TOWARDS ENHANCEMENT OF RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION THROUGH EFFECTIVE ICT BASED PROGRAMME FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT
The content and message of Religious Education is unchangeable but the methodology has to be changed. The paper seeks to examine the possibility of enhancing instruction through ICT based programme that will integrate the subject-based approach that may have resulted in reoccurring difficulty in the teaching/learning process over the years. It explores the possibility of improving mastery skills and greater level of achievement through the use of multimedia in instruction. It discovers among other things that most teachers and students are not literate and so do not integrate ICT in the classroom teaching-learning process. It concludes by recommending that both teachers and students should avail themselves of the available opportunity to realise the desired objectives, instructional goals, attitude change and positive interest in the subject in order to attain sustainable human capital development in Africa.
Keywords: Religious instruction, effective, ICT, sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION
The acronym ICT means Information and Communication Technology. Blurton (1999) notes that it is a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, to create, disseminate, store and manage information. Hence, it can be referred to as a combination of hardwares; software, media and delivery system which are not based on a single part of technology but include computers, the internet, broadcasting technologies (radio and television) as well as telephony (Tinio 2002). Spivak (2007) however took a further step to define ICT to include the various phases on the internet that include five phases namely PC's (1980-1990) followed by Web 1.0 (1990-2000), Web 2.0 (2000-2010), Web 3.0 (2010-2020) and Web 4.0 (2020-2030). Web 1.0 connected the computers; the generation connected the people as social network. It is on this basis that ICT capability is fundamental to participation and engagement in modern society that will boost the overall pupils and teachers need for development through its application in the teaching and learning process.

ICT APPLICATION IN RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION
The use of ICT in Religious instruction seems to be nascent. Aikonen (2011) notes that the usage of ICT and nets in Religious education instruction came late in the 1990s with very little interest shown by churches, students and religious education instructors. Zinn (1964) notes that computers used as teaching machines date from 1958; early development took place at IBM's Watson Research Centre and the University of Illinois. Thus, for over a period of thirty years, it was not employed in the teaching of religious education. Aikonen (2010) thus posits that since ICT has entered the classroom over the decades, pedagogical

development should be encouraged through routine training of teachers in the use of ICT in Religious instruction. However, greater level of integration can be achieved through the involvement of teachers in developing curriculum contents and application of the appropriate media to enhance instruction. Otherwise, it will result in fatal weakness and increased difficulty in the subject as earlier experienced. Reade (2011) similarly, notes that the misuse of the ICT can be disastrous pointing at mindless copying and pasting, surfing for information, often contained with unsuitable websites, teachers' use of PowerPoint, creating a climate of passive learning, watching and listening without pupils' effort and contributions to create interactive classroom discussions. On this note, the integration of the programme is a welcome development that can sky-rocket the level of personal skills and development of the individual on his/her career path.

THE RELEVANCE OF ICT TO ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

The relevance of ICT to Academic Achievement cannot be overemphasized. Isiorhovoja (2004) notes that it is a crucial venture in which all information managers, teachers and instructors must take seriously. The ease of storage, retrieval and frequency of possible re-use makes the teaching-learning process to become flexible. The slow learners therefore can replay a lesson over and again without any human instructor until he/she gains mastery. Anyafulu (2011) thus posits strongly that students need to be educated beyond classrooms. This affirms Isiorhovoja (2004) claims of the possibility of using over and again any particular instruction. In her remark, Anyafulu notes that the time is now to educate our kids beyond the four walls of the classroom for better development of our child education in the country. In further support of her claims, she admits that:

> *Educational system in Nigeria is getting better than what it used to be before, but the problem is that there is no much emphasis on the total development of a child... as much as possible to expose them to lots of things like music instruments, dance and other extra curricula activities including computer and information technology.*

Other relevance of ICT to academic achievement according to Reade (2011) includes:

a. Speed and automation enabling tasks to be carried out more quickly.

b. Capacity to provide access to local, national and global resources not usually available in the classroom, including images, sounds or clips with classic clips versatility enabling flexibility routes through their materials.

c. Interactively and communicability which enable pupils to interact with sources or people in a way not possible with books or video alone.

d. Provisionality, enabling pupils to be creative in how they explore, express and or present their work through websites designed.

e. The ease of access to recorded contents in CD ROMS and other commercial ICT sources for networks and whiteboards, providing comparable resources and activities.

f.   It breaks the monopoly of the any particular curriculum based approach. Students and free to adapt and adopt the 'best fit' approach to learning with the greatest ease.

g.   Students learning and interaction with the content via internet has brought a paradigm shift into the academic system as some teachers and students get relevant answer from their personal researches.

CHALLENGES OF ENHANCED INSTRUCTION TO THE TEACHERS AND LEARNERS

The first major challenge facing teachers in the school is that of ever adapting to changes as the ICT presents so many opportunities which are daily explored by most students. Thus, teachers are forced to adapt to changes. Spender (2003) opines that many students know more than their teachers as a result of the new technologies. It is however believed that students are on a cusp of a revolution in learning that requires teachers to adapt to their cyber world. Elliott (2004) and Lawson (2004) from their earlier researches affirmed that some teachers in the profession have been de-skilled as a result of the ICT based programme that has been introduced to the learning process. It is however disheartening to note that students performed on the average better on some ICT dimensions in a 2005 Computer Skills Assessment (CSA) trial test in spite of the fact that this was in areas that their teachers indicate that they needed professional development in order to enhance their teaching skills. Thus, complex information and communication technologies can pose difficult situation for both teachers/students. Effective planning is required, hence the need for in-service training to update their knowledge. Similarly, the classrooms unique nature poses some environmental challenges for teachers to implement ICT.

More important than the technology is the underpinning pedagogy, which serves to dictate the pace for the teachers. The Nigeria scene is not different, as most teachers do not regularly use ICT in their instruction; some do not have while the few who actually have may have done that as a show-off and as teaching aid. In an earlier study carried out in 2009 by the researcher, he discovered that over 80% of teachers in religious studies who are 50 years and above do not really see the need to personally work to integrate ICT into pedagogy in the classroom, of the 20% who are much younger, the integration of ICT during instruction is a mundane thing. Consequently, excuses are given such as: lack of time, the environment is not conducive, often interruption of power supply and the non availability of ICT assistant during set up for instruction as we do not have an equipped classrooms (Isiorhovoja, 2009). However, considering the challenges of development from a global perspective, viz-a-viz vision 20:2020 actualization; we cannot but agree with John Chambers that education and the internet are the two great equalizers in life through which the education sector can grow. Mr. Gerald Ilukwe while delivering a speech on, "Nigeria's Educational System in the Internet Age" describes a situation in which Nigerian graduates cannot favourably use ICT after four years of University Education. The situation became worrisome, as some citizens from other African countries who are not even graduates are at home with ICT. He however reiterated

> *Our tertiary education – the monotechnic, Polytechnic,*
> *College of Education and the University should explore the*
> *knowledge of information communication technology made*
> *available in this twenty-first century if the vision 20:2020 of*
> *being among the 20 best economy must be realised.*

From the foregoing, Nigeria which is the giant of the African continent, if we must attain sustainable development through education, we cannot but think of the best option in which we can integrate ICT at all level of study. According to the National Policy on Education (NPE) (2004), it is well enshrined as part of the goals of Primary Education that:

> *In recognition of the prominent role of Information and*
> *communication Technology in advancing knowledge and*
> *skills necessary for effective functioning in the modern*
> *world, there is urgent need to integrate ICT into education*
> *in Nigeria. Government shall therefore provide ... realization*
> *of the goal at the Primary school level.*

Coincidentally, similar goal is stated for the secondary level of education as well as for Special Education respectively. The question arising from the laudable goals is, to what extent have we achieved this? The expected libraries, infrastructure and human capital are in place. The National Policy on Education (NPE 2004) in context speaks more of the early environment – the primary and secondary schools as the right place to acquaint the child with (ICT). This may not be totally out of place. Levine and Havighurst (1992) noted that research on the cognitive development of children summarized by Bloom (1964), Hunt (1979), Schorr (1989) and Schaefer (1991) points to the family as the major key player to influence the child as the preschool years are crucial for mental development of the child. Yet very few children are exposed to ICT even at the levels spelt out in the National Policy on Education.

The training of teachers in some of tertiary institutions also contributes to the low level of instruction in the subject in our schools causing poor academic performance. Hence Martin and Norman (1973) argue that today's education is inadequate preparation for tomorrow's computerized society. The computer provides both the requirement and the means for continuous learning into old age. Education therefore should not end when one leaves the school or takes his/her last degree but will go on throughout life in order to enable the individual to keep in tune with his constantly changing environment. The use of computers-assisted instructor in the teaching-learning process is proving its applicability at various levels of education, ranging from very small children to graduate students and professional men. The key to its success as in other uses of computers lies in the ability to interact with the language in which the programs are written. While outlining the causes of non implementation of ICT in the classroom, Fogarty (2006) argues that the failure are not far-fetched. He notes that intractable working conditions; external demands on the teacher time; the conservative nature of traditional classroom culture; teacher's resistance to change; need

for teachers to unlearn traditional approaches; lack of time and availability of computers; technical problems with unreliable technology; lack of learning resources; lack of teacher basic ICT skills; varying competency levels of students; the foreign background of ICT to our culture; access to literate teacher assistance; intractable working conditions and external demands made on a teacher's time.

ICT ROLE IN IMPROVING RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

Despite the enormous challenges posed by ICT to the teachers and students, it has the potential of raising standard in religious instructions. The following are some ways to achieve this goal using ICT as a tool.

a. To support teachers to improve lesson design, to transform teaching and learning process as well as to engage and motivate pupils more effectively. Example include the projection of the topographical map of Palestine for pupils to visualise during instruction

b. Provide opportunities for pupils to learn in alternative and challenging ways, using a wide range of sources of information and techniques to support critical thinking. This includes online lessons/exercises for pupils to interact with before the next class.

c. Support both collaborative and individual work. A pupil in Greek Language class for example, can replay the audio cassette or video cassette to assist inn gaining mastery of the language as well as the right pronunciation as a foreign language.

d. Allow pupils to access the sources of information relevant to a particular enquiring by searching websites on the internet. The ability of the pupils to go for further information will not only boost their knowledge, but will further enable them to gain additional knowledge from the web.

e. Allow pupils to identify and select the most useful information and sources when learning about and when learning from religious. A critical example here is the map of the Fertile Crescent in the web. Most of the maps do not include Africa; the Nile in Egypt. They do not believe that Africa is part of the cradle of the cradle of civilisation. Pupils can carefully make choice in downloading the right map for their use.

f. Enable pupils to improve their decision-making skills through the use of computer generated models. There are sites on the web where language are taught. The fact the some have over time undergone some changes do not remove from the net completely to original alphabets as we have in Koine Greek; the language of the New Testament the is no longer spoken today.

g. Enable pupils to review, refine, redraft and modify work in progress as well as to helps pupils to refine and present their ideas more effectively and in different ways. The ease of sending work today cannot to be outshined. Pupils can readily change work format to suite and to present same with greater ease most unlike the era of just typewriters where that same work cannot be edited.

h.   to present tutorials and worksheet that will enable students carry out enough practice before any examination is taken. Some universities where students are assigned to visiting lecturers, sometimes, projects are submitted online to their supervisors. All these are possible through the use of ICTs in the teaching learning process.

CONCLUSION

The task of achieving sustainable development through education in Africa is enormous hence concerted effort is required to make it a reality. The challenges of enhancing religious instruction through ICT based programme cannot be left for the government alone rather the home, school, teachers and environment are key players. Curriculum planning and implementation process should ensure that teachers are adequately equipped in their training for the task ahead. Thus collaborative effort is needed to kick start, run and maintain the tempo to attain the globalized objective of human capital development in the black continent of Africa.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study, there is the need:

1. To train teachers on the use of ICT in the classroom to enhance pupils understanding in basic themes in religion
2. The curriculum for training and retraining of teachers should be reviewed to adequately furnish students with the basic skills of handling all instructional materials that are needed for effective teaching and learning
3. ICT training should be inculcated in the curriculum at all levels as a general study that will be compulsory throughout the period of study.
4. Pilot programme should be organised to equip all teachers that will be posted to all school as pioneers.
5. Teachers should be encouraged to show professionalism in the classroom and other aspect of learning that can help students to achieve greater level of academic performance.
6. ICT centres should be provided at all levels of education and should be equipped with functional systems and manpower.

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