

ANALYSIS OF ICT SKILLS FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Joel O. ALISON

Department of Educational Foundations, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria

E-mail: Alisonjoelonyekachi@gmail.com; Phone: 08068908471

Daniel ORIFAMAH

Post-Primary School Education Board, Isoko South, Delta State

E-mail: Daniel.orifamah@gmail.com; Phone: 08064930596

Peter U. IWUNNA

Department of Educational Foundations, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

E-mail: ugwumba.iwunna@unn.edu.ng; Phone: 08133523173

Felicia N. OPARA

Department of Educational Foundations, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

E-mail: felicia.opara@unn.edu.ng; Phone: 07037285821

&

Patrick N. UJAH

Department of Educational Foundations, University of Nigeria Nsukka

E-mail: patrick.ujah@gmail.com Phone: 00234(0)8080491517

Abstract

This paper is a discussion on the major Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills which Nigerians have tapped into in this era of joblessness in the country. As a leeway out of poverty and destitution, Nigerians that have engaged in various skills of this digital era have successfully emerged as employers of labour and contributors to the growth of the economy in spite of the harsh economic situations facing the country. Through their numerous contributions to the growth of the economy and provision of employment opportunities to fellow citizens in desperate need of jobs, criminality and youth restiveness have been greatly tackled joblessness among the youth. Armed with lucrative ICT-related entrepreneurial skills therefore, the prospects of rescuing Nigeria citizens from the adverse effects of hunger, disease, destitution, violence and criminality could be further mitigated. The understanding is that aided with such skills, unemployed Nigerians could be self-reliant, self-employed and economically relevant to themselves, families, communities and the entire nation. It is therefore the target of this brief paper to discuss some of those key areas of ICT-related entrepreneurship which Nigerians have keyed into in their attempts to remain relevant to the growth of the national economy.

Keywords: Analysis, Development, Entrepreneurship, ICT, Skills

Introduction

It is without doubt that the entry of the ICT into the global arena has fast-tracked the speedy development of the world in all of its ramifications. Man's discovery and invention of the numerous electronically driven technological devices have no doubt transformed all major global activities tremendously, with the effect that the entire wide globe, which separates nations into several million nautical miles apart from one another,

has been systematically reduced into a miniature village. Through the powers of these modern technological devices, towns and communities which are geographically separated by several miles away from one another could be circulated in a matter of few seconds.

Business activities could be initiated and concluded in a matter of minutes without any forms of

physical contacts, travels, or exchange of bureaucratic paperwork. Delivery of crucial information to persons and organizations that are geographically separated by several thousands of miles could be conducted through the powers of these modern ICT infrastructures which could be accessed without complications from any corners of the globe. With the availability of ICT infrastructures, prompt access to research data without unnecessary loss of time and waste of human efforts could be assured. Thus, adaptation to the numerous infrastructures of the ICT reduce geographical space, maximize time usage, reduce human labour, eliminate travel risks and cut off unnecessary bureaucracies involved in gaining access to critical research data from educational institutions and business establishments (Odo, 2015; Danbatta, 2017; Iwunna, Dimonye, Nkokelonye, & Okoro, 2018).

Thus, for Nigerians, ICT infrastructures fertilized the favourable platforms for incomes generation and wealth creation, a situation proliferated by the invention of the computer in the United States of America in the 20th century. These ignited the 'I can do it' spirit among the citizens of this country, with the effect that the ICTs motivated Nigerians to become entrepreneurs at their different levels and became employers of labour (Nkokelonye, 2005). The result is that ICT facilities such as android mobile phones, computers, laptops, video cameras, video recorders, electronic printing machines, electronic recorders, flat screen television sets, scanners, audio-visual machines, IPADS, satellite facilities, flat screen television sets, etc. became tools for wealth creation and self-employment. They are no longer procured as items of luxury. It is not surprising then that an ICT infrastructure manufactured in New York could be couriered into cities like Sydney, Singapore, Oakland, Lagos, Johannesburg, Accra, Brussels, Berlin and Beirut, etc. within the next hours.

As employers of labour, Nigerian entrepreneurs employ their entrepreneurial acumen to engage the services of fellow Nigerians whose services provided food on the tables of their family members. This led Wehmier, in Odo (2015) to concede an entrepreneur as a person who makes money by starting or running business especially when this involves taking

some financial risks. Ogunleye (2007), in Odo (2015), accepts this opinion and strongly maintains that an entrepreneur is one who creates incremental wealth through the judicious use of resources. These opinions agree with the opinion of Akaakohol and Avaan (2013) who consider this concept as "a dynamic process of vision, change, and creation. It requires the application of energy and passion towards the creation and implementation of new ideas and creative solutions".

These inform us that the intellectual lights of education are needed for survival as an ICT-related entrepreneur. Without proper education therefore, one's emergence as an entrepreneur could suffer disastrous failure. Without education, ability to survive the traumas associated with entrepreneurship and wealth creation could be illusory. These could end up as daydreams and mere imaginations. Thus, education opens up learners' intellectual minds and equips them with the ability to acquire skills. It exposes them to gain the ability to handle their business activities digitally, using the tools of the ICT industry. Thus, authors agree that education enhances personal development, build strong intellectual growth, reduces mental stagnation and arms recipients with the relevant skills and intellectual abilities to deal with the daily challenges involved connected with their entrepreneurship projects (Odo, 2015; Osokoya, 2015; United Nations, 2015).

The United Nations (2015), in Agenda 2030 declaration, also known as Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), conceded basic education as a pre-requisite for the elimination of poverty, hunger, disease, and acquisition of relevant skills. By implication, education detaches recipients from poverty, attacks of diseases, and equips them with skills to cater for family needs. Education exposes learners to varieties of lucrative skills, equips learners with the mental and intellectual abilities to live independently. With the aid of education, necessary wider opportunities acquiring skills-based jobs become accessible to recipients. By that, affected recipients are spared from the embarrassments of parading the streets of Nigeria in search of jobs (Akaakohol, & Avaan, 2013).

Millions of Nigerians have in the recent times successfully tapped into the MDGs programmes which target at lifting Nigerians out of poverty, empower them

with lucrative skills, support them to escape from poverty and become wealth creators, as well as arm them with the skills to become job creators. These have largely provided Nigerian families and local communities with food security and showed them the escape route from hunger, poverty, diseases and criminality (Akaakohol, & Awaan, 2013).

Thus, by investing in entrepreneurial skills acquisition, the road to poverty is cut off and eradicated. Ability to be self-reliant is ensured. Opportunities of contributing to national development are assured. These are indicators that every investment yields great results. Ability to discover a business venture and commit to it often results in capacity development. Armed with a lucrative skill therefore, ability to develop oneself and able to employ oneself and employ others alleviates poverty from the land. This clearly involves investing in oneself and investing in others too, which form part and parcel of Africa's Millennium Development Goals (MDG) (Akaakohol, & Awaan, 2013).

Based on these positive reports therefore, it is obvious that the numerous entrepreneurial opportunities created by the ICT industry in Nigeria have contributed immensely to disengaging the country's youth from submitting to criminal gangs. Accordingly, the authors maintain that engaging the youth in ICT-related entrepreneurial skills go a long way in pulling persons away from criminal activities, which include cybercrimes, financial fraud of all sorts, kidnapping for ransom, sexual abuse, drug abuse and other unlawful activities which dent the nation's good image. By that, Nigeria's youths could become viable instruments of nation building and contributors to reducing unemployment (Onuoha, 2010).

It is against these backgrounds that the project of supporting and encouraging Nigerians to embrace the attitude of skills acquisition becomes fundamental. Through functional education, most especially the inclusion and adaptation of those educational curricula which expose young learners to varieties of practical skills from the early stages of their educational careers becomes incumbent. These have become crucial at this digital era when the entire globe is getting speedily digitalized, most especially as there are no shortages in the various areas of the ICT industry where young

learners could be guided to develop professional lives and eventually become self-reliant entrepreneurs. Put into context, it is without doubt that ability to acquire a professional skill in any lucrative areas of the ICT is capable of empowering people; supporting families to escape from the crutches of poverty and failure, as well as transform the lives of community members and the larger Nigerian nation too.

Concept of ICT Skills

According to Ayo (2002), in Odo (2015) this concept refers to the ability to use ICT infrastructures in the acquisition, processing, storage and dissemination of vocal, textual, pictorial and numerical information by a micro-electronics based combination of computer systems and telecommunication equipment in information processing. ICT facilities perform fundamental functions in the art of information handling, most especially in the 21st century when the gadgets have been found most relevant.

For Danbatta (2017), ICT skills provide skills-based opportunities for trainees to adapt their hands to the effective usage of modern electronic facilities. The facilities are designed to transform teaching and learning, as well as enhance top quality information acquisition, storage, dissemination and processing. It concludes that the powers of modern electronic facilities draw the distinction between the traditional patterns of information handling, storage and processing, from their digital era counterparts when time and space are highly maximized.

Based on the above, a few critical observations need to be added. First and foremost, ICT skills require special training which lasts over a period of time. The training programme equips learners with the knowledge and technical know-how required in the handling of specific electro-technological devices. In which case, a number of training sessions are usually held between trainers and trainees, during which specific training packages are practically demonstrated in order to equip learners with the practical skills required for effective entrepreneurship.

Major ICT Skills Required for Entrepreneurship Development

The major ICT entrepreneurial skills which offer jobs to millions of unemployed youth in Nigeria shall be discussed under the following subheadings:

Computer Literacy Skills

The digital era in Nigeria gave birth to the development of several entrepreneurship skills in the area of computer education, which according to Danbatta (2017) widened the range of opportunities for business growth and human empowerment. The introduction of computers and other ICT facilities created favourable platforms for Nigerians to acquire the skills of computer literacy. Thus, computer literacy skills refer to that training which one acquires on the art of handling a computer.

The primary target is that armed with adequate computer literacy skills, the recipient could then train others and equip them with the knowledge already gained in the course of attaining proficiency in the profession. Often, such professional establish their own institutions where fresh candidates receive training on the business of operating computers in a commercial enterprise. At that level, some larger space would be rented. A number of sets of computers would be procured. As well, a number of qualified computer teachers or trainers would be hired too, all with the targets of enlarging the training capacities of the enterprise. At that, the need for the recruitment of qualified computer trainers becomes crucial. The essence is to accommodate as many trainees as possible.

Internet Browsing Skills

Sourcing of materials and other research data is another lucrative area of training where a good number of Nigerian job seekers have found job for themselves since the arrival of the ICT infrastructures industry in the country. This has become crucial in view of the growing need for crucial information, research data and business idea among Nigerians. Having successfully graduated in the business of internet browsing for necessary data, entrepreneurs procure some sets of computers, rent a business premises, and then employ other jobless countrymen who engage themselves and commit their hours of service in the

activities of assisting their numerous clients to source materials on the internet, also known as the worldwide web (www), as well as share information with clients all over the globe through this digital platform. In doing these however, ICT facilities which include printers, scanners, photocopiers, android mobile phones, digital cameras and electronic recorders, IPADs, etc. are deployed. Unfortunately, some unscrupulous Nigerians have in the recent times created awful entrepreneurial jobs for themselves in the way of various forms of incriminating internet fraudulent activities, which have adversely affected the good image of the country in the past years (Chukwu, Olaitan, & Omeje, 2018; Danbatta, 2017; Iwunna, Dimonye, Okoro, Okeke, Ari, & Patrick, 2021).

It is against this background that the need for more aggressive investment in entrepreneurship projects in Nigeria has continued to be argued strongly. The need for more Nigerians to invest fiscal and materials resources in the establishment of their own business ventures has been projected and supported by both government and private investors. Most importantly, this has become crucial in view of the need to eliminate hunger, acquire lucrative skills, escape from poverty and criminality, as well as motivate others to encourage strong entrepreneurship among fellow citizens. Because of the obvious truth that in the assertion which claims that an idle mind is the devil's workshop, putting into consideration Nigerians' resilient nature and strong desire to remain economically relevant to themselves and family members, entrepreneurial job opportunities as these never eludes them (Akaakohol, & Avaan, 2013; Wuana & Iyav 2013).

Computer Hardware and Maintenance Skills

The servicing and maintenance of ICT facilities remain another lucrative entrepreneurial sector which created lucrative jobs for millions of unemployed Nigerians. The source maintains that the digital economy which Nigeria has successfully tapped into since the past decade has strongly impacted the creation of jobs among the youth, as well as empowered them with the practical skills needed to create wealth through self-employment (Osuagwu, 2020).

With the arrival of the ICT industry, millions of jobless Nigerians from different tertiary institutions, as well as those who just passed out of secondary schools took interests in training their hands in the servicing, installation and maintenance of various ICT infrastructures. While some specialize in the handling of computers, laptops, electronic keyboards, IPADs, photocopiers and printers, others also find fulfillment in the servicing, installation and maintenance of other ICT infrastructures, which include video cameras, close circuit television cameras (CCTV), wireless internal communications devices, security cameras, UPS devices, air conditioners, scanners, etc. (Danbatta, 2017). Behind this initiative is to ensure that the ICT facilities operated at top working conditions always.

Computer Networking Skills

This is another lucrative branch of the ICT industry which has found good jobs for millions of Nigeria's teeming youth and jobless school graduates. Engagement in this important sector of the economy has become quite essential as the government cannot be able to provide jobs to all her unemployed citizens. To that end, the government kick-started a number of policy initiatives which are designed to assist the youth and other unemployed citizens to create jobs for themselves, as well as employ other Nigerians in need of jobs too. The essence is to encourage entrepreneurship, strengthen the attitude of skills acquisition among citizens, and most importantly, eliminate poverty and hunger in the land through forms of self-employment (Chukwu, Olaitan, & Omeje, 2018).

Thus, through a number of federal government-sponsored skills acquisition programmes, millions of Nigeria's youths, that is persons between these of 15 – 39 years of age are supported with free training programmes, equipment, take-off capital, and interest-free bank loans to support them establish themselves as private own entrepreneurs after successfully completing their training. In view of its relevance for the development of Nigeria's economy, all networking activities anywhere in the country are controlled and managed by the Nigerian Communications Commission, a body established by the federal government for the purposes of ensuring

safety and standard, as well as check any attitudes of abuse in the networking industry (Onuoha, 2010, Danbatta, 2017).

For instance, Danbatta (2017) reports that the University of Nigeria, Nsukka enjoys "a total of 26.3 km of OFC (Optic Fibre Cable) capacity linking the university with its College of Medical Sciences, Ituku-Ozalla". The author adds that a total of 381.7 km OFC has been deployed in linking fifteen Nigeria universities with their medical colleges. By implication, the networking industry in Nigeria is capable of providing jobs to millions of unemployed youth in the country. The effect is that hunger, unemployment and poverty could be eradicated in due course (United Nations, 2015).

Software Engineering Skills

This is another lucrative sector which offered jobs to millions of Nigerians. As a matter of fact, assorted software packages such as computer programmers, website designers, virus detectors, typing tutors, and accounting packages, etc., are needed regularly for the operation of different ICT-related facilities. Essentially, most ICT infrastructures require the services of various software programmes to function effectively. Obviously, several of these modern facilities cannot function without the use of relevant software packages. This implies that the software industry in Nigeria creates huge employment opportunities for qualified unemployed Nigerian youth and other talented unemployed persons to actualize their dreams of becoming software engineers (Umeh, 2020).

ICT Marketing Skills

Similarly, marketing of ICT facilities and gadgets has created millions of jobs for Nigerians. As entrepreneurs, unemployed youth engage in the marketing and distribution of ICTs on either salary or commission basis. As marketers, their jobs include the distribution and supply of ICT-related facilities to companies, factories and other economic points in Nigeria. Products marketed include computers, laptops, software packages, hardware drives, scanners, computer accessories, networking facilities, power surge stabilizers, IPADs, assorted cables, Android phones, printers, ICT furniture, etc. Distributed by air,

land, and sea, ICT infrastructures marketers ensure that the products are delivered with precision in different parts of Nigeria. Without doubt then, the invention of these 21st century technological infrastructures has impacted the rate of unemployment among Nigerians and offered opportunities of employment to millions of citizens.

Computer Graphic Skills

Graphic designing is another critical area of the ICT world of technology which has provided lucrative technology-driven skills-related jobs to Nigerians in their large numbers. Sources claim that, armed with relevant electronically-driven ICT infrastructures which include computers, laptops, hand scanners, printers, and access to the internet, several arts-inclined Nigerians have found lucrative jobs for themselves. With these electronic infrastructures, they are able to create numerous beautiful artistic works, design lifelike structures, construct buildings, roads and bridges, as well as generate several other graphic ornamental images desperately needed in homes, offices and other public places (Danbatta, 2017; Osuagwu, 2020; Umeh, 2020). Accordingly, engagement in these career professions guide the mind into a complete re-think in the art of designing graphic objects, most especially in tertiary institutions where students are exposed to numerous complex tasks of designing difficult images and objects.

Prevailing Challenges influencing ICT utilization by Entrepreneurs

The growth of the ICT industry in Nigeria is militated by a few major factors. First and foremost, it must be pinpointed that the challenge of epileptic power supplies affects the growth of the electronically driven technological devices in Nigeria. In some places, electricity supplies never last more than a few short hours in a day, while in other areas, power supplies are provided intermittently and irrationally for a few hours in weeks and months. Consequently, huge amounts of revenue are lost by entrepreneurs in affected parts of the country (Oyesola, 2017).

Another major factor is the question of the exorbitant prices at which dealers and marketers sell

ICT products in markets and various shops In Nigeria. Faced with this challenge, many Nigerians find themselves disadvantaged and consequently unable to buy the products. The situation even becomes more challenging as dealers and marketers offer erratic prices to customers. Mostly, prices of the products are irrationally determined by dealers' locations, cities and quality of the shopping complex where the products are displayed. For instance, it is quite unimaginable that the same ICT product displayed for sale in a big plaza at the FCT Abuja could be bought at the same price when displayed at a mobile shop in Nsukka town. No doubt, the price difference would always be there, irrespective of the fact that the quality of the products is simply the same (Emerole, 2010; Ezirim, 2011).

It is quite appalling that the economic hardships faced by unemployed Nigerians in the recent times have driven them into engaging in a number of internet frauds and other unprintable cyber-based crimes. Among them is the "Advance Fee Fraud", known as 419 in Nigeria. Similar, the unceremonious internet-based criminal activity popularly known as "Yahoo – Yahoo" is another huge dent on the nation. This is popularly known as "Yahooism". This acronym is associated with the long hours perpetrators spend day and night browsing on the internet in search of unsuspecting victims who could be defrauded of their cash. Similar crimes include the spreading of fake news, dissemination of hate speech and engaging in dangerous names-calling. Others include cult activities which often involve the illicit use of human body parts as medicaments to lure unsuspecting clients. These digital crimes dent the image of Nigeria dragged her good name to the muds (Attah, 2017). Among the youth too, cases of drug abuse, rape, human trafficking, sexual assault, campus cultism, armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom and money laundering, etc., seems to displace honesty, culture of hard work and dignity of labour and pride of entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

Discussion so far confirms that the importance of ICT skills for entrepreneurship development is overwhelming. They are quite innumerable. It is important to remark that ICT skills empower trainees

with the ability to operate computers competently without fear of any intimidations. Armed with strong computer literacy skills, affected trainees are able to lay their hands on the computer and browse on the internet in search of crucial information. Empowered with both skills, some of the trainees who have special interest in the handling of technical wares choose to specialize in the areas of computer hardware servicing and maintenance skills, while others who are technically inclined also opt to engage their careers in the areas of computer networking, which usually involves the hooking of a number of computers to a common server. Furthermore, this analysis confirms that unemployed and talented Nigerian youth also make careers in the areas of software engineering, all with intentions of servicing the software needs of the country's teeming firms and numerous government agencies located in different parts of the country. The analysis also appreciated the fact that the economic depression facing the country compelled unemployed citizens to engage in the marketing of ICT materials, while some others train themselves in computer graphic skills.

However, the growth of the ICT industry in Nigeria is militated by some major challenges. First, it is quite regrettable that adulterated ICT facilities have flooded Nigerians markets and shops with the effect that durability of products is never guaranteed. Secondly, regular supply of power by the appropriate authorities has turned into mere illusions to users of ICT facilities. Consequently, huge revenues are lost by affected

entrepreneurs. Finally, the question of unavailability of genuine ICT accessories remains another crucial factor which impacts the growth of the ICT industry in Nigeria. This affects the prompt replacement of damaged parts.

The Way Forward

Nigeria should conduct a periodic review of her educational curricula and make them entrepreneurship-friendly. The need to make an upward review of the country's curricula of education at this digital era is incumbent and should not be allowed to grow obsolete. This could ignite strong entrepreneurship spirits among learners and set them on the part to self-employment after graduation from school. Again, the Nigerian government should invest massively in the area of furnishing educational institutions with adequate ICT facilities. With these facilities, learners engage their hands in the operational technics of handling the various infrastructures of the ICT in classrooms. Such facilities should be adapted into effective tools of classroom education. It is therefore crucial that adequate fiscal commitments are made to ensure that the country's educational establishments get fair share of the country's annual budgets. Opportunities should be created for the training of teachers and other handlers of ICT infrastructures in all the country's educational establishments. By that, both teachers and their trainees could acquire knowledge and entrepreneurial skills needed for eventual emergence as future entrepreneurs.

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