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## English Language, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Wealth Creation Initiatives

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**Abstract:** This article examines the interdependence between English language and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and explores the role of ICT in boosting wealth creation. Nigeria is noted for her over-reliance on revenue from oil, a situation which has made even the government of Nigeria to ignore other sectors of the economy that can equally foster wealth creation. In this article, ICT provides that avenue and is seen as a good revenue base for government, for encouraging import and export, promoting self-reliance by creating jobs for the army of youths and paving way for competitive language education. The article decries the near absence of effective electricity supply in the country which is a major challenge of ICT and suggests that government should explore alternative sources of energy supply rather than depending on hydro-electricity. It also advocates for the subsidy of ICT facilities so as to pave way for the average Nigerian to purchase computer systems—a necessity in ICT.

**Keywords:** Information and communication technology; English language; Wealth creation.

### 1. Introduction

A wide range of information and communication technology (ICT) tools have been widely embraced by people of different walks of life all over the world. Beginning from the most efficient company manager, to the university professor, media executive, transporter to the cattle herdsman, and subsistent farmer, ICT occupies a domineering position in our daily undertakings. The use of computer-driven technologies such as global system for mobile communication (GSM), electronic calculators, digital wristwatches, CD players, radio and television even among illiterate and semiliterate transporters, farmers, hawkers, and market women bears a living testimony of the case in point. ICT, like many other human innovations, sprang up in phases. In its traditional sense, it embraces "...print, broadcast and radio" while the new and most sophisticated ICT embraces "...audiotapes, videotapes, computer-based learning packages, interactive video (disk and tape), CDTV, audio conferencing, audio graphic communication systems and videoconferencing" (Ker, 2006).

Nearly three decades ago, Quirk *et al.* (1985) declared English as the "world's most important" and "most widely used" language and went ahead to mention a four-point criteria to consider a language important namely: the number of speakers of the language, the extent to which the language is geographically dispersed, its functional load (i.e. the purpose for which the language is used), and the economic and political influence of the native speakers of the language. In the next section, we state the functions of English in a bit more detail.

### 2. Universal Functions of English Language

English is generally referred to as an intranational language in places where it is used among native speakers as a medium of communication among speakers of the same country. In other words, English is used for internal purposes. English is also an international language when the medium of communication involves users of different countries and regions of the world. Again Quirk *et al.* (1985) consider English:

- 1) as being instrumental (i.e. it is used for formal education)
- 2) as being regulative (i.e. it is used for government administration and the law courts)
- 3) as being communicative (i.e. it is used for interpersonal communication between individuals speaking different native languages)
- 4) as being occupational (i.e. it is used both intranationally and internationally for commerce and for science and technology)
- 5) as being creative (i.e. it is used for non-technical writings, such as fiction and political works). In Nigeria, English assumes both the status of an international and intranational language. And depending on the roles classified below, it is both a second and foreign language. It is the language of official meetings, the

legislative assembly, official broadcast, trade and bilateral contracts (Udu, 2004). Udu (2004) further states that, as a language of education: English is learnt compulsorily as a school requirement. It is both the language of instruction and a subject of instruction in the school curriculum... It is the language of space exploration and aviation, science and technology, advertisement and international politics (p.16).

The importance of English language has made it imperative for the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1981) to stipulate that it should be learnt as a school subject at all the three tiers of education: primary, secondary and tertiary. At both the primary and secondary tiers, students learn general English, while at the tertiary level, students learn the use of English and communication skills, a course which aims at (i) providing the students with skills that will enable them to cope with their studies (ii) helping them to acquire the required proficiency in the language to enable them to cope with social and academic demands.

### 3. Interdependence between English Language and Information and Communication Technology

Arguably, to access ICT today, one must possess literacy skills in English language. This is so for obvious reasons:

- 1) English is the language of ICT. Most programmes, websites, and templates published on the internet are in English language because English is used by many countries and regions of the world. Instructional manuals and advertisements of the products of ICT are presented via English.
- 2) English is the medium of instruction in schools in Nigeria and many overseas countries. With the emergence of ICT tools such as computers, CD players, overhead projectors, videos, television and accompanying softwares which make instruction easier and more effective; and given that most of these are conveyed via English language, it makes it increasingly necessary for teachers (including non-English specialists) and students to not only learn the English language, but to also acquire basic ICT skills as a requirement to partake in the ICT world.
- 3) ICT enhances information dissemination and effective publicity. With the advent of more and more sophisticated ICT gadgets, the volume and quality of print and electronic information at the disposal of users keeps increasing. The social media (facebook, twitter, Whatsapp, etc.) provide good examples of how such information is shared across the globe in seconds. This also suggests that more efforts be geared towards English language education.
- 4) Accessing books and reference resources on-line. A pool of literature and important reference materials are published on the internet which can be assessed from any part of the world. There are many thesauruses and online dictionaries to be accessed if one visits the right websites. This makes information sharing faster, more accessible and more affordable. Again, only teachers and students who have good command of English language and who possess ICT skills can make judicious use of this facility.
- 5) Quicker sending and receiving of personal information is fostered by the ICT. The Technologically Mediated Discourse (TMD) or Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) which is enhanced by a network of computers (see Taiwo (2007)) has provided a fascinating and amazing way of communicating between two or more individuals who are at different ends of the globe. This mechanism fosters communication between two or more people through the process of text messaging, e—mailing, online chats, audio and video conferencing.
- 6) Playing games and watching the satellite for pleasure. ICT resources such as computer-aided games, television and the satellites not only provide pleasure for the viewers, but also enables them to acquire experience about the cultures of people and places they have not come in contact with. Again, while using this facility, one notices that English language is the dominant language of communication.

### 4. How Proficiency in ICT and English Language can Boost Wealth Creation

Wealth creation is often linked to entrepreneurship. We can learn about entrepreneurship and how it can lead to wealth creation by examining Professor Howard Stevenson's definition (provided by Eisenmann (2013)) of the term entrepreneurship that "*entrepreneurship is the pursuit of opportunity beyond resources controlled.*" A major component of this definition is that entrepreneurship embraces the capacity to initiate and develop new ways of using both human and material resources for purpose of business. Proficiency in ICT and English language are critical in wealth creation initiatives. Ker (2006) estimates that about 60% of Nigerians use English or its varieties for various communicative purposes. This implies that 40% of Nigerians are aspiring to be users of English to cope with the present demands of the language. This has created a fertile ground for the hatching of more language graduates who would take up teaching challenges in the field of English language. This calls for expansion of Departments of English language in Colleges of Education and Universities.

*English is big business.* Proficiency in English qualifies someone for many jobs and services including teaching, e-ticketing, e-banking, e-mailing, interpreting, writing, film acting, entertainment, air and sea travel, assisting key government functionaries etc.

Another important area in which ICT skills can boost wealth creation is the establishment of more business centres to provide services such as internet browsing, computer typing, graphics design, photocopy, digital photography, scanning of document, and printing. As more and more people show interest in investing in this area, it

will go a long way in opening job opportunities for applicants who will get paid for their services thereby improving their standards of living.

*Telephone calls, telephone servicing technology and sale of recharge cards.* The invention of global system for mobile communication (GSM) handsets has brought with it large and ambitious business opportunities that have the potentials of alleviating poverty and creating wealth both for the individual and the state. Sale of recharge cards is a mouthwatering business since it is constantly on demand in the daytime or at night. Those in this business have reduced the army of jobless youths and are contributing to the growth of the economy of the nation.

*Generating revenue for the government.* The sale of recharge cards attracts huge percentages that goes to the Federal Government of Nigeria as Value Added Tax. The owners of the following networks currently in use in Nigeria: *MTN, Celtel, Glo, Zoom, Multilinks* etc pay a huge telephone tariffs to the government of the federation. Banks, individuals, and multinationals who are core investors in the ICT business have not only boosted their income base, but have contributed to national and world economy.

*Expansion in the production of ICT facilities both at the local and international markets.* More companies producing computer sets, DVD players, scanners, photocopiers, calculators, television, printers, system discs, printing ink, paper etc have sprung up. This creates job opportunities for interested men and women both locally and internationally.

Item writing/ programming and web design. Consultants in the field of ICT have made huge profits while selling their services of writing items or programmes for publishing on the internet. Again, since this is a lucrative area, more research is continually being carried out.

*Import and Export activities.* With the introduction of ICT and its adoption by schools, hospitals, and government owned companies, and individuals, more people have taken to import and export of ICT facilities for supply to the needing agencies such as churches, media houses, hospitals, schools, universities and government establishments. This has increased the business network thereby fostering wealth creation.

*Publishing of books, journals, leaflets and other educational materials.* This is another very important area in which ICT can and will continue to leave its lasting impact. The volume of books, journals, educational magazines, dictionaries and encyclopaedias has increased with the high printing technology brought about by the rapid expansion in the ICT world. In this way, publishing companies get more investors, salesmen, distributors and buyers of their product, a situation which has boosted wealth creation.

## 5. Recommendations

Looking at the opportunities, which ICT and English language studies can offer, it can be recommended that: ICT education should be made compulsory at all tiers of education.

The government of Nigeria should encourage the purchase of computers and other ICT tools by subsidizing them for her citizens.

The government of Nigeria should make new efforts in stabilizing power supply in our homes, schools and institutions. Without power, ICT facilities will not be effective. It is only stable electricity supply that can guarantee effective use of ICT tools and generally, lead to a stable economy.

Language teachers should be made to acquire ICT skills as a teaching requirement; since it is with it that one would be able to use modern teaching methods and impact positively on the lives of the students.

School libraries should be supported with computers and internet facilities to make information easily accessible to both teachers and students.

Nigeria should look for an alternative energy source to supplement hydro-electricity.

## 6. Conclusion

One of the major setbacks to ICT is the near-absence of functional electricity supply in Nigeria. Those who have acquired computers including those who mounted internet facilities find it difficult to operate successfully as a result of interrupted power supply. Another similar problem is the poor attitude to ICT even by some school administrators and government officials who do not allocate funds for the takeoff of internet facilities in their schools. Many people erroneously think that ICT is merely acquiring computers for the school without even installing them.

Furthermore, given that Nigeria targets education to bring it to international standards, it is with the help of ICT facilities that the required manpower or personnel can be produced especially in the area of language education and science and technology to make Nigeria one of the world's top 20 economies by the year 2020 as being targeted. Until this is done, the matter remains a tall dream.

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