CHAPTER 9.

BRIDGING DIGITAL DIVIDES THROUGH INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES FOR INNOVATIVE EDUCATION AND ENHANCED LIFE-STYLE AMONG RURAL DWELLERS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has since its inception been a global phenomenon which has orchestrated industrialization, economic growth and civilization in most countries of the world especially the developed nations such as America, Canada, Japan etcetera. It has continued to enhance educational and technological advancement in these countries while on the other hand, there is a big gap in the case of developing countries. This gap also known as digital divide or barrier is the bane of most sub – Saharan – African countries including Nigeria. This means

that these countries are not enjoying ICTs as much as the developed countries. The effects of course are enormous as there are no remarkable industrial development especially in the rural areas. In Nigeria for instance, students in rural communities do not have access to ICTs and so cannot compete with their urban counterparts who are enjoying a bit of it. This is an aberration information is power and it is in the right of every human to have access to it. Reasons abound for this lack but the major one being inappropriate mode of enlightenment. English language is usually employed which of course should not be because aside students, other rural dwellers are illiterates indigenous languages therefore should be utilized in educating them on the usefulness of ICTs. The researchers of this work are therefore advocating that this method can adequately bridge the digital divide among the rural populace thereby ushering in innovation in education and other human endeavour throughout the nation.

Keywords: *Bridging, Digital Divides, Language, Innovation, Education*

INTRODUCTION

According to UNESCO Institute for statistics as captured in Rusell and Steele (2013), Information, Communications and Technologies (ICTs) means a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to transmit, store, create, share or exchange information. It is an umbrella term that includes any communication device, encompassing radio, television, cell phones, computer and network hardware, satellite system including distant learning and conferencing (Wikipedia). In other words, ICTs simply implies a compendium of various information techniques which people utilize for various purposes.

Information, Communications and Technologies is the

aftermath of the age long scientific research and inventions by some notable technologists. For instance, Konrad Zuse invented computer known as ZI computers in 1936; in 1942, John Atanasoff and Clifford Berry invented ABC computers, while in 1946, John P. Eckert and John W. Mauchly invented ENIAC 1 computers and then BMI computers in 1951. In the 1970s, mobile phones, internet and World Wide Waves were developed. Android and smart phones started featuring in the 1980s, followed by the current feat performed by Philip Emeagwali, who is said to have developed the fastest computer in the world. He won the 1989 Gordon Bell prize for the price – performance in high – performance computing applications. Wikipedia: https://www.google.com

All these developmental stages have continued to usher in more inventions, discoveries, large scale of computer usage, creativity, efficiency; and have unarguably continued to better the lots of people, especially of the developed world. For them, there is financial freedom, effective and easy education and farming system, higher life expectancy, healthy, life – style and longevity. According to Rusell and Steeke (Ibid), the digital revolution has transformed much of the global economy and ICTs play a key role in this revolution.

Ibenegbu (google.com) opines that ICT provides great importance to economies by giving the digital world the possibility of becoming a real fourth Industrial Revolution that can provide a lot of possibilities. In other words, there are lots of gains to ICT subscribers and users. However it is sad to note that these gains are not equitably and evenly distributed across globe. The

developing countries such as Nigeria as far as ICT services are connected are highly disadvantaged.

This paper therefore will discuss digital devides and their effects on the rural communities, advantages of ICTs, factors limiting ICTs utilization in Nigeria, solutions are also proffered. All these are aimed at bridging the digital divides so that citizens can enjoy better life – style in all ramifications.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

- **Bridging:** According to Oxford Advanced Learners' English Dictionary, bridging means overcoming obstacles or difficulties. In other words, it connotes proffering solution to an existing problem.
- **Digital Divide:** This means the gap between those with regular and effective access to digital technologies and those without. According to Carmen Steele (2019), the digital divide is the gap that exists between individuals who have access to modern Information Communications and Technology and those who lack access. Digital divide can equally be termed to mean barrier, obstruent, blockage and hindrance to persons who have no access to various ICT uses and in contrary to those who have.
- **Innovation:** This means introducing something new in any facets of life, be it in education, culture, rites, business, farming, fashion etcetera. Also according to Dictionary Definitions from Oxford Languages, innovation means the action or process that is crucial to the continuing success

of any organization.

- **Education:** Education means the process of imparting knowledge, skill, facts and ideas that have been learned, either formally or informally. According to Hornby (2014), education means systematic training and instruction (especially of the young in school, college etc). Again, education means a gradual process which brings positive changes in human life and behaviour. It brings a natural and lasting change in an individual's reasoning ability to achieve the targeted goal, in other words, a passage to progress. (passioneducation.com) (2019). Education therefore is power and it is the greatest asset parents or nations can give to individuals. Education enhances ones social life. It librates and enlightens. Most importantly, it brings several opportunities to individuals. And it is through education that the utilities of ICTs are inculcated thereby making the beneficiaries to be innovative and creative. No country can therefore afford to neglect education and ICTs because of their innumerable benefits.

ADVANTAGES OF ICTs

The usefulness of Information and Communications Technologies cannot be quantified, and are going to be discussed in this section as follows.

- **Effective and Fast Learning**
  ICTs make teaching and learning efficient and fast. This means that with digital devices such as computer or power point, teaching is made easy

and students learn many things in short space of time. According to Education Zone (2018), teachers will have a fast and effective way of teaching because they can just scroll up and down to teach the lesson and students perform better because what they see on the screen of the laptop or power points create lasting impression on their minds and make them remember points easily. It therefore makes teaching and learning easier and less tasking.

- **Creativity**
  People who have access to ICTs are proactive, creative and inventive. Students are exposed to rational thinking and are logically sound. With the application of ICTs in schools, rote learning is becoming obsolete because students now become pragmatic and practical in their orientations giving more attention to higher order, thinking and problem solving skills, learned through real world tasks. According to Ala-Mutka and Redecker (2008), information and communication technologies provides new opportunities for education and training, as they enhance learning and teaching, and facilitate collaborations, innovation and creativity for individuals and organizations.
- **Makes Students Smarter and more Confident**
  Students who genuinely access ICTs exhibit intellectual knowledge, social ability, dexterity and competence equipped with digital technology. They are confident because they are sure of their capabilities and can compete favourably without

any inferiority complex with their counterparts anywhere in the world.

- **Promotes Healthy Life – Style**
  Nowadays, many health tips are posted on the internet and people gain a lot reading them. By this, many get solutions to their health challenges while many as well get information that aid them prevent one ailment or the other and so maintain healthy living which of course is beneficial and crucial to nations development, because healthy individuals beget healthy nations according to Van Zyl Spies (2019), the ultimate goal of development is that there should be an increase in an individual's quality of life and the health is a major contributing factor to quality of life and also contributes positively to a country's economic development.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has a lot of potentials and is already being utilized in this field, he opined. And so in the health sector, ICT helps in diagnosing diseases and damages to the body with body scanning machines, and solutions also proffered.

- **Human Capital Development and Global Advancement**
  Information and Communications Technologies is the engine house of development and progress of nations and their citizens. Any nation that does not embrace technological breakthroughs well surely be industrially backward and cannot make any global advancement. ICTs build and develop nations and individuals. It reduces poverty to the

barest minimum while making the utilizers have robust economy and life – style. People make a lot of money through legitimate means like logging, crypto currency, forex, goldmine etcetera. According to Satish Patel and Gujarat V. (2014), device is about change. Change for the better. Development is about making a better life for everyone. It means meeting of the basic needs of food, protection, education, health and a healthy environment, where all people can live with dignity and respect.

- **Rescues People from Primitivity and Non – Standard Life – Style**
  Modern technologies have continued to better the lots of people. Most primitive and non – standard ways of doing things are now going into oblivion. Nowadays, beneficiaries of ICTs carry out their day to day activities with much ease, be it home, in the offices or in schools. For instance, digital computers have replaced analogue typewriters, people now wash cloths with washing machines as against stressful and energy sapping manual washing method, electric or gas cooker replacing stressful and smoking firewood method of cooking. Also mechanized farming has replaced manual labour system thereby making easier, faster, more effective and more productive. According to Mansi Bosania (2013), nowadays, many ICT gadgets are used in our life and they facilitate mobility, thus used anywhere and anytime. These gadgets operate for information, speed, and communication and reduce the

physical and mental human workload.

- **Makes Communication Easier and Faster** Modern ICT devices like SMS, telephone telegram, facebook, whatsapp, instagram, email yutube, etcetera have practically replaced the former means of communication like letter writing, journeying from one far or short distance to another in order to deliver message, ringing of gong and so on. All these previous means are now eroding. Communications can now be made in a flash. No matter the distance, messages can get to the receiver within one second. ICT tools are therefore used to communicate, create, disseminate, store, retrieve and manage information without stress and so it is communication made easy.

FACTORS LIMITING ICTS IN RURAL AREAS

Despite the fact that ICTs have contributed immensely in human capital and industrial development of societies and individuals; and is seen as a gateway to progress, advancement and globalization, it is lightly regrettable and sad that most countries from the Sub-Sahara Africa are not accessing them. In Nigeria for instance, rural communities are worst for it. They do not have simple access to these great and awesome opportunities, whereas as humans, they have the right to. Many factors are actually responsible for this lack and will be discussed as follows:

- **Discrimination against Urban and Rural Areas** There are undue favoritism for urban dwellers as

against their rural counterparts. More developmental projects are usually situated in the urban cities than in the rural. This in essence means insensitivity on the part of the government and stakeholders at various levels to the citizens legitimate needs. Good and standard schools, markets, hospitals, reads ICT centres and other social infrastructure are not built in the rural areas, and this is quite out of place.

- **Lack of Enlightenment / Inappropriate Means**
  There are absence of enlightenment and sensitization on the usefulness and benefits of ICTs to humanity especially the rural dwellers. No efforts have been made to educate these people so that they can develop interest on the potentials and opportunities inherent in ICTs. And if at all, there is enlightenment, inappropriate means are usually employed. This means that instead of using indigenous languages to educate the illiterate citizens, foreign languages like English or French are used. As far as language use is concerned, online content is only in a handful of languages. And this does not help matters because they will not assimilates not to take of practicalizing.
- **Failure of National Education Planners to make it Compulsory in the Curriculum**
  As important as ICT is, National Education Planners have not still made it compulsory at all levels of education in Nigeria. This is a draw back and has hindered a lot of individuals from benefiting and showcasing their talents.

- **Lack of Effective Network to Operate**
  Most of the time, there is much difficulty in assessing internet in rural areas because of ineffective network coverage; even to operate ordinary phone, not to talk of computer or other ICT devices.
- **High Charges from Network Operators**
  Another factor hindering ICT usage in rural areas is high tariff charges from various network owners, like MTN, Globacom, Airtel etcetera. This makes data and airtime usages extremely difficult because the rural dwellers are not enjoying robust economy either. There is also epileptic or unstable power supply. This makes utilitization of ICT devices even worse because most time, no electricity supply to power the devices.
- **Poor Standard of Living**
  So many people especially the rural communities still live below the International Poverty line of $1.90 or N950 per day and so do not usually find it easy to cope with the exigencies of life. To own most of the ICT devices is always a mirage. Rather we have poverty stricken communities, high rate of illiteracy, ill-health, high mortality rates among other challenges.

EFFECTS OF DIGITAL BARRIERS ON RURAL COMMUNITIES

The non – availability and inaccessibility of ICTs have impacted so adversely on rural dwellers. In communities where there are no manifestations of ICT presence, life is

bound to be boring, as there are no meaningful growth and development. Nothing seems to move forward. People of such areas still live in primitivity and they know nothing about technological advancement. Talents are caged and as such, no invention, no discovery, no creativity, no industrialization.

In these areas too are increase in health challenges and mortality rates, majority because they do not have access to internet where they would have continued to get tips on how to manage their health.

Digital barriers also make these rural dwellers to engage in primitive farming methods that are very stressful and less productive, as against the mechanized systems that are stressfree, fast, and highly productive. This in essence makes them to wallow in abject poverty and so are reduced to penury.

Teaching and learning in schools situated in these communities are very tasking, burdensome and less effective. This is because they still engage in teaching and learning methods it are becoming absolute and out-dated. They don't know anything about e-learning or e-commerce. Therefore instead of students being smart and creative, they became dull and inferior and so cannot exhibit competence in any field of endeavour.

The crux of the matter therefore is total retardation of mental, physical and industrial development of human persons, which of course is highly regrettable and sad indeed. Effects of the digital divide therefore are immensely felt in the following areas; education, job opportunities, communication, politics, consumer satisfaction, health information, community involvement, government and emergency information. htpp://www.digitaldividecouncil.com (2018).

THE INDISPENSABILITY OF LANGUAGE IN ICT OPERATIONS

Language implies communicating by means of signs, gestures, sounds or symbols employed by persons to persons in order to exchange or express ideas, messages, concerns, feelings or desires. Apart from humans, animals also have their own system of communication, majorly by sounds and gestures and these are called non – instinctive methods. In any case, it is only human beings that are endowed with the innate ability to speak. According to Babajide as cited by Njoku, J.C. et al (2018) in African Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, language constitute that quality of human peculiarity, that unique attributes of man's distinctiveness and that priceless mandate of superiority over entire creation. Also Dictionary.com defines language as a body of words and the systems for their use common to a people who are of the sane community or nation, the same geographical area, or the same cultural tradition, or a communication by voice in the distinctively human manner, using arbitrary sounds and conventional ways with conventional meanings. Language therefore connotes utterances made by humans so as to achieve various goals.

The usefulness and importance of language cannot be measured or quantified. It is one of the greatest endowment and privileges God has given to mankind. As man evolved language almost immediately followed suit. With language, Adam, the first man on earth was able to give names to every creature; animals, trees and human beings alike (Genesis 2:20).

Language can be said to be the most important aspect of any field of endeavour because without language, nothing can function. No area of study can be delved into.

It is therefore through the use of language that people get to be educated or trained. According to Mayell, (2003) as captured in Say lordotorg. Github pages, some linguistics go so far as to suggest that the acquisition of language skills is the primary advancement that enabled our prehistoric ancestors to flourish and succeed over other hominid species. Without language, the world will have been in complete chaos, confusion and anarchy. When every human being keeps mute without even gesture or sign, what an existential quaquire would the world have been!

Language has therefore brought about civilization, enlightenment, progress, advancement and lots more because people are taught and sensitized through the use of language. According to Fishman (1971) as cited in Dikenwosi and Dimejesi (2018) in African Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, language is not a mere carrier of content that is either latent or manifest to him language itself is content where lots of information and meanings can be drawn. Language therefore, is of paramount importance. and so, for any country to attain significant advancement in national development, such as a country must honour, nurture, cherish and develop her language. Dimejesi (2018).

ICT is majorly about disseminating information, instruction, guide and educating people on how to utilize and maximize potentials inherent in it. It builds nations and individuals and makes them highly productive and creative. Many things come into play when operating ICT devices, like computer, powerpoint, e-mail, SMS and much more. In all these it is only language that makes them workable and attainable. The indispensably of language is ICT operation them becomes non –

contestable. Two of them therefore are at interface. ICT operators therefore cannot practically do without employing language in their various activities.

Language is an area where open access resources, online course, virtual classrooms and social networks based on information and communication technologies are being increasingly used to give learners access to information, promote interaction and communication and enhance digital literacy skills. https://www.google.com. Also Antoni (2014) opines that language in general provides an interesting interface in the teaching of science, mathematics, philosophy, art, computing etcetera.

And so for any person to actually benefit from ICT opportunities, such persons must be ablest or conversant with the language of instruction, otherwise it becomes a wasted effort, time and resources.

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES, RURAL DWELLERS AND ICT

Indigenous language is the language of ones immediate environment. It is the language spoken by indigenous people living in the same geographical or homogenous community with common ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural inclination. Rural dwellers are indigenous speakers of mother tongue, also called local or indigenous languages. The rural dwellers are illiterates and they feel at home speaking their local languages. They also comprehend or assimilate more when being educated or enlightened using these languages. Being uneducated therefore, it becomes irrational and absurd to employ any language foreign or unfamiliar to them to instruct them on the use and applications of any sort.

According to the United Nations Permanent Forum

on Indigenous Issues (UNPEII), indigenous languages are not only methods of communication, but also extensive and complex systems of knowledge that have developed over millennia. They are central to the identity of indigenous peoples, the preservation of their cultures, worldviews and visions and an expression of self – determination. When indigenous languages are under threat, so too are indigenous people themselves. Also indigenous language implies a local means of communication between members of a people or community, it contains within it the essence of considerable information and knowledge and wisdom of the people or community. Its loss is therefore a loss of indigenous knowledge intelligence, IGI global.

Despite the fact that indigenous languages are of paramount importance, their existence are being threatened. Many have even gone into extinction because of negligence on the part of some government of the world and other stakeholders to preserve and nurture them. According to Clothey (2008) estimates suggest that approximately 6000 languages have disappeared in the last century, and also 3000 0f the world's languages are endangered across the globe (UNESCO 2011). Also, many indigenous people world wide have stopped passing on their ancestral languages to the next generation and so many indigenous languages have been subject to linguicide (language killing) Wikipedia. Also according to Fantognon et al (2005), as cited in Clothey (2008) (Ibid), a 2005 UNESCO study found that 80% of all web pages hosted in African domain were written in English, African languages accounted for only about 1.3% of the more than one million web pages examined in the study. These and many other instances was why the

United Nations declared 2019 as the International year of indigenous language (Iyll 2019) Wikipedia. This step was taken in order to stop indigenous languages from going into extinction and for the nations of the world especially African continent to be cautious of the impending doom.

This unfortunate trend has made ICT opportunities to continually elude the rural dwellers because many sub-Saharam Africans especially Nigeria do not take the indigenous dwellers interests serious. They don't bother whether they benefit from ICTs or not. And this is quite unlike Asian countries where a lot are being done to make sure that internet usage circulate to all their citizens irrespective of their status. For instance, according to World Internet (Stats 2011) Asia has the largest number of adult online learners in the world, Latchan and Jung (2011). Also, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has developed what is known as Open Course Ware (OCW) through which free contents are placed on the internet for access by the general public. In any case, all are in English language.

According to Selwyn et al (2001) international agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) advocates ICT for facilitating access to education for remote populations and for developing literacy and promoting cultural preservation among indigenous population. This in essence should have been enough signal for the stakeholders to endeavour to drive home ICT gains and potentials to the rural areas, using appropriate means of course. This entails employing indigenous languages to educate and enlighten them so that they will benefit maximally as this will again ensure transformation, innovative education and enhanced life style.

SUGGESTIONS

These suggestions if religiously implemented will actually change the narratives of the rural dwellers in Nigeria.

First of all, indigenous languages should be made mandatory as medium of instruction and enlightenment to the rural populace. Also it should be made compulsory at all levels of secondary school so that children will be well grounded in the mastering of their mother tongue.

Second, when educating the indigenous communities on the utilization of ICT facilities, radio, jingles, community interactions and so on should be employed while in all, indigenous languages will be the mode of instruction.

At the grassroots, e-learning and e-commerce encoded in indigenous languages should be inculcated. All the citizens have the right to benefit from all angles of ICT potentials.

ICT should be made compulsory in the school curriculum and every student in the country to be knowledgeable about it. This will accelerate national development.

CONCLUSION

Much have been said about Information, Communications and Technologies as a very viable means of making progress in life both as a body and as individuals. Ado (2001) highlights how World Bank created the World Links for Development Program to assist developing countries in increasing connectivity and training for ICTs. But sad enough to note that rural communities are not benefiting from the kind gestures of World Bank, because if at all attempts are made, wrong mode of communication are usually applied. Instead of

utilizing indigenous languages, for instruction, foreign language such as English is used. So lack of indigenous knowledge is a big problem facing developing countries. This has to be addressed so that the potentials of ICT will be utilized by all and sundry irrespective of status. This will ensure innovation in all facets of life.

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through creative, relevant curriculum projects. Using effective teaching models, teachers can take existing curriculum, develop project guidelines, set learning objectives and timelines to interact with a classroom in a distant location. Interactive videoconferencing can be used to connect one school to another, regardless of location.

Digital games refer to using actual digital video games as learning tools. The basic idea behind digital games in the classroom is that, as opposed to isolated tasks such as memorization, quizzing and drilling, digital games helps students learn subject matter in context, as part of an interactive system (Brian, 2016). Digital games are effective teaching tools because the learning takes place within a meaningful (to the game) context. What one must learn is directly related to the environment in which one learns and demonstrates it. Thus, the learning is not only relevant but applied and practiced within that context. Digital games create a virtual world that promotes necessary social and community skills and can create real-life simulations for learning (Johnson, Smith, Willis, Levine, and Haywood, 2011). It provides many benefits to learners such as active engagement, information-based skills, decision-making skills, innovation, problem-solving skills, knowledge construction, and discovery learning.

Digital games are user-centered; they promote challenges, co-operation, engagement, and the development of problem-solving strategies (Gros in Ferguson, 2014). Digital video games not only promote student engagement and motivation but also can be used in various other educational ways to promote student learning. Such games benefit learners in other ways such

Anambra State.

- There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of business educators' on the extent of utilization of digital games for quality teaching of business education in tertiary institutions in Anambra State on the basis of age (22-40 years and 41-60 years).

Method

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. According to Nworgu (2015), a survey design involves the collection of extensive data from the population for the purpose of describing and interpreting an existing situation under study using a questionnaire. The study was carried out in tertiary institutions in Anambra State in the South-East geopolitical zone in Nigeria. The population of the study consisted of 119 business educators from the five tertiary institutions that offer business education programme in Anambra State. The entire population was used as the sample size since the population is of a manageable size and the respondents were adequately reached. The instrument for data collection for this study was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher based on the review of related literature and in relation to the research questions guiding the study. The face validity of the instrument was established using three experts. The questionnaire was structured on a 5- point rating scale of Very Highly Utilized (VHU), Highly Utilized (HU), Moderately Utilized (MU), Lowly Utilized (LU) and Not Utilized (NU). Cronbach Alpha was used to establish the reliability of the instrument. The reliability index obtained was r = 0.80. The researchers and three research