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| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

The Contribution of Information Communication Technology to the Dwindling Reading Culture among Students of Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

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| **ABSTRACT**

The idea that Information Communication Technology (ICT) has become the lifeblood of national development is no longer news. Similarly, it is no news that it has contributed immensely to the economies of nations and revolutionized the means and methods of studying. However, the information of interest and concern now is how it has contributed to the dwindling reading culture among students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This topic was studied through oral interviews and personal interaction to know how students' reading habits have declined tremendously as a result of the advent of ICT using selected Kogi State University students as a case study. It is discovered through our informants that much time is given by the students to surfing the internet for both relevant and mostly irrelevant materials to their academic progress at the expense of reading natural materials such as textbooks and notebooks. This practice has depleted their natural mental ability and reduced their capacity to read comprehensively and effectively with consequent mass failure in both their internal and external examinations. The data collected were analyzed using the simple descriptive statistical tool to compute and summarize the findings. It was discovered that the advent of ICT has in no small way depleted their natural mental ability to read comprehensively and effectively. This paper is of the opinion that students need to put their internet use under control, appreciate the fact that all life is not yet online and see the internet for now as only a means to an end. This paper concludes with the view that lecturers need to sensitize the students on the importance of reading to their intellectual and moral development so that reading can start to take its rightful position alongside ICT.

| **KEYWORDS**

ICT, Reading Culture, Tertiary Institutions

1. Introduction

Information Communication Technology (ICT) is an electronically based technology that embraces various new technologies and their applications such as television broadcasting, video cassette, recorder, computers, satellite communication, telephony (SMS) teleconferencing and audio conferencing. "It also comprises what enables the handling of information and facilitates different forms of communication among human actors, between human beings and among electronic systems" (Omachonu 34). As an interdisciplinary science, it is primarily concerned with the collection, classification, manipulation, storage, retrieval and dissemination of information.

As a revolution in learning, ICT has transformed the means and methods of studying and expanded the frontiers of learning and knowledge for all. It is an electronic mode of sharing and transferring knowledge information without necessarily requiring physical contact between the teachers and the students (Omachonu 5). It makes access to information a lot easier and more convenient, saves time for both teachers and learners and encourages personal development.

Today we have several ICT based platforms such as e-banking, e-mail, e-workshop, e-contract, e-marriage, e-conferencing, e-interview, just to mention a few. It has brought a great change in the economies of countries around the world. For example, in a statement credited to the Nigerian Minister of Communication:

> *ICT contributes about as much as GDP as oil and gas. It is equally one of the fastest-growing sectors of the Nigerian economies, and it is the second-largest soon to be the largest ICT market in Africa.*

In the educational sector, especially in science, internet services have enabled teachers and learners from different countries to discuss issues affecting teaching and learning. They can share problems and prospects of the solutions found in their area globally and alert other countries. ICT paves the way for new pedagogies in the learning and teaching process. It stimulates and enhances the learning experiences of learners. These are what scholars observed that made them brand ICT as the lifeblood of national development. Corroborating this is the statement by Abimbola Alele, the Managing Director of National Broadband Nigeria Communication, that: 'ICT is the Nation's driver, and it drives everything'.

The advantages derived from these technologies are so enormous that they have obliterated from the people, especially learners in higher institutions, the fact that ICT is quietly corrosive to the educational development of the country. For instance, these days, students of higher institutions hardly have time to read any natural material, including textbooks, class notes, or even novels. This is obviously impacting negatively on the reading culture of students, as exemplified from sampled information/cases of the students of Kogi State University Anyigba. Having examined the role of ICT in nation-building, it is equally important to highlight the benefits of reading on nation-building as well.

1.1 Background to the work

These days, it is worrisome to note students' lack of interest in reading. For instance, students no longer read meaningfully and comprehensively for some time now. Their interest in literary works such as prose can be used to teach pronunciation through the correct application of punctuation marks such as comma, full stop, the question mark is almost at zero level. This inability to read well affects students' correct interpretation of examination questions and promotes poor performance in examinations.

To complicate the situation more, the communication operators in the country, such as the MTN, GLO, Etisalat, Airtel and others, keep sending their unsolicited promos to phone users. These seem to have totally captured the attention of students in Universities especially. Other social and semi-social communication platforms are capturing and luring students away from core academic sources and sites. Examples of these are; the 'Face Book': an online social platform for sharing views, pictures, and internet calls with Facebook already added contacts. Another one is tagged 'To Go', an online instant messenger for social communication between contacts registered in users' phone books. This is not to make calls or chats. There is yet another one called WHATSAPP which is an online instant messenger for social communication between contacts registered in users' phone books. It is used for internet calls - Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP), video chat and group conversations. We also have 'Instagram`, which is mainly for sharing pictorial views while users can also add comments to uploaded pictures.

The startling revelation about these social media platforms is that there is hardly any university student that does not subscribe to at least two of these time-consuming platforms. Even when lectures are in progress, students keep moving from one platform to another. This practice has led to great apathy towards reading as most students no longer have time for reading and can no longer read with concentration and comprehension, which are the essence of reading. The end result of all these is their poor academic performance at examinations. Some basically can no longer read with the correct application of punctuation marks, including the full stop, comma and the question mark that can enable them to interpret exam questions correctly. When they are not chatting with both known and unknown friends, they are sharing pictorial views or sending messages across in the class even when lectures are in progress.

To guarantee student patronage - continuous browsing, the communication operators usually make free megabytes for browsing available for them to browse and occasionally, financial rewards that usually come with an expiration time so beneficiaries will not waste time with those bonuses. Examples of such captivating messages sent on phones and found in some national dailies are given below:

> Rocking data offer! Get double data while <u>on campus with GLO campus</u> booster! N200 gives 400 MB data while on
> Campus and 200MB outside the campus. Subscribe now!

Enjoy free calls to all networks and browse the internet today! You can now talk and browse more for less. Get N300 when you pay N100 valid for 3 days –[MTN].

GLO campus data Booster Zone available in all Nigeria campuses nationwide, including Police, Customs and Immigration Training Institutes ₦200 gives ₦1600 worth of data on campus. [The Nigerian Tribune 9/12/2015].

Twin bash DEAL for ₦1000 gets 3GB Data + 1000 to call All Net +₦1000 to call friends + 250 MB free data to GIFT –[GLO].

15 free MB data bonus on recharge and free one minute for every 3 minutes of a call.

Gel 1 GB data plus ₦1500 credit on Easy flex data recharge ₦2000 valid for 30days –[Etisalat].

GLO campus booster is the BEST Data Deal Ever. To hit ₦1000, get 1GB DATA outside Campus and get 2GB on campus.

New offer! Get N3800 to call all networks + 300 MB data. SMS Vl000 to 131 NOW cost ₦1000 Val/1-4 days [MTN].

These are examples of the baits often targeted at students of higher institutions, which seem to have lured them away from classwork (reading) to continuous browsing until many gradually became addicted. The more these baits are consumed by students, the distant they become from reading and the higher the increase in the number of subscribers, with a corresponding profit margin to the communication operators. For instance, the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) declared that internet users have increased from 76.322.S02 in 2014 to 81.892.840 in January 2015 that is a general increase of 5,570,085 within one year.

1.2 Problem Review
While the aim of Technology generally is to get things done effectively and efficiently, the advent of ICT is fast eroding the place of reading in our society, especially among our university students. Most students have psychologically addicted themselves to its negative uses. The internet, for instance, which should be a source of knowledge, has become the engine house where all sorts of vices are perpetrated. As a result, most students of higher institutions, especially, are using the technology wrongly. They are glued to their computers day and night surfing the internet, watching pornography, indulging in internet fraud or wasting precious time chatting.

Apart from the moral issues against ICT such as 'visiting pornographic sites by teenagers, monitoring other people's daily activities and storing information about their misdemeanors for life, a threat to intellectual property and privacy; (Omachonu 30) all of which have in no small way depleted their natural mental ability. ICT seems to be eroding students reading culture at a rate that will affect their academic performance.

Society once bemoaned this practice but now seems to condone the practice as most parents seem to rely on their children's proceeds from such sources. This has made some parents shy away from the truth that their children's addiction to browsing negatively impacts their academic progress. Therefore, the goal of this paper is to carry out some verifications on the assertion that ICT access by students is more of a hindrance to their academic progress.

1.3 Scope of Study
This research is an examination of how the advent of ICT has caused a downward trend in the reading habits of students in tertiary institutions. Kogi State University is used as a case study for this verification. The University has eight faculties comprising of 100 levels to 500 levels. The method adopted for data collection is an oral interview. Questions were drawn on various aspects of browsing and administered to randomly selected students of three hundred levels that cut across all the faculties. This interview was to elicit students' responses on their interest/attitudes towards browsing and reading. Areas studied include the impact of ICT on reading culture, the role of ICT on academic performance in examinations, impact of browsing on intellectual and moral development, impact on comprehensive and effective reading, motivating factors for browsing and how students' addiction to the net can be put under control so reading could take back its rightful position alongside ICT.

1.4 Research Questions
❖ How has students' addiction to internet browsing affected their capacity to read comprehensively and effectively?
❖ To what extent has ICT affected the academic performance of students in tertiary institutions?
❖ What are the motivating factors that get students glued to browsing?
❖ What is responsible for students' apathy towards reading natural materials books?
❖ How' can students' addiction to internet browsing be put under control?

1.5 Objectives

- ❖ To determine how students' capacity to read comprehensively and effectively can be achieved.
- ❖ To determine how students' interest in browsing will no longer jeopardize their academic performance.
- ❖ To study factors motivating students' interest in browsing and recommend how they can alter their routine on the internet so as to break the usage patterns.
- ❖ To determine how to create students' interest in reading literary works that can help inculcate reading culture among students.
- ❖ To determine how to make students stay connected to the offline world by reading novels and seeing the internet just as a tool and a means to an end, not an end in itself.

1.6 Methodology of Study

This study is evaluative in nature. The adopted method for data collection was an oral interview which is acclaimed for its high immediate response and ability to probe the underlying sentimental facts revealed by informants. 50 randomly selected students (males and females) per faculty (eight faculties), giving a total of 400 students, were used. All the informants were picked from three hundred levels. The 100 levels students were not used because they were seen as fresher. The 200 levels students were not used because the level is made up of both old and new students who came in through direct admission. Four hundred level was not chosen because a faculty-'medicine' is just three years old and may not be represented at that level (400 level)

Different questions bordering on the attitudes of students to internet browsing and reading were asked of the informants. The average of responses to each question from each faculty was determined. The average of these percentages per faculty was determined. It is these averages that were used to carry out the data analysis. These averages were analyzed using the simple descriptive statistical tool to compute and summarize the findings.

2. Literature Review

Although reading is a difficult skill to acquire, it is one of the key aspects of literacy-reading and writing. Reading is a tool for learning at all levels of education. It facilitates the learning process and promotes intellectual development in learners. Reading provides the key information to social, moral and intellectual development (Amuche 207). Through reading, one's competence in language use can increase. Reading equally exposes one to adequate knowledge that equips one to tackle any challenge one can ever face. Reading is a better stress reliever than music or any other method, according to Idoko (26), and it helps to develop self-confidence in speaking.

3. ICT and the Educational Sector.

While the communication operators keep milking fat on the browsers, the educational sector daily decries the downward trend in youths' reading culture, which culminates in their poor performance in examinations. For example, Ekele Jacob, a one time Kogi State Coordinator for National Examination Council in "EXPO' attributed 'the last woeful performance of candidates in the National Examination Council (NECO) examination result in which only 2% of the registered candidates passed with five credits (including Mathematics but failed English which is the University admission requirement) is due to 'the great decline in the reading culture among youths (11). According to him, more time is being spent on watching movies, pornographic films and some unprofitable ventures provided by the internet.

Joining in the condemnation of the negative role the internet plays on students' academic life is Ojali Cletus, one of the organizers of the annual 'Award of Excellence' to the best-performed country in West Africa in the West African School Certificate Examination (WASCE). He gave the main reason why Ghana towers over Nigeria in the Award for some time to be the lack of interest in reading and the excessive general love for the internet among Nigerian students.

A one-time Vice-Chancellor of the Kogi State University (the focus of this study), Hassan Issa at a 'Book Fair' organized by the University in 2015, equally lamented the low patronage of the University Library by staff and students of the University, in spite of the abundant and current materials stocked in the library. He gave the main reason for the low patronage as the impact of the internet (ICT) that is fast eroding students' interest in reading. He further lamented how this apathy towards reading had affected and is still affecting students' academic progress. He equally observed that though e-resources could be helpful, they could not be completely relied on in the Nigeria situation where there was constant power challenge.

The Federal government is equally troubled about the decline in the reading culture among youths in the country as it has also decried the downward trend in students' performance in examinations. This poor performance Jerry Agada (a one-time Minister of State for Education) observed could be detrimental to national development. He, therefore, instructed the Universal Basic Education Board (UBEB) in the country 'to instil reading culture into the day-to-day activities of school children'. To this effect, he

flagged up a 'Read' campaign in some schools to encourage pupils to imbibe the reading culture from a young age even before getting to higher institutions.

From the various levels of observations on the decline in reading activities among the youths as orchestrated by the advent of ICT, it is clear that it has become a national issue that demands prompt attention so that it does not lead eventually to national disaster in the educational sector, as youths may not be able to further their education because of repeated failures.

The table provided below shows the percentages of responses recorded for each faculty on each question asked the students. The total averages of these percentages are used to interpret our data.

Table of Responses by Faculties in Percentage

Questions	Faculties								
	Agric	Arts	Sciences	Education	Medicine	Natural Science	Mgt Sci.	Law	Average
1. Do you have access to a browsing phone?	97	92	95	94	95	98	95	94	95
2. What is your level of interest in internet browsing?	95	95	95	95	60	95	95	90	90
3. What in particular do you .love using your phone to do often?	55	75	65	65	25	50	60	45	55
4. How long do you stay browsing daily?	60	80	80	78	40	62	80	40	65
5. Why do you browse often?	60	75	67	70	50	65	75	50	64
6. Why do you prefer internet materials to textbooks?	63	78	69	78	40	55	65	40	61
7. How many hours do you spend daily on reading?	92	95	88	82	85	89	95	86	89
8. How often do you visit the library to read?	85	87	85	82	64	76	75	70	78
9. Why do you consider net materials more advantageous than the natural materials?	85	96	96	89	82	85	85	70	86
10. What impact has the ICT on your academic life?	64	75	75	75	40	65	76	50	65

4. Data Presentation and Interpretation.
Responding to the first question, 95% of them admitted that they have access to browsing phones. This is an indication that no one is left out in the browsing business as they do not need to get to any cafe before they access whatever information is needed from the net.

90% of the student informants confessed that they could not do without browsing in one day. The implication of this is that they are fully occupied doing one form of browsing or the other, a situation that is likely not to give room for proper reading.
Regarding what they often use their phones to do. 45% of the students revealed that they use their phones for academic purposes, such as recording their lecturers' voices and appearances. The implication is that there will be not enough time to read notebooks or textbooks as their focus will be on what they have on their various phones.

55% of the informants admitted that they regularly use their phones to visit social media such as FaceBook, Whatsapp, and other platforms. This is a high percentage. The implication of this on reading is great as there is likely going to be very limited or no time spared for reading.

About 65% of the students interviewed owned up to the fact that they spend between 3 and 5 hours daily browsing. When added to the hours, they spend on lectures; this definitely will leave them with little or no time to read each day.

Responding to why they always browse, 64% of the total population confessed that they see browsing as a fun time, time to kill boredom and time to make new friends. All these have no bearing on academic activities; rather, they will lure students away from reading and drive them to pleasure land.

Responding to how many hours they spend daily reading, none admitted to having specific time dedicated to reading. 35% said they read as and when necessary. Another group made up of 30% said their reading is scheduled for weekends. 30% revealed that they read mostly when they are preparing for tests or examinations. From these revelations, it is clear that reading which promotes academic excellence, seems not to be a serious business among students these days because of their over-reliance on browsing to get ready-made materials anytime. The practice seems to be killing fast the reading culture among our students in tertiary institutions.

Responding to why they prefer sourcing materials from the net rather than from the library, 90% o of them attest to the fact that ICT has made studying easier, faster, cheaper and less stressful. Moreover, they do not have to be at a specific place before they access the net, unlike reading that requires specific places and time for successful reading. The implication of this is that it is turning them to become copycats and making them perform poorly in some vital aspects of literacy such as spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Responding to how regular they visit the library to read, 55% of them confessed that since they registered as students in the library, they have never gone there for the reading. 40% said they only visit the library when lecturers mandate them to read specific books for classwork. This practice must have a negative impact on their reading ability and academic performance.

85% of our informants admitted that the net materials have more advantages over the natural materials because the net materials are cheaper and readily available to access. The implication of this is that students are no longer able to apply correct punctuation marks in their reading so as to get the real message of examination questions for better performance.

Texting is another ICT activity that takes students off reading. Most times, free SMS are granted to students, as revealed in some of our samples of communication promos. Texting has become a universal means of communicating. 70% of our informants admitted to sending as many as ten text messages daily to friends, parents and relations using their phones. Apart from the fact that each message takes time to construct, it affects both writing and reading methods equally. Most often, abbreviations that run foul the conventional writing method are employed. Such abbreviations include b4 = before, bcos = because, there4 = therefore.

The effect of this writing pattern is glaring on students' poor reading, writing, spelling and grammar. The existing templates also offer the students a window of communication but also with its negative implications for writing letters and composition. Examples are: 'Pls call me later. 'Am busy'. 'Send me credit'.

5. Findings

It is obvious from the results gathered from the interview conducted with students that ICT could definitely contribute to the dwindling reading culture among students of tertiary institutions. This is a result of their addiction to internet browsing. Lecturers, parents and governments have all complained about the negative impact of the ICT on the reading habits of students. Some of the areas pointed out include students' poor performance in examinations, their inability to read comprehensively and effectively, their apathy towards reading literary works, depletion in their natural mental capacity to read and understand, their poor interpretation of examination questions and their wrong application of punctuation marks for meaningful reading.

Of all the factors suspected to be responsible for the poor performance of students in academic work, the impact of ICT proves to be the recurring factor as opined by parents, teachers and government. Therefore, efforts must be made to redress this trend by educating students on the benefits of reading, making Literature [a perceived tool for inculcating reading culture] compulsory at secondary school level for students to imbibe reading culture even before getting to higher institutions.

To Ekele (11), poor reading habits among students is symptomatic of their poor performance in examinations as they can no longer read with understanding.

6. Recommendations
Redressing the trend of the dwindling reading culture among the students of higher institutions in Nigeria requires the joint efforts of the parents, teachers, students themselves and the government.

- ➢ There should be regular reading competitions at the secondary school level to prepare students and increase their interest in reading at a higher level.
- ➢ The 'Read' campaign organized by the Federal Ministry of Education should not be limited to cities but be extended to the grass root to educate pupils on the benefits of reading to inculcate a reading culture in Nigerian youths even before getting to higher institutions.
- ➢ Literature which is a tool for inculcating reading culture should be made compulsory at the secondary school level for students to imbibe the reading culture before getting to the University level.
- ➢ Parents should provide reading materials for their children and monitor their educational progress in schools.
- ➢ Teachers should make learners know the benefits of reading as well as the moral and academic importance.
- ➢ Students should try to alter their routine on the internet so as to   break their usage patterns, set reasonable Internet use goals and stick to them.
- ➢ Students should also stay connected to the offline world by reading novels and visiting newsstands to develop their social and intellectual skills.
- ➢ Students should take time to appreciate the fact that all life is not yet online and therefore treat the internet as a tool and stay focused on the fact that the internet is just a means to an end.

7. Conclusion
This writer submits that there cannot be economic development without proper human development. In fact, one must be intellectually sound to successfully access information from the internet, and reading is a tool for achieving this intellectual goal. While ICT is branded as the lifeblood of any nation's development, reading has also been acknowledged as life itself. So, the two are collaborators in the complete development of any nation.

As a nation develops technologically, it should also strive to develop its human resources. For instance, knowledge is said to be power, and this power comes from written words. According to Musa Halliru (2006), reading books and other publications is the process of acquiring power and intellectual authority. Reading clarifies the thought process, stimulates the mind and provokes research, which ultimately leads to invention.

If reading culture is to be facilitated among tertiary institutions' students, efforts should be made to rekindle students' interest in literary works with Literature as a subject at secondary school level and learnt by all, since literature is seen to be a vehicle for the attainment of reading culture among tertiary institutions' students.

Finally, all and sundry should, in fact, make reading a continuous exercise so as to keep knowledge alive throughout one's life. Reading should be a lifelong exercise, and as this habit is developed, reading will gradually take its rightful position alongside ICT.

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