

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Framework for Youth Empowerments in Nigeria

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Abstract

The rate of unemployment among Nigerian youths is alarming and this unfortunate situation has led many youths to involve in various forms of crimes such as armed robbery, banditry, kidnapping, human trafficking, insurgency, to mention but a few. Though, governments at all levels are trying to minimize unemployment scenario through different interventions, such as poverty alleviation, agriculture anchor programme, trainings of youths on different technical programmes and so on. This paper proposes an ICT based framework for youth empowerment in Nigeria so as to complements the existing efforts on the joblessness. The paper x-rayed concept of ICT, youth empowerments and unemployment. It was also explained in the paper the causes of unemployment in Nigeria and governments efforts to reduce unemployment to barest minimum. The paper provides some recommendations, such as, provision of interest-free loans by federal government to youths who are willing to stand on their own for self-reliant and employer of labour in the nearest future.

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Background to the Study

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is a combination of computer and telecommunication systems which has revolutionized the entire workplace. It has been well established that the use of ICT cannot be undermined in all facets of human works (Jimoh, Salawu, Yusuf & Folorunso, 2021). It is changing the ways of doing businesses. The pervasive use of ICT tools and resources are increasing daily due to its effectiveness in obtaining desirable results. The transformation of ICT in today's 21st century of information-driven society has been well documented by several authors and thus stressed that ICT has accelerated development of many sectors, such as agriculture, economy, education, politics, manufacturing firm/ industry, to mention but a few (Jimoh, Salawu, Huzaifa & Yusuf, 2019; Adepaju, 2018; Ebinuwele, Ola & Uduebor, 2014 & Maduewesi, 2013).

The acceptance rate of Nigerian populace in the use of ICT tools and applications is high. It is not an overstatement in saying that every household in Nigeria has one thing or the other to do in relation to ICT. This implies that Nigeria society is a veritable environment for the markets of ICT tools, gadgets and its wide range of applications. In the processes of using these ICT devices, some are damaged or worn out which need maintenance and repairs or even replacement which will call for purchase of a new one. To make calls and access the Internet, there is need for recharge cards. No wonder, it is established that the economic development of a nation can be accelerated by improvements in a country's ICT infrastructure (Ndukwe, 2007). Looking at area of ICT in relation to unemployment in Nigeria, youths can be empowered after receiving adequate skills on technical-know-how on repairs and maintenance of the ICT devices as well as buying and selling of these products. Though, some youths have been engaged in rendering maintenance and repair, buying and selling services to Nigeria populace, there is need to look at how to reduce unemployment in Nigeria society from this angle using a model called 'Igbo, master-apprentice approach'.

In Igbo master-apprentice approach, learning a trade is very effective and has been aiding Igbo people to be financial empowered because of its networking structure. An Igbo man (master) who is into a business can bring one or two of his brothers (apprentice) from home and train them the business. After two to three years of engaging them, they (apprentice) will be given money by the master and then set them up for the same business. In turn, the apprentice will also do same for others after being empowered financially. Thus, in this paper, the approach 'Igbo, master-apprentice' is proposed in ICT framework for youth's empowerment in Nigeria.

Conceptual Definitions

The Concept of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Many scholars have defined or conceptualized Information and communication technologies (ICT) in different ways, for instance, UNESCO (2017) sees it as a wide range of technological tools and resources used in transmitting, storing, creating, sharing or exchanging information. These tools and resources include but not limited to computers,

the Internet (websites, blogs and emails), live broadcasting technologies (radio, television and webcasting), recorded broadcasting technologies (podcasting, audio and video players, and storage devices) and telephony (fixed or mobile, satellite, videoconferencing, etc.).

According to Prat (2023), ICT is described to mean all devices, networking components, applications and systems that allow people and organizations (i.e., businesses, nonprofit agencies, governments and criminal enterprises) to interact in the digital world. In the definition provided by Food and Agricultural Organisation–FAO (2016), it is seen as a broader term for Information Technology (IT), which refers to all communication technologies, including the internet, wireless networks, cell phones, computers, software, middleware, video-conferencing, social networking, and other media applications and services enabling users to access, retrieve, store, transmit, and manipulate information in a digital form. ICTs are also used to refer to the convergence of media technology such as audio-visual and telephone networks with computer networks, by means of a unified system of cabling (including signal distribution and management) or link system.

Similarly, ICT is defined according to Library & Information Science Education Network (2023) as the convergence of electronics, computing, and telecommunications. It has unleashed a tidal wave of technological innovations in the collecting, storing, processing, transmission, and presentation of information that has not only transformed the information technology sector itself into a highly dynamic and expanding field of activity- creating new markets and generating new investment, income, and jobs but also provided other sectors with more rapid and efficient mechanisms for responding to shifts in demand patterns and changes in international comparative advantage, through more efficient production processes and new and improved products and services. In a nutshell, ICT can be seen as a wide range of hardware, software and internet facilities that enable information to be collected, processed, stored, presented and transmitted from a device in sending location to another device at receiving location.

ICT Components

Library & Information Science Education Network (2023) identifies components of ICT are as follows:

1. **Hardware:** Multimedia PCs, Laptops, notebook, any portable devices (mobile phones and PDAs) connected Internet connectivity through Local Area Network & Wide Area Network, telecommunication satellites, interactive television and radio.
2. **Software/ Application:** These include operating system, application software and packages.
3. **Internet services:** This enables World Wide Web (WWW) or Internet applications such as online apps, video conferencing, electronic mail, discussion board and newsgroup, digital libraries (consists of e-books, e-journals, etc), computer-mediated conferences, telemedicine and virtual reality to be presented and transmitted from one location to another.

Youth Empowerment

Youth empowerment is an imperative for youth growth and development as well as society or nation at large. Youth empowerment, according to Olusola (2019) is a process where youths possess the ability and authority to make informed decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people. It is a means of encouraging youths to do great things for themselves and also to make great impact in their society. Today, Nigeria youths are at the center of absolute strength because they constitute high percentage of nation's population, hence, the need to make continuous efforts in turning dreams into reality. According to the global organization (UN) reports, as cited in Olusola (2019), Nigerian youth migrants in Europe and America are three times more than migrants from other west -African country. Thus, the migration rate of the youth was 32% in 1999 and was estimated that by the end of 2012, over 50% of the youths in Nigeria will be residing in foreign countries where job opportunities are easier to come by. This is excluding the massive migration rate of Nigerians to Canada and other foreign countries since 2017.

Olusola (2019) and EduPadi (2023), identify the following reasons for empowering youths in Nigeria:

1. Poverty Eradication
2. Improved Standard of Education
3. Good Governance
4. Crime reduction and National Security
5. Employment Creation
6. Increased innovation and creativity
7. Skill development

Youth Empowerment Prorammes in Nigeria

Nigerian governments are concerned about the rising cases of unemployment saga among the teeming youths. Based on this, different empowerment programmes are funded by government and some of the popular ones, according to Izuchukwu (2022) include;

1. Youth Empowering People (YEP)
2. N-Power
3. Tony Elumelu Foundation Entrepreneurship Program
4. Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (Youwin)
5. Trader Moni
6. Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS)
7. Youth Initiative for Sustainable Agriculture in Nigeria (YISA)
8. African Youth Empowerment Nigeria (AYEN)
9. Youth Empowerment and Development Initiative (YEDI)
10. Presidential Youth Entrepreneurship Support (P-YES)

Causes of unemployment in Nigeria

Many authors have attributed different factors as the causes of unemployment in Nigeria, for instance, Kakwagh & Ikwuba (2010) and Simwa (2023) highlight the following:

- (1) **High rate of Population Growth:** The population is growing faster than the economy, so there are not enough jobs.
- (2) **Inappropriate School Curricula and Poor Training:** Many Nigerian youths are not adequately educated or trained due to ineffective curricula. Nigeria education system gives more glory to certificates than the skills.
- (3) **Perception of Policy Makers:** The policy makers favour themselves forgetting their followers when they get to power.
- (4) **Bribery and Corruption:** Due to bribe and corruption, jobs are sold to wealthy or rich people of the society which is not based on competency and neglect the children of the poor.
- (5) **Low level of Technology:** Due to ineffective curricular, the youths lack requisite technical-know-how to work with some industries that need their skills rather than their certificates.
- (6) **The insecurity in Nigeria:** The insecurity in Nigeria makes it difficult for businesses to operate and also makes it unsafe for people to go out and look for jobs as a presence of insecurity in a society is a bane to economic development.

ICT Framework for Youths empowerment in Nigeria

As it can be seen in figure 1, ICT comprises of computer and telecommunication systems/technology. Each of these components is further sub-divided into hardware and software. In computer technology hardware, three separate units are carved out in which a youth may have interest to learn and acquire required skills that can empower and make him/her excel in the field. Using an 'Igbo master-apprentice approach' here, a trainee can choose a skill acquisition development in anyone or more of the units of hardware/software of computer or telecommunication technology for a specified period of learning (say two years). After graduation, the federal government can support such trainee with fund or equipment free or loan with zero interest rate. Minimum of three years may be given to graduated trainee who is now master to payback the loaned money. But instead of paying the money, the master now should train another two youths in his/her area of specialization and set them up after graduation. This network of training or buying and selling continue. With proper monitoring, this approach can empower many youths in the area of ICT if it is given a trial.

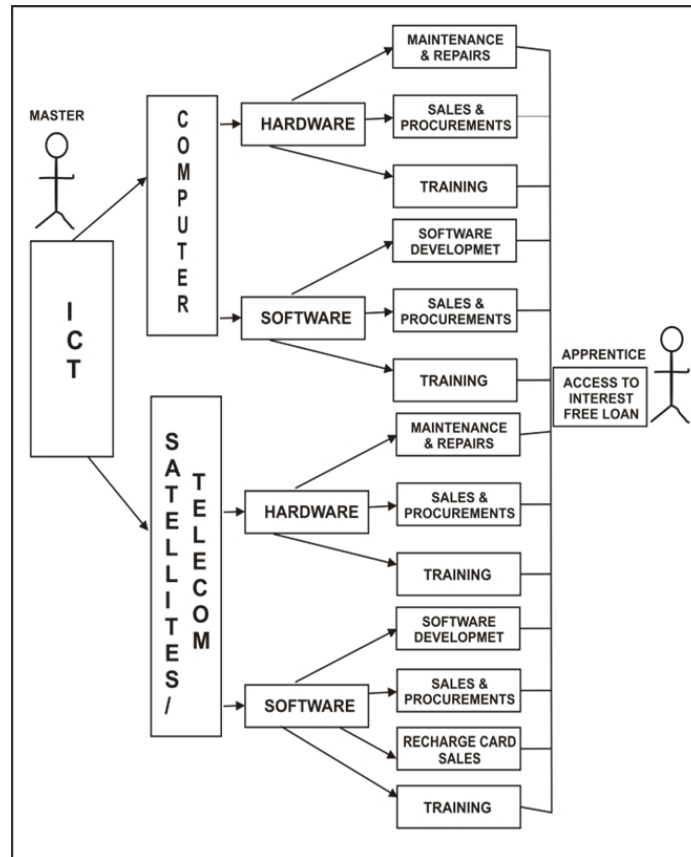


Figure 1: ICT Framework for Youths empowerment in Nigeria

Resultant effects of unemployment in Nigeria

The resultant effects of unemployment are numerous in number, but Anayochukwu & Ifejiolor (2014) identified the following impacts as follows:

- (1) **Unproductive Labour Force:** The youths who possess relevant skills in different fields of study cannot get jobs to contribute to gross domestic products (GDP) of the country; this can lead to unproductivity of the youths
- (2) **Crime and Violence:** Looking at the alarming rate of joblessness in Nigeria, there is more tendencies to have more crimes which is the threat to economic development. It is obvious that different kinds of crimes have emerged in all regions of Nigeria which can be attributed to unemployment.
- (3) **Drug Addiction/Sexual Harassment:** Lack of job can set in frustration among youths and can result to drug abuse or use of narcotic and thus eventually leads to harassment of female child in the community.
- (4) **Contributes to low GDP:** It is an established economic reality that the size of the workforce directly impacts on country's GDP. So, since no job, then low GDP is ascertained.

- (5) **Effect on health:** Without job, there is no tendency to get money to buy quality food and drug, disease or ill-health can easily set in.
- (6) **Political instability:** Youths without jobs may be likely recruited into political thugs.

Conclusion

This paper proposed an ICT framework for youth empowerments in Nigeria. To implement this ICT framework effectively, an 'Igbo master-apprentice approach' was recommended. The approach was suggested because it has been working for Igbo people since time immemorial and still found useful in Igbo business till today. The paper conceptualized some basic concepts, such as ICT, the components of ICT, youth empowerment, causes of unemployment and its resultant effects in Nigeria society. Besides, federal government's efforts through different empowerment programmes to reduce joblessness in Nigeria society were also discussed in the paper.

Recommendations/Way Forward

Based on proposed framework and review of existing empowerment programmes in this work, the following recommendations are made:

- (1) Provision of interest-free loans by federal government to youths who are willing to stand on their own for self-reliant and employer of labour in the nearest future.
- (2) Government should adopt and implement an 'Igbo master-apprentice approach' suggested in this paper to see the efficacy of the method.
- (3) Nigerian educational planners and curricula developers must consider skill acquisition programmes while developing curriculums for all units of education.
- (4) Employers must place emphasize on skills acquisition (what employee can offer to the firm/organization/business) rather than paper qualifications.

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