Chapter 45
Attitudes to Online Reading and Web-Based Instructions in Developing Societies

Olushola B. Are
Kogi State Polytechnic, Nigeria

ABSTRACT
This chapter reports a research that attempted to identify attitudes and responses to online reading and learning among people in a typical developing context. A number of Nigerians who, by virtue of work and study, have to use the Internet were selected and studied in this regard. The research revealed limited use of the Internet among these people. Also, the research revealed that there was a tendency among the respondents to view browsing as too technically difficult. These responses are linked to the fact that many developing societies, unlike the advanced world, may not yet be socially adaptable to computer mediated communication due to social attitudes and low competence in computer use. The chapter therefore recommends information literacy training in schools and a more cautious approach to the introduction of ICT solutions.

INTRODUCTION
Access to information is an essential ingredient of development in the 21st century. We live in an age which is often appropriately referred to as the information age due primarily to the sheer volume of information available and the means available to rapidly retrieve them, so much so that the advanced economies of today are essentially based on efficient generation, management, dissemination, and utilization of information.

Looking at things from a global perspective, it is clear that there is a great deal of imbalance in the extent to which societies are able to key into the information systems of the world. While the advanced societies race ahead in the quest for more information generation, dissemination and utilization, the developing world struggles with crippling ignorance and its serious implications. In the last century, a Canadian Education Secretary was quoted...
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as saying that “the haves and the have-nots in the next century will be defined by their degree of access to information”. (Maiyanga & Macaulay, 1998, p.80) He has been proved right.

Reasons for the situation in the developing world include the paucity of information dissemination infrastructure, poverty, low literacy rates and so on. Yet, in today’s world, one of the general goals and expectations of peoples (whether at national or international levels) is the quest for a knowledge based society. This involves enabling people to access the information required for the enhancement of their lives without institutional or practical inhibitions.

Online reading and Web based instruction are among the current fads in education, which have attended the phenomenal growth in information and communication technology. It is inevitable that educational systems and mass communication systems would take advantage of the available information and the attendant information infrastructure. It is in this wise that online reading and Web based instruction have emerged as central aspects of education and mass communication in the advanced world.

Learners’ attitudes and responses have been identified as crucial factors in the effectiveness of instructional systems and general information dissemination, and they deserve in-depth empirical study to provide education and public information practitioners with relevant data to help in determining how best to serve learners’ interest with what the information age makes available. This is particularly pertinent in view of the possibilities of the existence of problematic cultural, linguistic and experiential peculiarities. Yet even in spite of the limited Information and Communication Technology (ICT) capacity in developing societies, educational institutions (especially) are rushing into a system that involves near exclusive reliance on ICT. This situation may actually amount to a blind rush if appropriate studies are not carried out. Examples known to this writer are the cases of the National Open University of Nigeria and Nigerian examination bodies.

This researcher carried out a micro study (in Nigeria), using selected individuals. They were selected purposively to, as much as possible; reflect gender, age and social distribution in Nigeria. The respondents were (via a questionnaire) requested to supply information about aspects of their attitudes such as general preferences between conventional learning and ICT based learning, perceived effectiveness of ICT media, problems with information extraction, linguistic inhibitions, incompetence in handling ICT hardware and so on. The results were analyzed to reflect diversity of responses in line with relevant variables, using appropriate statistical procedure. The objective was to answer some research questions that are itemized as follows:

- To what extent do the respondents use the Internet for reading and learning activities?
- What is the general preference of the respondents from the options of the Internet and traditional print sources?
- To what extent do the factors of language and culture affect the use of the Internet?
- What are the impacts, if any, of the variables of age, education, gender, and technical preparedness on the respondents’ use of the Internet?
- What are the implications of the above for education and communication?

Details of the procedure adopted in data gathering and data analyses are described in the relevant section of the chapter.

Prior to the above however, the researcher carried out a review of previous studies of Web based learning (WBL), the relationship between learners’ attitudes to learning facilities and instructional outcomes, as well as relevant studies of the language factor in the use of ICT facilities. Also, reviews of relevant studies of cultural and
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