are not technologically skilled. They only do guess work, trial and error. They actually have the will and the desire. What they need more is the training which can come as part of their studies in the secondary schools.

All the above discussed potentials in ICTs for empowerment can be made available to Nigerian secondary school students. They can be integrated in their secondary school curriculum. Nevertheless, the integration is not without challenges.

Barriers to Youth Empowerment in Nigeria
Generally, youth empowerment is often than not confronted with myriads of problems. The challenges range from "sense of hopelessness among some youths, social marginalization 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 where identified: incompetent and inefficient Educators, lack of interest from students, unavailability of teaching aids, poor enrollment 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 are not taught as a course under any of the departments or subject. Many secondary schools do not even have computer teachers at all. In schools that offer computer as a subject, the teachers are either NCE or ND holders in computer. 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 computer, 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 talk of 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 pretense of usage only when government wants to produce 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 worst now that the world is experiencing economic recession. Research shows that poverty and income affect the likelihood for the incompletion of high school. According to Njapa-Mingard (2010), factors like poverty "increases the likelihood for the youth to not go to a college or university". Empowering the youth in ICT via secondary school system is more or less a mirage in the face of this kind of situation. In the course of this research, we took trips to some public secondary schools in some villages in Imo and Anambra states and discovered, to our chagrin, average of 3-5 students in SS1, 2 and 3. It is, thus, problematic to think of empowering youth without increasing secondary school enrolment.

In addition, misplacement of priorities by secondary school student poses a clog in the wheels of empowerment of youths. We realized as we interacted with students that many of them do

not know what they want in life. Many of them are in school, not for the relevance of being educated but to please their parents, guardians and uncles who wished them to have at least an SSCE result. Many of them would prefer to make money in an unlawful, crooked and immodest means. In fact, they want to be rich overnight than the time they are supposedly wasting in secondary school. Subject like computer, for this category of students, is not worth-taking, let alone bringing in a semi-complex study of ICT.

Conclusion

Information and Communication Technologies are as vital as the successes of any empowerment strategy. More essential is ICT being a resource and entrepreneurial strategy for youth empowerment itself with regard to secondary school students. ICT has not only become the order of the present business but has transformed the traditional entrepreneurship. Recent studies by Austins and Tygris (2010), Eduardo (2006), and Kollman (2006) posit that ICT entrepreneurship has become more and more important and useful. The beneficial outcome to youth empowerment programmes are improved social skills, improved behavour, increased academic achievement, increased self-esteem and increased efficacy (Catalano et al, 2004). Empowerment theory suggests that engaging youth in pro-social, meaningful and community-enhancing activities that the youth themselves define and control helps youths gain vital skills, responsibilities, and confidence necessary to become productive and healthy adults (Golay & Malatesta, 2014). Other researchers have established the fact that youth empowerment is a framework to prevent and reduce youth violence (Reischl et al, 2011), can improve conflict avoidance and resolution skills and increase group leadership skills and civic efficacy (Fuentes, Goncy & Sutherland, 2011). These benefits are realizable if ICT is used to drive the empowerment at the level and stage of secondary schools. In Nigeria, the integration of ICT in secondary schools as empowerment strategy is not devoid of teething challenges. Though enormous and tasking as the problems are, they can be handled with the following suggestions.

Recommendations

1. ICT should be created to be a subject at least for senior secondary schools and students. It should be included in their curriculum and made compulsory to all students. If this is not possible, it should be integrated as a subset of computer studies/education. ICT entrepreneurship and empowerment should be a veritable aspect of computer studies to include phone and computer repairs, sales, internet usages, website design and hosting, Software development etc. Teachers already teaching the subject could be trained to meet the demand of the current integration and dynamic nature of computer education.

2. Competent, skilled and self-motivated teachers in ICT should be employed by state and federal governments to teach the subject. Computer laboratories built in public secondary schools should be connected to the internet and be put to judicious use than being used for political purposes.

3. There is the need for reorientation from the grass root in the rural areas for parents to see the need to send their wards to school than diverting their careers to undignifying jobs. The orientation should continue in the schools as students are admitted into junior and senior secondary classes. The orientation and reorientation would remove misplacement of priorities in the students and make them focused towards being empowered via ICT.

4. Government at different levels should collaborate with one another to find a functional strategy targeted at accommodating identified poor students. They could be awarded free education or granted subsidized tuition fees. Total free education to all students may not be feasible at the face of Nigeria's dwindling revenue and global recession. This, if done, will increase enrolment and reduce drop out.

5. Teaching aids like computer laboratory with internet connectivity, phone and computer repair equipment/tools and accessories, etc. should be provided to public schools, and more importantly, made to be put to use. Practical should be conducted with them as often as possible. Private schools should be regulated and made to provide the teaching aids to their teachers and students, as they are partners in the empowerment project.

6. The teaching aids should be properly supervised and monitored by the schools' authorities to guard them from vandalization and being roughly handled by students and teachers. Spoilt teaching aids should be replaced immediately. In essence, maintenance culture and discipline should be inculcated into the students and teachers to ensure the durability of the teaching aids.

7. Judicious use of cell phones should be allowed in public and private schools. Students should bring their cell phones only during ICT classes for practice. This will have direct and indirect effect in improving the interest of students in ICTs studies. However, students should be monitored properly as regards the true essence of the phones to guard against abuse and unnecessary distractions.

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