Application and Role of ICT in Religious Education

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Abstract
This study sought to examine the important role of ICT in religious education. It examined the primary place of religion especially in the Nigerian context where all life activities are defined from the perspective of religion. It makes the argument that religious education can no longer impart and impact successfully without being technology competent and ICT compliant. The study showed that there are some constraints to the implementation of ICT in religious education. Some recommendations were proffered.
Keywords: Information Communication Technology (ICT), Religion, Education

Introduction
The 21st century, no doubt, witnessed a rapid transformation generally and particularly in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This has resulted in the emancipation of globalization in the entire world. The previous or primitive ways of disseminating Information and Communication attitudes have been enhanced to a greater extent. Technological advancement is also on the increase, which necessitates this talk of ICT. Acquiring information has gone electronic whereby one can reach every part of the world to source information from his local point. Elders (as in the African setting) teachers and books are no longer the only sources of information. Educational accessibility is now vast the most students are seemingly more informed that their teachers. Thanks to the media (print and electronic) and most acknowledging, the internet. Currently, education or learnedness has no boundary and as such no apex, all for in the impact of ICT.
ICT has really helped in the introduction of distance learning or e-learning. Educational materials are now in our doorsteps and even cheaper unlike when libraries are found in government agencies, its accessibility restricted. One can access the Toronto University Chicago from his local point in Ezeagu, Enugu State Nigeria. ICT made self instruction possible, whereby one can learn without the teacher because the codes and rubrics of learning are provided there in, which may not be contained in books. The teacher puts extra effort to overpower and out shine the students, without which they embarrass themselves class.
Bearing in mind that ICT is very necessary in disseminating information and enhancing communication attitudes, it is now correct to say that education and its processes are made easier by ICT. In that case therefore, religious education will be improved through the medium, ICT. Therefore, this essay discusses the application and role of ICT in religious education. For clarity, the topic is discusses some sub-topic which are to be found in the body of the essay.

Meaning of ICT
The term ICT might still be strange to some, confusing to many and also misunderstood by great number of people. However ICT is taken to be the highest breakthrough in educational technology since the invention of the blackboard. It is an acronym for **Information Communication Technology.** "ICT" is no different theory with IT. Both can be interchangeably. Before giving a working definition let first of all look at some component words in ICT.
According to Prof G. B. Harrison (2000) **technology** is the process of using scientific materials and human resources in order to meet human need or purpose. **Information** on its own side is that which can be communicated and understood. Therefore information Technology (IT) which is the same with **Information Communication Technology** can be defined as the use of Information in order to meet human need or purpose with reference to the use of contemporary devices such as the internet, etc. ICTs are also defined as a "diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store and manage information (Cuban 2002). These technologies include computers, the internet, broadcasting technologies (radio and television) and telephones.

Relevance of ICT
ICT, without being told is of paramount importance in the daily activities of man. There is one general aphorism which says that "if one is not informed, the person will be deformed". This is true because man cannot (necessarily) do without information which is got through communication and enhanced with the scientific technologies available.
Through the use of ICTs, the flow of information have been elevated and improved across the continents.
Through the use ICTs, the whole experiences of teaching and learning have been given a newer and appreciable dimension. Teaching and learning tools are now easier and readily available to both teachers and students all over the globe.

Through the use of ICTs, communication and communication channels are boosted so much that the communication stress is ameliorated if not eliminated completely. People no longer travel distances to pass information. They can just sit in their localities to communicate with the world.

Through the use ICTs, we are able to discover harmful agents in the societies (terrorists) and their heinous practices and consequently allow the law to take action on them for a peaceful world to exist.

Through the use of ICTs, researches and studies are made easily in short frame. With the ICTs, the scientists are prone to contending results for a better and smooth world to run.

Through the use of ICTs, the world globally understands itself and foster for economic growth. No country is ready to be left behind and such an overwhelming growth in the world's combined economy at large.

Through the use of ICTs, education now knows no bounds. Teachers are no more the only sources of information and knowledge proper. People can now teach themselves through the use of ICTs.

What is Religious Education?

Religious education is the academic field of multi-disciplinary, secular study of religious beliefs, behaviours and institutions. It describes, compares, interprets and explains religion, emphasizing systematic, historically based, and cross-cultural perspectives.

Religious education originated in the nineteenth century, when scholarly and historical analysis of the Bible had flourished, and Hindu and Buddhist texts were first being translated into European languages. Early influential scholars included Friedrich Max Müller, in England, and Cornelius P. Tiele, in the Netherlands. Today religious education is practiced by scholars worldwide. In its early years, it was known as **Comparative Religion** or the **Science of Religion** and, in the USA, there are those who today also know the field as the **History of Religion** (associated with methodological traditions traced to the University of Chicago from the late 1950s through to the late 1980s). The field is known as *Religionswissenschaft* in German and *Science de la religion* in the French-speaking world (Wikipedia).

The Application of ICTs in Religious Education

Most people, at the hearing of ICT think and believe it only meant the computer. But it is far from just the computer. By a way of clarification, ICT means Information Communication Technology i.e those channels, medium, aids, through which or by which communication is made, and information circulated. Information communication technologies include, Computer ROMS, television telephones, GSM phones, projectors, Audiovisual, Video Tapes, Video Machines, Recorder (Tape & Video), Filmstrip, Cameras, etc.

Therefore the application of these ICTs in religious education will amount to discussing the methods of their application and uses also.

Computer:

The computer could be said to be the master in the world of ICT. This is because all the ICTs have something to do with the computer (Alade, 2006). Most of the ICTs, if not all of them, go through the computer to be made. The students and teachers alike in the religious education use computers to solve assignments and crack strong questions. Computers can be used to store or keep facts and records in the religious education. Teachers specifically use the computer to store the students' marks in order to monitor the students' performances. Also in the religious education, computer can be used to detect impersonators (Dimson, 2007).

GSM Phone

The Global System Mobile Phone (GSM Phone) is a product of science in the 21st century which has necessarily made communication easier. With the GSM phone the teacher can pass notice to students through course/discipline Ambassadors of class schedules. With GSM phone also the teacher can book appointments with the students in religious education. The GSM phone allows for direct contact between teachers and students in a way that the students will fly with the wings of knowledge and amiable character.

Projectors:

Projectors, as the name imply, are electronic devices use to project photographs or films/movies or more still some intellectual educative information onto a screen. This is used to cover a wide range of view just as we can see in the cinemas, schools, churches etc. The projectors help the teacher in religious education to impact knowledge or information in a wider range. It does what the black/white boards can do and even more.

Videotape, Filmstrip, Television:

According to Dimson (2007), "these ICT materials can used for supplementary tutoring in distance learning". They can be used to administer test to the leaner, and also disseminate information to students. The religious education is not precluded where these ICT materials could be applied for purposeful results that will make ends meet.

The Role of ICT in Religious Education

Having known that religious education deals with the adequate study of religious beliefs, behaviours, institutions (of course religious) with a view of giving proper information to man about himself and his practices, it is very important to the ask question: Can ICT be of any importance in religious education?

The issue of e-learning or distance learning is not a new born in religious education. And for this to go on and be

sustained religious education, the ICT materials are necessarily prerequisite. E-learning is such that operates in a conditioned information network – the internet, an intranet (LAN – Local Access Network) or extranet (WAN – Wide Access Network). It simply requires computer(s) to happen.

Because of the danger of losing students' records, lecturers and teachers in religious education store up information about the students in some of the ICT materials. This is simply because storing those records or information in print is vulnerable and prone to loss. The CD Rom, Tape/Video recorders, etc are known for storing information and students' data in religious education.

For a wider coverage and also to make learning easy and simple in religious education, teachers and lecturers make use of some ICT materials like projectors, television to teach their students. The blackboard syndrome is outdated and worrisome, but joy and satisfaction come with knowledge that are gotten using these ICT materials in religious education.

If is taken for granted what the GSM phone can do in religious education. The whole functions of GSM phone generally also apply in religious education

Setbacks in the Use of ICTs in Religious Education.

There are knowable certain factors that militate against the proper use of ICT materials in religious education.

Most teachers and students find it very difficult to make use of some ICT materials like the computer. They lack the technical know-how of the adequate use of the computer. Many people also have phobia for technologies that they may often be referred as timid. This is mostly seen in students who were introduced to the use of ICT materials earlier.

Another militating factor for the adequate use of ICT materials according to Mkpa (1989) is that many school heads divert the funds provided for the procurement of these ICT facilities for their effective uses in religion education especially.

Also many anti-development agents in the ministry and some government agencies pocket the money disbursed by the government to achieve the proper use of ICT materials in various schools which religious education is a part.

Also some of these ICT materials are not sold in the open market and such the dealers put their prices at a very high rate that most institution finds it very difficult to afford. Take for instance, to get a fully database of the whole activities of a particular institution is not always easy. Institutions that have achieved this go through hell, financially, to do so.

The Results of the Application of ICT in Religious Education

The significance of any work done is its contending results. It is also expected that the application of ICT in religious education will yield laudable and may be devastating results. This implies that the application of ICT in religious education has its advantages on one hand, and on other hand disadvantages and them weight them to see if we will go further or not to apply ICT in religious education.

Advantages

The application of ICT in religious education achieves the following in students, teachers and entire world:

a. Nobody is shielded from information, which is an empowerment.
b. There is a mental development.
c. The world becomes a global village with the use of ICTs.
d. Students' information and data are not in the danger of being lost easily.
e. Many people can be taught at the same time and also a purposeful result is achieved.
f. It increases our knowledge of those ICT materials.
g. It awakens and fosters development – social development, intellectual development, cultural development, human development, economical development, information communication technological development, etc.
h. It helps to checkmate impostors and agents of irregularities in the examination hall.

Disadvantages

ICT materials have also so anomalies that go with their application in religious education. These anomalies can be or not intended.

1. The proper use of ICTs may lead to fraud – spamming phishing, etc.
2. Student's crack their brains in order to manipulate the computer do their hidden agenda which would not have been thought of if ICT materials were not applied in religious education and education in general.
3. Many teachers task their students heavily and illegally too to get for themselves these ICT materials.
4. The ICT materials make some people lazy and stop the student from getting the values in books.

However, the advantages and disadvantages are in a polarity and this may bring to note whether to continue or not the application of ICT in religious education. Definitely every activity of man has a polar concept but what we should consider as rational and reasonable beings we are, is which one suppresses the other (i.e the advantages and disadvantages). To a greater extent considering the productivity of ICT in religious education,

the advantages suppress the disadvantages so much. We can always work against the disadvantages drawn from the use of ICT materials but we cannot avoid or prevent the advantages coming forth. They speak for themselves anytime anywhere. So we should not and never think about not applying ICT in religious education because nothing can stand in for their purposeful good results.

Conclusion

From the fore-going, we can see that ICT is not new in our daily experiences. ICT happens to man at all times. The question, "what is the role of ICT in religious education?" is a rhetoric question because even the blind can see the relevance of ICT in religious education. We should not be talking of applying ICT in religious education but the enhancement of ICT application in religious education. So many things have happened in the religious education classrooms since the invention of the blackboard. One of those things is the introduction of ICT materials which have proved themselves that religious education classrooms with at least one of the ICT materials in use are counter-productive and also boring to the students and teachers alike.

Finally, think of what religious education would have been if not rescued with the introduction of ICT and ICT materials. It will look like taking the hands of the clock back which is not possible. We cannot go back to time in the real sense of it, so it is forward ever which suggests that we should always think of applying ICT not just in religious education but in the generality of the activities of man. There is no stopping till doomsday which is our last bus stop.

Recommendations

a.   Internet and computer literacy should be made compulsory to keep the students and teachers in the right and proper pedestrian.

b.   Government should include in the budgets funds that will boost the procurement of ICT materials in the education sector in general and religious education is not precluded.

c.   School heads, people in the ministry should not siphon funds that are meant for the procurement of these ICT materials.

d.   Students should be adjoined to remove disinterestedness in the use of ICT materials in order to a result-oriented end.

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