Availabilty and Utilization of Classroom Computers Across Urban and Rural Schools in Southwestern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the availability and use of classroom computers in urban and rural schools in Southwestern Nigeria. Since it is nearly a universal agreement that, when properly utilized, computers hold a great deal of promise to improve teaching and learning, it is pertinent to ascertain the availability of computer facilities and their use by teachers in secondary school in urban and rural schools in Southwestern Nigeria. Data for the study was collected through a structured questionnaire which was administered to 540 (300 male and 240 female) teachers in the schools. The result indicated that the urban schools were better equipped with computers than the rural schools. Also, it was found that the female teachers utilized computer facilities in their instructional activities than the male teachers. Recommendations were made as to how the situation can be improved in terms of computer supply and usage in the schools.

Keywords: computer facilities; digital divide; information and communication technology; information society; teaching and learning; technology; urban and rural schools

INTRODUCTION

A major characteristic of the information age is the rapid deployment of information and communication technology (ICT) to all sectors of the economy of most countries in the world. ICT provides powerful tools to enable us have access to vast array of information; enables new forms of interaction with others; and serves many on-line services in the area of commerce, culture, entertainment and education. Development in information and communication technology (ICT) has impacted on all sectors of society, including the education sector. ICT in form of e-learning and its deployment in the implementation of curriculum in all subject areas is already changing teaching and learning processes especially in developed countries of
the world. As the technological advancements are changing the way of teaching and learning in the developed world, there is one group of workers in developing countries that are not getting much involved in the utilization of IT facilities in educating the children of the nation. These are teachers in most developing countries of the world such as Nigeria. There is a rich use of technologies in the broad domain of education in the developed countries of the world, however, such level of use can not be said to prevail in developing countries. This has led to the much talked about digital divide.

In Nigeria, computer education was introduced into the Nation’s education system in 1988 after the 32nd Ministerial Council meeting of the National Council on Education in 1987 (Osemwegie, 2007). The Nigeria National Computer Policy’s major objectives are to enable Nigerian children to appreciate and use computer in various aspects of life and in future employment to ensure that the generality of Nigerians appreciate the impact of information and communication technology on today’s society and the importance of its effective use; to ensure that Nigerians will learn and know how to use and programme computers, develop software packages, understand the structure and operation of computers and their history, and to appreciate the economic, social and psychological impact of the computer (Osemwegie, 2007). The modality for realizing the objectives included the provision of hardware and software facilities, and the training of teachers and associated personnel.

With the formulation of the National Computer Policy in Nigeria for twenty years, the major current concern is; are relevant computer hardware and software facilities provided in secondary schools in Nigeria, and if they are provided, what are the equity implications of ICT in urban and rural schools?

There is fear that the poor rural schools may not offer the students the right facilities and training required to develop computer literacy and that the differential access to ICT facilities in both urban and rural schools in Nigeria may produce technological have and have nots, and winners and losers. There is dearth of research in the area of computer provision and utilization in rural and urban schools in Nigeria compared to the developed countries whose literature is rich in the field of technology application. Therefore, this study examines how equitably urban and rural schools in Southwestern Nigeria are provided with computer facilities and their use by teachers. It is also the aim of the article to ascertain if there is a digital divide between urban and rural secondary schools.

**PROBLEM**

The issue of digital divide is sometimes a misunderstood problem by many. Digital divide according to Wikipedia (2007:1), “refers to the gap between those with regular, effective access to digital and information technology, and those without this access”. Digital/Divide.org says (2001:1) “it refers to the gap between those who benefit from digital technology and those who do not”. The term digital divide includes “both physical access to technology hardware, and more broadly, skills and resources which allow for its use” (Wikipedia2007: 1). The digital divide may be discussed with reference to socio-economic factors, such as rich and poor, racial consideration such as rural and urban (Wikipedia, 2007).

Whatever may be responsible for a digital divide between countries and within countries, there is no doubt that lack of access to ICT contributes both to an inability to compete in the global arena and prepare citizens for the new digital environment of today and the future. As society changes, the educational system has to change accordingly (Westera and Sleop, 2001). There is no doubt that ICT provides productive teaching and learning in order to increase people’s creative and intellectual resources especially in the information age and knowledge society. Basalel (2004) indicated that technology in the classroom contributes to student achievement, both by making students more effective in their learning and teachers more efficient in their teaching.
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