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RELEVANCE AND USES OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY AMONG SELECTED ADULT MARKET WOMEN IN ILORIN WEST LGA KWARA STATE

MR SHOLAGBERU A.O.

Department of Adult and Primary Education,
University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.
E-mail: saadabdulsalam34@gmail.com

MR KAYODE S.T.

Department of Adult and Primary Education,
University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.
E-mail: sadiqtoyin2012@gmail.com

MRS. HASSAN AMINAT NAJMUDEEN

Department of Curriculum Studies Educational Technology,
Kwara State College of Education Ilorin.
E-mail: aminatnajmudeen@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper evaluated the relevance and uses of ICT (Information and Communications Technology) among market women in Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara State. The objectives were to unravel the extent of ICT literacy among women, to evaluate the relevance of ICT among selected market women, and to examine the extent to which ICT is used by women to empower themselves through sustainable poverty reduction. A total of 120 market women participated in the study it was revealed from the finding that ICTs offer a wide range of information and knowledge, which are critical components of poverty alleviation strategies, ICT are viewed as near-magic solution to problems which proved useful as it provides information on prices, markets, technology and potential entrepreneurship skills. It was concluded that women entrepreneurs' use of ICT infrastructure and systems in Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara State is limited and even the ones in use are not widely explored and channeled for business development. It was recommended among others that there is a need to establish women's clubs and the existing ones strengthen in communication skills and ICTs just as in the case of a group (Self Employed Women's Association) in India in where the rural women were trained in the production and use of video to generate income, disseminate new skills and to advocate for changes in policy, thus ICTs will not only empower the gender but sustain poverty alleviation programmes which in time past have failed in Nigeria through provision of new and enhanced opportunities for participation in the process of self-determination, economic, social, educational and cultural advancement and employment beyond the scope of traditional institutions and any forms of governance.

Key words: *ICT, adult education, empowerment, poverty reduction and market women.*

Introduction

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) permeate every aspect of our lives; from community radios in the most rural parts of the globe to cellular phones in the hands of women and men in every community on earth, to computers in almost every society to a large organization. The advancement of ICTs has brought new opportunities for both knowledge sharing and knowledge gathering for both women and men. To the extent that the global community can reach heretofore unconnected individuals, families, and populations to better understand their needs and challenges, ICTs can provide unlimited opportunities for economic development and social engagement through new innovative thinking and tools. However, a basic assumption is that all members of our global community benefit from and are part of the growing knowledge society. ICTs have been compared to a double edged sword - advancing the knowledge society on one hand and deepening gender and social divides based on pre-existing social divisions on the other. Specifically, without a thoughtful policy, strategy, and execution plan to ensure women's full engagement in the knowledge society, the places in which they work, the families for whom they care, and the communities in which they live and serve will not thrive. Thus information and communication technology is considered as an essential tool for both empowerment and knowledge expansion among market women (Yusuf, 2012).

In Nigeria, women entrepreneurs are an integral part of economic growth. Their business activities are required both for wealth creation for families and the entire nation's economy (Soetan, 2011). Women's activities in entrepreneurship enables them to effectively combine their productive and reproductive roles because of the flexibility in hours of work which permit them to care for their children and also contribute substantially to economic growth (Soetan, 2011). This has made women to be regarded as a central focus of economic development and public policy concerns (Bagby, 2014).

As women entrepreneurship is undergoing a transformation process, the focus on Nigeria, specifically the garment industry is the focus of this work since their level of ICT usage is still left undetermined. Thus, the crux of this work is to discern the relevance and extent of use of ICT by women to enhance their living condition through gainful employment opportunities focusing specifically on market women in Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria.

Concept of Adult Education

Adult education usually refers to any form of learning undertaken by or provided for mature men and women outside the formal school system. The main targets are specifically defined as youth (girls and boys over 15 years of age, but sometime younger) as well as women and men, generally poor or socially disadvantaged. Although literacy continues to be at its heart, adult education also includes "numeracy", problem-solving and life skills, and other knowledge. The notion of

adult education is often used interchangeably with other notions such as literacy, adult basic education, lifelong learning, continuing, adult basic and non-formal education, etcetera. For the purpose of this presentation, adult education is understood as a transmission process of general, technical or vocational knowledge, as well as skills, values and attitudes, which takes place out of the formal education system with a view to remedying early education inadequacies of mature people or equipping them with the knowledge and cultural elements required for their self-fulfilment and active participation in the social, economic and political life of their societies (Seya, 2014).

Adult education in Nigeria is presently geared towards national development (Ewuzie, 2012). The objective of the process of adult education and national development is to get the adults, either as individuals or as a group, to learn and through learning to change their attitude and behaviour. The policy on education states the objectives of adult education as:

1. to provide functional literacy education for adults who have never had the opportunity of any formal education,
2. to provide functional and remedial education for those young people who prematurely dropped out of the formal school system,
3. to provide further education for different categories of completers of formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills,
4. to provide in-service and on-the-job vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills, and
5. to give the adult citizens of the country aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment.

Concept of Information and Communications Technology

Information Communication technology (ICT) is a term that covers all forms of computer and communications equipment and software used to create, store, transmit, interpret, and manipulate information in its various formats. ICT is widely used in the entire globe for different purposes, including business, health, transport, communication, and education. The advancement in ICT ranging from electronic chips, mini computers, to large scale devices, has its impact on every sector, and has crossed every nation in the world. But, the way they utilize it differs from country to country. Computer and internet have integrated a lot of information and communication technology, leading to e-commerce, e-banking, e-government, e-learning, e-library and more (Yusuf, 2012).

Information and communication technologies can be interpreted broadly as technologies that facilitate communication and the processing and transmission of information by electronic means. This definition encompasses the full range of ICTs.

from radio and television to telephones (fixed and mobile), computers and the internet (Bagby, 2014). The internet protocol, broadband technology and wireless connection offer great opportunities for development. They are especially valuable to people with reduced or negligible access to healthcare, government, education services and other facilities such as rural women. They help to bridge the telephonic divide between the rich and the poor. The flexibility of mobiles is also seen to be more conducive to micro enterprise – especially in rural and suburban areas (Maplecroft, 2008).

ICT and Women Empowerment for Poverty Reduction

Women have been engaged in ICT development since its inception. It was a woman who developed the compiler, identified the first computer bug, and created the first programs. Today, example after example highlights the value of women's voices and the importance of their contributions in nation building. Women's participation in economic development through microloans to build small and medium enterprises has been well documented and publicized. Women's business incubators are emerging through the developing world in recognition of the need to provide business opportunities for women as well as men to enhance, grow, and quicken the pace of economic development. The full scale and power of many of these small and medium enterprises are yet to be fully realized, but there is a growing awareness of women's ability to use ICTs to expand their work across regions and around the world.

ICTs are applicable to all sectors of development for women, most especially education, livelihoods, healthcare and government which are directly linked to poverty alleviation. Five of the eight MDGs focus on these sectors, which attract a lot of focus in discussions on ICT and poverty alleviation. Balt (2009) notes that since the 1990s, there have been several initiatives around the globe to apply ICT to address issues of poverty in developing countries. His study found a positive correlation between investment in ICTs and economic growth. The study also shows that information leads to resources and opportunities that generate more resources. Several empirical studies cited by (Heeks, 2010) have established the relationship between just the telephone and economic growth. In a study by the Centre for Economic Research in UK (Colle, 2010), it was found that a developing country with an average of 10 mobile phones per 100 population between 1996 and 2003 had a per capita GDP growth of more than 0.59 percent higher than an identical country.

Since the early days of mainstream availability of the Internet and other modern Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), the rapid advancement of these technologies has given rise to utopist ideas that they would greatly empower democratic societies around the world. Such aspirations are directly based on some of the obvious fundamental properties of the technologies which are commonly referred to as new media: Their relative high speed, low cost and interactivity have the potential to connect people across spatial, social and cultural barriers in ways that have not been possible with more traditional media such as the telephone, television

or postal mail. These possibilities around information and communication have significantly contributed to the ongoing globalization process and generated well-known expressions such as "death of distance" and "global village".

In addition, they are also often regarded as supporting democratic and peaceful processes by leading to better informed citizens through the dissemination of knowledge, and by enabling the free exchange of ideas and opinions in a network where everybody can act both as a producer and consumer. At some point in time, the virtual worlds and communication platforms of the early times of the Internet and related technologies were even viewed as a democratic utopia, which would constitute its own society in "cyberspace", independent from any state's national borders and sovereignty.

It is interesting to note that the very idea of establishing world peace through a global communication system is not new. With the introduction of the telegraph 200 years ago, as well as with the introduction of the communications satellite 50 years ago, there was a general sense that such technologies would overcome barriers of space and time, and therefore enable all the peoples of the world to communicate with each other at a new level, which would enable the democratic solving of conflicts and therefore lead to lasting peace (Ogwumike, 2011).

ICT as a sector can contribute immensely to the national GDP of a nation if adult members in every society were adequately involved and that ICT acting as an enable; can result in improved market competitiveness of a nation's product and services. ICT serves as process of a nation this enable to contribute meaningfully in promoting democratic idea of nation.

The adoption of ICT in adult education programme requires a business environment encouraging open competition trust and security, and standardization, and financial resources for ICT. This requires the implementation of sustainable measures to improve access to the internet and telecommunication infrastructure and increase ICT literacy most especially among adult learners as well as development of local internet based content. Nigeria like most developing countries still depend on content developed and managed in the developed world and as a result substantial costs are incurred while trying to access content.

Relevance and Uses of Information and Communication Technology among Market Women

ICTs are often viewed as near-magic solutions to problems. They are extremely powerful tools that have proven useful in many areas of Nigeria. Traditional media and new ICTs have played a major role in diffusing information to poor living in rural communities. Although little empirical evidence of the benefits of ICTs in Nigeria are found in literature, there are great potentials of ICTs as tools for enhancing people's daily lives whether by increasing access to information relevant to their economic

livelihood, better access to other information sources; healthcare, transport, distance learning or in the strengthening of kinship.

The use of computers or the Internet is still restricted to very few people living in urban centres. ICTs have the potential to broaden and enhance access to information and communication resources for remote rural areas and poor communities, to strengthen the process of democratization and to ameliorate the endemic problem of poverty (Norris, 2010). With the privatization of the Nigeria Telecommunication system, mobile phones are increasingly becoming affordable by average Nigerian (the poor), and they help to overcome rural isolation and make communication easier. The wireless technologies have entered remote rural areas thereby reducing the reliance on costly fixed telephone infrastructures. In many rural areas, over 50% of households make regular use of the telephone when compare with few years ago when the figure was less than 5%. Such accessible communications are now been used for family contact, reduction of the necessity for trips, access to government services, and much more (Balit, 2009). Both radio and telephone are now operating in Nigeria regardless of the language spoken and do not require literacy, which helps in explaining the exceedingly high utility and utilization of both.

The Internet-based communications is however found to remain the least effective in the majority of the rural areas of Nigeria because the resource thresholds are far higher, typically requiring higher-quality communications, electricity, technology infrastructure, and literacy in a computer-supported language (Nwaobi, 2000).

ICTs are also found as tools that open new opportunities and new threats (often by virtue of each other). They have a far more enabling role in building the capacity of the intermediary institutions that work for poverty, rather than directly affecting poor themselves. ICTs have the greatest potential to act as a facilitator for specific development initiatives such as cassava, rice initiative programmes that are currently operational at grass roots in Nigeria. Access to ICTs provides information on prices, markets, technology, and weather to the poor farmers. Community-based telecentres have the potential to empower rural communities and facilitate socio-economic developments in agriculture. It uses selected ICTs (e-mail, Internet, phone, radio, TV, print) to accelerate the wider delivery of appropriately packaged agricultural information and other relevant information useful for the poor.

ICTs offer information and knowledge, which are critical components of poverty alleviation strategies; they make available easy access to huge amounts of information useful for the poor. Through the new technology, particularly networked Internet technologies, anyone can find almost anything. There are fewer secrets, and fewer places to hide. Educated but poor farmers and traders in Nigeria are now promoting their products and handle simple transactions such as orders over the web with payment transactions for goods being handled off-line (O'Farrell 2009). Evidence has also shown that even though trading online is not a common practice by the poor Nigerian; the technology is cheaper and faster paper-based medium,

telephone or fax. Electronic-commerce enables entrepreneurs to access global market information and open up new regional and global markets that fetch better prices and increase earnings (Okunade, 2007).

ICTs have assisted Nigeria in the reduction of unemployment rates at national, urban and in rural areas of Nigeria. Through the establishment of rural information centers in most parts of the country, ICTs have created employment opportunities in rural areas by engaging telecentre managers, subject matter specialists, information managers, translators and information technology technicians. Such centers have helped to bridge the gap between urban and rural communities and reduce the rural-urban migration problem. The centers have also provided training and those trained have now become small-scale entrepreneurs in their respective areas. Thousands of the poor Nigerian has also benefited from telephone service through sales of either accessories or Telephone calls (make calls, receive calls) (Yusuf, 2010).

ICTs have helped in the empowerment of a number of rural women in Nigeria and give them "a voice" that permits them to contribute to the development process. With ICTs, many rural women acquire the capacity to improve their living conditions and become motivated through training and dialogue with others to a level where they make decisions for their own development (Balit 2008). According to the ILO (2011), ICTs have assisted significantly in socio-economic development of many poor Nigerian women through capacity training on small scale business enterprises.

In Nigeria, the ICTs have also helped to impact on the livelihood strategies of small-scale enterprises and local entrepreneurs as well as in the enhancement of various forms of social capital. ICTs initiative is part of existing social interactions, they reduce the friction of space not the importance of place (Hampton 2004). The technologies have been viewed as part of a complex ecology of communication tools that enable local social interactivity. For instance, the Internet is a tool for maintaining social relations, information exchange, and increasing face-to-face interaction, all of which help to build both bonding and bridging social capital in communities (Kavanaugh and Patterson 2011). ICT initiatives play a significant role in developing and sustaining local social ties and stronger ties are characterized by broader media usage (Haythornthwaite, 2015).

New ICTs though not commonly used by majority in Nigeria as compared with the old ICTs and really old ICTs have the potential to penetrate under-serviced areas and enhance education through distance learning. The new ICTs facilitate development of relevant local content and faster delivery of information on technical assistance and basic human needs such as food, agriculture, health and water. Farmers can also interact with other farmers, their families, neighbors, suppliers, customers and intermediaries and this is a way of educating rural communities. The Internet can also enable the remotest village to access regular and reliable information from a global library (the web). Different media combinations are used in different cases through

radio, television, video-cassettes, audio-cassettes, video conferencing, computer programmes, print and CD-ROM or the Internet (Truelove 2008). Rural areas also get greater visibility by having the opportunity to disseminate information about their community to the whole world.

Methodology

Descriptive survey method was used for the study to investigate the relevance and uses of information and communication technology among selected market women in Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara State. The study was carried out among market women in three selected major market in Ilorin West L.G.A. The markets include: Mandate market, Oja Tuntun (New Market) and Oja Oba (Emir's market). The population sample was one hundred and twenty (120) which cut across three major markets selected. For the purpose of this study, a well structured questionnaire was prepared and used to collect relevant data from the sampled population, while simple percentage was used to analyse the data.

Objectives of the Study

The study intends to survey the relevance and uses of information and communication technology among selected market women in Ilorin West LGA, Kwara State. Therefore the following questions were raised and answered:

1. What are the major ICT tools commonly used by market women in Ilorin West LGA, Kwara State?
2. What are the relevance of ICT tools to market women in Ilorin West LGA, Kwara State?
3. To what extent do utilization of ICT empower market women to enhance their poverty level?

Results and Discussion

RQ1: What are the major ICT tools commonly used by market women in Ilorin West LGA, Kwara State?

Table 1: Percentage (%) of responses on ICT tools commonly used by market women in Ilorin West LGA, Kwara State.

S/N	Various ICT Tools/Platform	Frequently	Percentage (%)	Ranked
1	Handset/mobile phone	96	80.0	1 st
2	Whatsapp	65	54.2	2 nd
3	Facebook	56	46.7	3 rd
4	Instagram	40	33.3	4 th
5	E-mail	30	25.0	5 th

6	Computer/Internet facilities	24	20.0	6 th
7	Imo	20	16.7	7 th
8	Twitter	20	16.7	7 th
9	Snap chat	15	12.5	9 th
10	Ipad	12	10.0	10 th

From the above table, mobile phone/handsets were found to be commonly uses among the selected market women with 96 which represents 80.0% of the total women and ranked first, 65(54.2%) uses whatsapp platform of ICT, 56(46.7%) use Facebook 40(33.3%) uses Instagram, 24(20.0%) uses computer/internet facilities and the list use of this facilities/ICT is snap chat 15(12.5%) and ipad 12(10.0%) which ranked 9th and 10th respectively.

RQ2: What are the relevance of ICT tools to market women in Ilorin West LGA, Kwara State?

Table 2: Percentage (%) of responses on the relevance of ICT tools to adult market women in Ilorin West LGA, Kwara State.

S/N	Items	Frequency (No)	Percentage (%)
1	Use of ICT to broaden my knowledge and make me active as a market woman through various business innovative	70	58.3
2	The use of ICT assist me through some vital information on robust business opportunity	66	55.0
3	Enhance my decision making process on specific business activities	84	70.0
4	Keep me updated on the current market price and control	54	45.0
5	Enhance my experience of the trend on different business strategies.	60	50.0

From the table above, 70 women which represent 58.3% of the adult women selected agree that the use of ICT tools to broaden their knowledge and became active market women through various business innovative 66(55.0%) said the use of ICT tools to source for vital information on robust business opportunity, 84 which represent

70.0% of the selected market women said that the use of information and communication technology to enhance their decision making process specific business activities. Similarly, 54(45.0%) said the use of ICT to keep them updated on the current market price and control and 60(50.0%) said the use of ICT to enhance their experience of the trend in the political processes in state. Conclusively, it could deduce from the analysis that the use of ICT tools among market women enhance their decision making process which thus promote their effectiveness.

RQ3: To what extent do utilization of ICT empower market women to enhance their poverty level?

Table 3: Percentage (%) of responses on extent of ICT utilization for market women empowerment

Level of Use	Frequently	Percentage (%)
Very High Extent (VHE)	32	26.7
High Extent (HE)	48	40.0
Low Extent (LE)	28	23.3
Not Use At All (NUA)	12	10.0
Total	120	100

Use to high extent (HE) 28(23.3%) low extent (LE) while the remaining 12 which represent 10.0% said they were used at all (NUA). Thus, it can be concluded from the table above, that 32 of the selected market women which represent 26.7% said they use various form of ICT tools regularity (VHE), 48(40.0%) said they used it to a certain extent.

Conclusion

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) are enablers for economic growth because of their cross cutting nature this affecting all sectors. Adoption and proper utilization of ICTs among market women will lead among others to increased entrepreneurship knowledge, improved business strategies and create greater opportunities for women to promote their business activities as a measure to address their level of lingering poverty. However, it was concluded from the findings that ICTs offer a wide range of information and knowledge, which are critical components of poverty alleviation strategies, ICT are viewed as near-magic solution to problems which proved useful as it provides information on prices, markets, technology and potential entrepreneurship skills and also, women entrepreneurs' use of ICT infrastructure and systems in Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara State is limited and even the ones in use are not widely explored and channeled for business development

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion drawn, the following are further recommended.

1. There is a need to establish women's clubs and the existing ones strengthened in communication skills and ICTs just as in the case of a group (Self Employed Women's Association) in India where the rural women were trained in the production and use of video to generate income, disseminate new skills and to advocate for changes in policy.
2. The target population for policy-making of poverty alleviation must be known in relation to each specific service. Service must be capable of differentiating between the poor and those not so poor, so that benefits can be directed to their intended recipients.
3. Nigerian governments should formulate national strategies to narrow knowledge gaps, including those for technology acquisition and distribution, education and training and expanding access to technologies through its economic reform of deregulation and privatizations.
4. There is a need for the Government to make ICT the hub of the Policy wheel, to link the various sectors and absorb the cost at the initial stage of implementing the Policy.
5. The Infrastructure development of the country should be tackled seriously for decentralization of ICT to take place in all districts to facilitate socio-economic development of the country and alleviate people sufferings.
6. Government should develop various empowerment programme through ICT driven aimed at building women entrepreneurship skills for sustainable poverty reduction.

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