

Factors Militating Against the Access to Information Communication Technology (ICT) and Innovation in Education for the Girl-Child in Rural Areas of Sokoto State

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Abstract

Information Communication Technology (ICT) is a domain that every human being is supposed to have access to. This is because of its importance and relevance to day to day affairs of man in the present world. Due to this importance and relevance of ICT to human life in general, there should be no barriers to acquire the skills and sustain its access by all and sundry irrespective of gender. In Sokoto state, where knowledge and its acquisition is known and encouraged, women or the girl-child tends to be lagging behind in the access and having adequate access to ICT and its facilities. Women in the olden times in this area were confronted with problems that hinge on cultural, social and religious undertones. They were considered inferior to male because of the misinterpretation of religious injunctions and consequently, denied access to education. Her role was hinged on home making, child rearing, and home keeping among others. It is against this background that the paper is conceived to examine the factors that are militating against the girl-child and women in general in Sokoto State to have access and acquire ICT skills and sustain it in this 21st Century. The paper reviewed the level of access to ICT in rural areas of Sokoto state, identified some of the barriers to have adequate and sustained access and how to minimize some of these problems. It recommends that ICT facilities be provided for schools in the rural areas of the state, skilled and learned ICT personnel be employed to train female in the rural areas, and incentives like automatic employment of women who demonstrate ability in ICT be made among others.

Key Words: Girl-child, Education, Women, ICT, Academic achievement, rural areas

Introduction

Girl-child in Sokoto or in Northern Nigeria generally is left behind in many aspects especially in the quest for western model education. Though schools were established to address the trend, many young girls as well as boys do not attend schools. In Sokoto State alone, it was discovered that there are one million one

hundred and forty-five thousand one hundred and forty five (1,145,145) children of school age that are not attending formal school (Nasarawa & Lolo, 2022). This thus accounted for high rate of out of school children in the state. The apathy to learning is more alarming when it comes to sciences and science related courses like Physics and Mathematics. In engineering and Mathematics, the number of girl-child found in the disciplines in Sokoto State are very few. This paper attempts to bring forth the factors that hinder the girl-child or women in general from Sokoto State from undergoing studies in science based disciplines like Information Communication Technology (ICT), The paper covers definition of ICT, the tools used in ICT, level of involvement of women/girl-child in ICT in Sokoto State, factors militating against the participation of girl-child in access to ICT, how to remedy these problems and conclusion.

The ICT Concept

Information Communication Technology is a branch of engineering that involves the use of “computer based hardware and software systems in communication” (McGrawhill Encyclopaedia of Science and Technology, 2002). According to Chafa in Bala (2007), ICT “uses the power of computer and other computing instruments to capture, store, process and produce knowledge at speeds never dreamt before”. TechTerm in Yabo, Marafa, Binji and Muhammad (2021) stated that ICT refers to technologies that provide access to information Technology but primarily focuses on communication technologies. Therefore, ICT is the utilization of ICT tools like telephones, satellites, online library, CD & DVD Rooms, radio frequencies, audio, video and other forms of devices to transmit knowledge to any part of the globe within fraction of seconds. Huge data can be transmitted with the speed of light which is 360,000km per second (Chafe in Bala, 2007). In a nutshell, ICT enables learners to acquire, represent, store, transmit and use information easily without much difficulties. It is responsible for the emergence of e-everything according to Oloyede (2007). Thus, it is because of ICT that we have e-learning, e-board, e-banking, e-mail, e-commence, e-registration, e-marriage and so on.

Tools of ICT

By tools of ICT, we mean the instruments or devices that are used in generating, storing, transmitting, communicating information. Therefore, the devices used by ICT are many and perhaps difficult to exhaust. However, efforts can be made to

provide some. ICT tools include, Computers and their accessories, Printers, photocopiers, scanners, multimedia projectors, CD ROOMs, flash drives, Internet, routers, modem, Wifi, Handsets, radio, Televisions. Zango, Adamu and Bello (2020) grouped ICT tools for teaching and learning into four categories as follows:

- a. Those that are Flexible and include satellite receivers, radio, recorders, cameras, video pictures,, CCTVs, projectors, beams, video games and MP 3-4 players
- b. Those that are link with laboratory and some of them include scientific tools, technical instruments, medical apparatus, agricultural implements, engineering facilities, art costumes, language tools, books and other devices.
- c. Those that are fixed/mobile and they are storage devices, computers, internet, e-mail, social media, smart boards, touch screens, plain screens, robots, avatars and cables
- d. Those that are mobile and involve mobile phones, memory reader, i-pod, i-Pad, androids, i-phones, calculators, PDAs among others.

Therefore, briefly, ICT tools are those instrument or devices that are used to generate, transfer, store and disseminate information.

The Girl-child Concept

The girl-child as defined by Samaru and Idoko (2021) is a biological female child from birth to the age of eighteen. The period from birth to 18 years is characterised by developmental stages namely infancy, early childhood and late adolescence stages of development. Therefore, the girl-child is a young female person from birth and is expected to grow eventually to a woman and even marry and bear children. In other words, the girl-child is an expectant mother who is expected to eventually grow and lead the society into prosperity and sustainable development. As a prospective mother, the girl-child is supposed to acquire basic knowledge and skills that will enhance her role of prospering the society in all ramifications. Therefore, she is supposed to have adequate access and training to modern learning facilities like ICT so as to help in improving the conditions of members of her society.

In the past, the girl-child in Sokoto was a source of pride and had access to Islamic learning just like their male counterparts. However, with the advent of western education, it was feared that the girl-child while undergoing western education may very likely erode in terms of chastity and child-bearing ability. Therefore, due to

this thinking or perception, many people in Sokoto State and indeed in many parts of the Northern States of Nigeria, gave little or no regard to the education of the girl-child. This is particular in the rural areas where the girl-child is subjected to thwacking and other peripheral jobs so as to acquire means of livelihood for the family. Those that were able to enrol in schools have little or no access to ICT.

Nigeria's population was projected to be 201,135,262 in 2019 while Sokoto State had 5,863,187 (Wikipedia, 10/04/2023). Majority of the composition of the population in Sokoto State is female and children. With insurgency in the eastern part of the State, many male were displayed or forced to migrate or even killed, the number of girl-children have increased. Those schooling in the rural areas affected by the insurgency were relocated to urban centres like Sokoto and those that could not be relocated were fortified with security agents to provide security so as to enhance teaching and learning. The schools in Sokoto State that are homogeneously females are about 33 with a population over 8,000 (Lawal, 2023). Some of these schools are Government Girls; College Sokoto, Nana Government Girls' Day Secondary School, Sokoto, Government Girls' Secondary School Rabah, Government Girls' Secondary School, Illelah, Hafsat Arabic Secondary School, Sokoto, among others. These schools were established to enhance the education of the girl-children in the State. Majority of these schools have no ICT facilities and therefore the ICT accessibility in the state for the girl-child leaves much to be desired.

It is true that less than 10% of these schools have some of the tools of ICT like computers, televisions, i-Pad, printers etc acquired by the State Government in conjunction with donor agencies like UNICEF and USAID, but these facilities are not adequate, some places not functional or partially functioning, and in most cases without internet connectivity. The inadequacy of these facilities and lack of internet services have made the access of the girl-child to ICT services poor and total absence of innovation in the state.

Factors Militating Against Girl-child Access to ICT Facilities and Innovation

From what was briefly discussed above, it is clear that provision of adequate ICT facilities and access to enhance innovation are very vital if the girl-child learning in ICT is to be sustained. This section tries to identify factors that are responsible for the very low ICT access and practice among girl-children in Sokoto State.

1. Lack of adequate ICT facilities in most of the schools. Hardly do we have a ratio of 1 computer to 5 students in almost all the schools. This condition reduces the rate of access as well as practice. It is said that practice make perfect. Therefore, the more one practices, the very likelihood for one to become conversant with a tool and likely to make innovation and breakthroughs.
2. Lack of adequate power to utilize the ICT facilities where they exist. Perennial power failure from Power Holding Company of Nigeria and inability of the heads of the school to fund power supply to their ICT facilities in their respective schools is one of the greatest militating factors. ICT facilities cannot be access fully without sustained power supply. This is a setback to achieving any meaningful innovation or breakthrough.
3. Absence of adequate skilful manpower to train and galvanize the girl-child of Sokoto State to abreast ICT. The number of skilful or experts In ICT is highly insufficient compared with the number of people yearning for it. The case is even pathetic when we look for female ICT experts to train and coach their fellow female counter-parts in the State. In fact, the syndrome is not only particular to Sokoto State alone but to the whole of Northern Nigeria. Dearth of experts in ICT is a very serious militating factor against female to have access and make innovations in education and ICT.
4. Cost of ICT facilities is another militating factor that hampers access and innovation in the field on the part of girl-child in Sokoto State. It is a well known fact that ICT materials are very costly to procure and maintain. Therefore, even if the Government procures some of the facilities, to sustain the process is very difficult in the presence of other competing needs of the society.
5. Another militating factor to girl-child access to ICT and innovation is the total absence of internet services. Internet has helped to bring the world into a global village and continuously enhancing innovations. Availability of internet services in these female schools is a perennial problem in all the girl schools of the in the state

Conclusion

The girl-child in most of Northern Nigeria has great challenges or hurdles to cross in life partly due to nature and partly due to customary practices. One of these challenges of the girl-child in Sokoto is access to ICT facilities. Many female students, both in tertiary and in lower level of education in the State, lack ability and adequate access to functional ICT facilities. This accounted for the poor level of female who are skilful in ICT in the state. This is a negative trend, though not particular to Sokoto State, which must be addressed. ICT has become part and parcel of life today and any one lacking in the knowledge of ICT is left behind in the affairs of this world.

Suggestions

It is very important to proffer the following suggestions so as to improve the level of knowledge and skilful people in ICT in the state.

1. Government should prioritize ICT and mount a programme on it for female who constitute the majority in the state.
2. Train skilful persons in ICT so as to improve the number and provide easy access
3. Improve power supply by providing Solar sources which available in the region
4. Provide automatic employment opportunities to all female that are skilful in ICT

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