ENHANCING QUALITATIVE EDUCATION THROUGH ICT AS A CATALYST FOR THE ATTAINMENT OF THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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ABSTRACT: *The quest for the third world nations to become one of the 20 economic power nations of the world by the year 2020 sparked the need to institutionalize and enhance qualitative education at all levels of their education system. The 8 point MDG goals of the United Nation (UN) can only be attained in a nation that has quality education base that is affordable and accessible to her citizenry without any exception. In the present jet age, qualitative education is enhanced through information communication technologies (ICTs). ICTs are central to the creation of diversified and functional quality education system; creation of emerging global knowledge based economy and play an important role in promoting sustainable development aimed at achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This paper attempts to explore the importance of qualitative education through ICT in attaining the MDGs target of the UN in the areas of overall empowerment of` the populace to become self-sufficient and self-reliance, reduce poverty and hunger, gender equality and women empowerment, health and environmental stability. The factors that hinder quality education were also looked into. The paper also made recommendation on the way forward to enhancing quality education and the attainment of MDGs and concluded that unless a qualitative and functional education system built around the state of the arts in ICTs is institutionalized the quest to attain the MDGs and become one of the economic powers of the world by the year 2020 will definitely be a mirage.*

KEYWORDS: Qualitative, Self-sufficient, Self-reliance, Catalyst and MDGs.

INTRODUCTION

The importance and place of education in the socio-economic, political and technological development of any nation can never be overemphasized. Education is pictured as a key for the transformation of individuals for national development. According to Adogbeji and Oyovwe-Tinuoye (2013), a nation is said to be valued when a sizeable number of its citizens have quality education. They posit that quality education manifests in:

- Learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn and supported in learning by their families and communities;
- Environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities;
- Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the` acquisition of basic skills especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace.

- Processes through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skillful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities; and
- Outcomes that encompass knowledge skills and attitudes and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society.
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Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays an important role in enhancing and enabling qualitative and participatory education, covering wide areas, vast distances, producing individuals who are self-sufficient and self-reliant, and most importantly, eliminating discrimination in education (Sangeata, Ritu and Kamalesh, 2014). In recent years, there has been a grown interest on how computers and the internet can best be harnessed to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness and functionality of education at all levels and in both formal and non-formal settings (Adogbeji and Oyovwe-Tinuoye, 2013). If, for instance Nigeria as a nation needs to enhance and institutionalize quality education, the dividends and essentials of ICTs in her educational system need urgent attention.

ICT has made a remarkable impact on the` quality and quantity of teaching, learning and research in the tradition and/or distance education institution using it (Kwacha, 2007). Thus, the need for Nigeria to re-orient and re-engineer her formal education pattern for the transformation of her citizens is very crucial. Nwosu and Ugbomo (2012) noted that ICTs greatly facilitate the acquisition and absorption of knowledge, offering developing countries unprecedented opportunities to enhance educational systems, improve policy formulation and execution, and widen the range of opportunities for business and the poor.

Law, Pelgrum and Plomp (2008) opined that, acquisition of ICT skills include the ability to become lifelong learners within a context of collaborative inquiry and the ability to work and learn from experts and peers in a connected global community. Olalube, Ubogu and Ossai (2007) noted that the introduction of ICT usage, integration and diffusion has initiated a new age in educational methodologies. They stressed that ICTs have radically changed the traditional method of information delivery and usage patterns in the education domain as well as offering contemporary learning experience for both instructors and students. It is on this premise that Nwosu and Ugbomo (2012) asserted that for developing countries like Nigeria, ICTs have the potential for increasing access to and improving the relevance and quality of education. Nwosu and Ugbomo further stated that when used appropriately, different ICTs help to expand access to education, strengthen the relevance of education to the workplace, raise educational quality by creating an active process connected to real life and equally spurs an overall development of the nation.

As evident above, the importance of a qualitative education ancord on a viable ICT integration and use, will in no doubt, produce citizens that will be self-sufficient, self-reliant, eradicate poverty and hunger, increase awareness on the dangers of HIV/AIDS, EBOLA, malaria and other deadly diseases, ensure gender equality in education acquisition. These gains are hitherto, some of the eight-point issues designed to be met by the year 2015 through MDGs. Qualitative education through ICTs will undoubtedly enhance the attainment of the MDGs if and only if it is well embraced.

However, this paper would be inconclusive without a brief overview of the following:
- The Millennium Development Goals,

- 		Benefits of ICTs in enhancing quality education, and
- 		Hindrance of ICTs in enhancing quality education.

Millennium Development Goals
The MDGs has its origin in the September 2000 gathering of 189 heads of state of government for the United Nations Millennium Summit where the Millennium Declaration was ratified (Adogbeji and Oyovwe-Tinuoye, 2013). MDGs represent an unparallel global commitment to free human beings especially those in the third world regions from the bondage of absolute poverty and wretchedness. The millennium declaration, seen by many as one of the most vital UN document in recent times, offers the international community, both rich and poor, the golden opportunity to have a common stance and integrated vision on the best ways to address and solve the multidimensional problems facing humanity and to promote sustainable development. The declaration covers the following issues;
1. 		To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. The primary target is to half the ratio of people living on less than $1 daily and those suffering from hunger by the year 2015.
2. 		To achieve universal primary (basic) education
3. 		To promote gender equality and women empowerment. The target is to totally overcome gender disparity in both primary and secondary education enrolment by 2015 and achieve equity at all levels by 2015.
4. 		To reduce child mortality. The target is to reduce child mortality rate by 2/3 by 2015.
5. 		To improve maternal health. The prime target is to reduce by ¾ the ratio of women dying in childbirth by 2015,
6. 		To combat HIV/AIDs, malaria and other communicable diseases. The prime target is to stop and commence to reverse the incidence of HIV/AIDs, malaria and other communicable diseases by 2015.
7. 		To ensure environmental sustainability. The target is to minimize by half the proportion of people living without access to clean drinking water and basic sanitation, and
8. 		To develop a global partnership for development. The target is to bring together the have and have-not to fight and eradicate poverty and extreme hunger.

Benefits of ICT enhancing quality education
A lot of benefits are derivable from the use of ICTs in enhancing quality education. Such benefits includes the ability of the learner to choose when to learn irrespective of geographical location without stress, helps learners to discover and explore new ideas or innovations from experts around the world through the use of the common ICT available facilities. ICT in education will enable delivery of lessons to students, monitoring of learner's progress and assessment promptly In line with the above dividends of ICT in enhancing quality education, Nwosu and Ugbomo (2012) highlighted the following as the benefits derivable from the use of ICTs in education:

1. 		**Active learning:** ICT-enhanced learning mobilizes tools for examination, calculation and analysis of information, thus, providing a platform for students inquiry, analysis and construction of new information. They posit that learners can therefore learn as they do and, whenever appropriate, work on real-life problems in-depth, making learning less abstract and more relevant to the learner's life situation. In this way, and in contrast to memorization based or rote learning, ICT enhanced learning promotes increased learner engagement. ICT

enhanced learning is also "just-in-time" learning in which learners can choose what to learn when they need to learn it.

2. **Collaborative Learning:** ICT-supported learning encourages interaction and cooperation among students, teachers and experts regardless of where they are. Apart from modeling real-world interactions, ICT-supported learning provides learners the opportunity to work with people from different cultures, thereby helping to enhance learners' teaching and communicative skills as well as their global awareness. It models learning done throughout the learner's lifetime by expanding the learning space to include not just peers but also mentors and experts from different fields.

3. **Creative Learning:** ICT-supportive learning promotes the manipulation of existing information and the creation of real-world products rather than the regurgitation of received information.

4. **Integrative Learning:** ICT-enhanced learning promotes a thematic, interactive approach to teaching and learning. This approach eliminates the artificial separation between the different disciplines and between theory and practice that characterizes the traditional classroom approach.

5. **Evaluate Learning:** ICT-enhanced learning is learner-directed and diagnostic. Nwosu and Ugbomo (2012) argued that unlike the static, text- or print- based educational technologies, ICT-enhanced learning recognizes that there are many different learning pathways and many different articulations of knowledge. ICTs give learners the opportunity to explore and discover rather than merely listen and remember.

The dividends of qualitative education through ICTs as enumerated above will if institutionalized in the education system, produce citizens who will be self-sufficient, self-reliant (poverty and hunger eradication), promote gender equality in education assessment and women empowerment, ensure universal basic education for a greater percentage of the populace, enlightens the citizen on the dangers of HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other deadly diseases which is what MDGs targets to attain.

CONCLUSION

Qualitative education in no doubt is a veritable medium for the emancipation and ensuring a development-driven society in the present day world. ICT have proven inheritable tools in ensuring a rich quality education. Thus, the MDGs which are anchored in qualitative education will definitely be attained if a qualitative and functional education equipped with the states of the arts in information communication technologies is institutionalized in the education system. Thence, the system will start to produce citizens who will be able to study their immediate environment and beyond, picture opportunities and with the knowledge and skills acquired in a qualitative driven education environment, start to initiate ideas that will turn out productive. When this scenario is attained, poverty and hunger, illiteracy will be a thing of the past. Greater percentage of the populace would be educated at least to the basic level, women empowerment will boom and the scourge of deadly diseases like HIV/AIDS and malaria would minimize considerably as awareness increases. Thus, millennium Development Goals would have been significantly achieved as stipulated and anticipated by the Heads of State of the UN.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance qualitative education through ICT for the attainment of the MDGs, the under-listed recommendations should be put into considerations:

1. Development and training of ICT experts: specifically for instruction design and development, who will work in partnership with educators and teachers (Kwacha, 2007).

2. Adoption ICT international standards and ensuring its inclusion and full implementation in the education system. Continuous training and retraining of teachers, other support personnel and the academia on computer and ICT knowledge and skills acquisition should be provided,.

3. The Government must seriously address the issue of erratic power supply. As efforts are on ground to ensure stable power supply through the privatization policies of the most third world countries management of educational institutions and schools should make provision for power generating sets as alternative to supplement the effort of the countries for supply of electricity until stability of supply is attained, and,

4. Government at all levels of the education system should make ICT a matter of priority, improve in the funding needed in ICT training of teachers, students and support personnel (staff) available at all times.

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