**ENGENDERING QUALITY CONTINUING EDUCATION PROGRAMMES THROUGH INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)**

**BY**

**AJAYI, RACHAEL ADEJOKE (Ph.D)**

**LAGOS SATE UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, OTO-IJANIKIN WITH A CAMPUS@ NOFORIJA EPE, LAGOS STATE**

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***ABSTRACT***

*The practice of continuing education has been in existence since the twentieth century and, from indications, it has contributed in no small measure to the enhancement of the skills and competencies of many adults socially, economically, politically and in all facets of human endeavours. The advent of information and communication technology (ICT) and its contribution to socio-economic infrastructure has further boosted the capacity of continuing education to provide seamless learning access to limitless number of learners in adult education globally. The situation is not different in Nigeria as evidence shows that ICT has contributed immensely to the effectiveness of continuing education, thereby increasing the achievements posted in Adult Education programmes. In this context, the importance of ICT in engendering quality continuing education programmes in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. This paper therefore examines the concept of Continuing Education, Information and Communication Technology and how ICT can engender quality Continuing Education programmes. It was how ever recommended among others that Facilitators in continuing education programmes should ensure they attend workshops and seminars on a continuous basis with the aim of training and retraining them on the effective use of ICT tools and all Adult Education programmes and curriculum should be reviewed in order to entrench the use of ICT in its teaching and learning process.*

**Introduction**

There is no doubt that the advent of information and communication technology in Nigeria and all over the world has impacted every area of human endeavour and education inclusive.

The role and the importance of information and communication technology was evidenced unprecedently during the global lock down that was informed by the covid-19 pandemic that hit the whole world. The delivery of the teaching –learning process was carried out through the various information and communication technology learning platforms all over the world.Through ICT ,students were brought together through discussion and collaboration tools who could never have considered or be opportuned to communicate and interact with each other offline. Information and communication technology has made learning more interactive and easier both for learners and the teachers.

Oyedokun and Adeolu-Akande (2022) buttressing the importance of ICT in education noted that the transition of the world to digital media and information technology has transformed the educational system by replacing traditional ways of teaching and learning with modern computer-based processes which has tremendously impacted the teaching learning process.

In adult education and adult learning, the impact and transformation, information and communication technology experienced cannot be overemphasized. Adult literacy has received tremendous improvement especially after covid-19. Older adults have learnt to embrace new technologies to facilitate their tasks as well as providing them with an effective means as against loneliness and social isolation caused by the global lockdown during covid-19 era.

Covid – 19 contributed immensely to the effective use of information technology in various continuing education activities. There was continuous learning among the adult populace inspite of the pandemic experienced all over the world. Engendering quality continuing education programmes through information and communication technology therefore becomes very imperative for meaningful growth and development of the nation.

**CONCEPT OF CONTINUING EDUCATION**

The concept of continuing education has been defined or described in different ways and from different perspectives. One of such perspectives describes continuing education as an adult education concept that deals with the provision of educational opportunities for individuals after the abeyance of formal schooling for one reason or the other. This perspective was corroborated by Osuji (2001) in Bankole (2010). He further adds that it implies education and re-education, training and retraining opportunities made available to individuals that are out of school such as young school leavers, the employed that are desirous of improving their professional skills while on their job and for the unemployed to be empowered and in order to be able to cope with new situations of life.

Continuing Education is also a general term that is assigned to any programme of study (be it certificate awarding or not) beyond compulsory education. It could also be considered as a post compulsory education of a short-term nature that does not lead directly to a major higher education qualification. In other words, activities that could contribute towards a higher education qualification but are not principally programmed for such.

Continuing Education from the foregoing, therefore combines the characteristics of formal and non-formal education system and its activities are not terminal in any way but it is a process that may never be completed in one’s lifetime. This also explains its synonymity with life-long learning. Irrespective of the age of the individual, the social status, level or the level of academic attainment acquired ,learning continues and this is the purpose of continuing education. In recognition of the importance of continuing education the federal government in the National Policy on Education (2004) included continuing Education among the components of Adult and Non-Formal Education.

The policy highlights in section 7 that the objectives of adult and continuing education should be:

a. To provide functional literacy education for adults who have never had the advantage of any formal education.

b. To provide functional and remedial education for those young people who pre-maturely dropped out of the formal school system.

c. To provide further education for different categories of completers of the formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills.

d. To provide in-service, on the job vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills.

e. To give the adult citizens of the country necessary aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment.

Continuing education provides learning opportunities for different categories of people to take up schooling after the cessation of full-time compulsory learning in schools. A cursory look at the objectives of adult and continuing education in the National Policy on Education (2004) reveal the different learning opportunities made available for persons of any age which could be on part-time or full-time basis.

Continuing Education helps to provide avenue for people to be able to keep up with new knowledge and techniques required for effective and efficient performance in any area through constant training and retraining process; promotes individual self-actualisation and development; fosters human resource and capacity building process. Also provides a second chance education thereby complementing the formal education school system (Osuji, 2001).

Continuing education programmes help to produce a variety of outcomes including the acquisition of new knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, the ultimate goal of which is to promote development.

**Continuing Education Programmes**

Continuing Education programmes are offered by different organisations and they offer a wide range of educational activities that ensure access to education for different categories of people in Nigeria. The continuing education programmes in Nigeria are:

* **Remedial Education:** This is a type of continuing education programme that offer general education curriculum and are very flexible in its operation. It is also known as developmental education, compensatory education, preparatory education and academic upgrade. It is designed to assist students to achieve expected competences in core academic skills such as literacy and numeracy .

The programme also prepares their students for external examinations like West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), University and Tertiary Matriculation Examination(UTME), Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) and so on.

* **Vocational and Career Institutes:** This is another form of continuing education programme that its curricula are basically occupational and skill oriented. It is a type of Non-Formal Adult Education programme that prepare their students for external occupational and professional examinations. They offer certificates whose standard, validity, for obtaining jobs are ensured e.g. computer literacy, hotels and catering management, sales and marketing and travel management courses.
* **In-service training units of Government and Business Enterprises.** Public and private institutions have training units that provide continuous on-the-job training induction courses for their workers. Some banks have training schools where their staff undergo training on continuous basis in order to improve their professional skills.
* **Distance Education:** This type of continuing education is offered by institutions or as a department in government organisations. Some Universities and Colleges have centres for continuing Education, Sandwich Programmes where programmes are run on weekends through the Distance learning mode e.g. National Open University System, Sandwich and Distance Learning Programmes organized by the University of Lagos (DLI) Distance Learning Institute runs an example of continuing education programme practiced in Nigeria.
* **Private Companies** also offer continuing education programmes in order to make profit like the National and International Information Technology (NIIT) organises Continuing Education Programmes for the public basically for profit and the improvement of professional skills in information technology to different categories of people like the employed and unemployed in our society.
* **Government Agencies** are also sponsors and providers of continuing education programmes by offering a variety of continuing professional development programmes. These programmes come as a way of improving access to services for the indigent populations by educating social workers or teachers in the screening and recruitment of clients. The programmes may be offered for the purpose of introducing new techniques and methods such as efforts of Independent National Electoral Commission towards awareness campaign and sensitizing the populace for registration with regards to election, organizing training programmes for improving the practice of Health Care Workers on HIV/AIDS infection and so on.
* **Professional Continuing Education.**  This is offered by professional organisations geared towards updating the knowledge, skills and expertise of practising members of different professions in order to improve their service delivery. For example the Medical, Engineering, Nursing, Accounting, Teaching Professions. They offer continuing education through their association meetings, organizing seminars, workshops, lectures and other organized training programmes (Akinpelu, 2002).

**Information and Communication Technology (ICT)**

Information and Communication Technology with the acronym (ICT) is an umbrella terminology that encompasses any communication device used to disseminate information to individuals, groups of people and the general public like the radio, television, cell phones, computer and network hardware, satellite systems and so on. The term ‘Information and Communication Technologies as defined by Blurton (2007) is a set of diverse or numerous set of technological tools and resources that are employed to communicate, disseminate, store and exchange information. The communication device or tools also include hardware and software, satellite systems as well as the various services and applications associated with them such as videoconferencing and distance learning (Churdgar, 2012).

The role of ICT in institutions and organisations cannot be overemphasized as it helps to provide quality, facilitation, dissemination and management of information within and outside organisations. Access to computers, information networks and software applications has put an end to manual operations and through the use of ICT, activities of various institutions are carried out better and faster. Organisations are now exposed to organization of information for use, capacity building, management information system, digital libraries, resource sharing and document delivery. (Haliso, 2007 and Chisenga, 2006).

ICT has also brought tremendous improvement in education delivery in Nigeria. Infact ,the advent of Information and Communication Technology has contributed to the transformation of the whole world to a global village. The different countries of the world have included ICT into their daily activities including the teaching and learning process. Innovations have come into the delivery of various Adult Education programmes especially the delivery of Continuing Education which has provided opportunities for individuals to continue to learn and improve their skills and values. Corroborating the role of ICT in Education delivery, Olaluba (2006) asserted that ICT is bringing a revolutionary transformation on teaching methodologies. Teachers can reach out to their students beyond the traditional classroom and still ensure adequate participation in the teaching and learning process(Williams, 2020).

The use of ICT as observed by Khan, Hassan, Clement (2012) helps to promote collaborative, active and lifelong learning, increase students’ motivation, offer better access to information and shared working resources, deepen understanding, help students think and communicate creatively. The integration of ICT into the teaching and learning process has brought great improvement and students’ active involvement, new learning environment and an effective information system have evolved through the adoption of ICT and they are still evolving.

The adoption of ICT into the teaching learning situation has transformed the process from being highly teacher-dominated to student centred. This has created opportunities for learners to develop creativity and problem-solving abilities, Various methods of ICT adopted have assisted in making the teaching learning process to be student-centred and such methods include systematized feedback system, computer based operational network, video conferencing, audio conferencing, internet/worldwide websites, compact discs with only memory(CD Rom), digital camera and multimedia computer assisted instruction.

ICT has the potential to accelerate, enrich and deepen skills, to motivate and engage students, to help students to relate school experience to work practices, create economic viability for tomorrow’s workers as well as strengthening teaching and helping schools change (Dave and Tearle, 2010, Yusuf, 2011).

**Continuing Education Programmes and Information Communication Technology (ICT)**

The application of information and communication technology in continuing education and all forms of adult learning becomes very imperative for meaningful growth and development of the nation. Undoubtedly, ICT has been employed in continuing education through its Distance Learning Programmes. Some of the ICT tools include CD – Rom materials, broadcast programme videos, virtual libraries, slides and so on.

Undoubtedly, the use of ICT in recent times has increased in the delivery of continuing education programmes. However, for more quality delivery to be achieved, Its application needs to be continuously improved upon. This is the only way by which the desired expectation of quality delivery could be achieved. This is in view of the many challenges that still bedevilles the application of ICT particularly in developing countries like Nigeria. This is so much so that majority of the target groups for continuing education programmes still reside in rural areas. There is no doubt that if ICT is going to achieve its purpose in continuing education, the question of effectiveness and efficiency with respect to cost is one area that should not be ignored given the pervasive economic challenges of the rural dwellers in our clime. The government at all levels equally has a major role to play towards the achievement of the objectives of ICT contributing towards the quality delivery of continuing education. This becomes relevant in the provision of infrastructure that are necessary for effective functioning of ICT application in our rural areas i.e. regular electricity and road access for regular maintenance of other relevant infrastructure as well as security for the protection of the infrastructure.

Other areas, where the government needs to be involved in this subject matter is encouraging private bodies to set up institutions in our rural areas to train the people in our rural areas some basic ICT knowledge. This is to enable them improve on their use of ICT tools/facilities available for their learning. There is no doubt that the effectiveness of the industry regulators has left much to be desired on quality of the service provided by network providers in a third world country like Nigeria. This is exemplified in the non-challant attitude of network providers in the area of their charges, network problems and so on which have brought untold frustration on Nigerians and there seems to be no help forthcoming inspite of regulatory bodies like Nigeria Communication Council (NCC) in existence. What we are saying in this regard, is that for ICT to engender continuing education delivery in Nigeria, NCC must wake up to its regulatory responsibilities to ensure effective service delivery by the network providers.

**Conclusion**

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has great potentials to engender quality continuing education programmes in its delivery and the achievement of the objectives of Adult and Continuing education in Nigeria. All hands must therefore be on deck to ensure access to the tools of ICT in order to motivate all the citizens of the country that are disadvantaged educationally to engage and to re-engage in learning again. The adoption of ICT in adult learning will help to motivate the learners, attrition rate in continuing education programmes will be reduced, learners will be retained and effective teaching and learning will be assured.

**Recommendations**

1. Facilitators in continuing education programmes should ensure they attend workshops and seminars on a continuous basis with the aim of training and retraining them on the effective use of ICT tools.

2. All Adult Education programmes and curriculum should be reviewed in order to entrench the use of ICT in its teaching and learning process.

3. The Nigeria Communication Council needs to wake up to their regulatory responsibility towards ensuring uninterrupted network service by network providers.

4. Private Bodies should be encouraged to set up institutions in our rural areas to train the people some basic ICT skills.

5. Effective and uninterrupted power supply should be readily made available to power ICT tools for their smooth running of services.

6. There is need to ensure qualified adult education specialists facilitate continuing education programmes in the country. It should be made a matter of policy by the government.

7. The government should also ensure proper monitoring and supervision of continuing education programmes all over the country.

8. The Nigeria National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE) should also wake up to its regulatory responsibilities of ensuring proper monitoring and supervision of adult education programmes in the country. It must also liase with the government in having the right attitude towards adult education e.g. budgetary allocation.

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