

INNOVATIVE TRENDS AND ADVANCES IN EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION IN AFRICA

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Abstract

Education and communication on the African continent are almost as old as humanity. Education is gotten through communication, but the objective or goal of quality education is yet to be realized. The obvious reason behind this is doing things always in a stereotypical way, or doing things in the same way, and then expecting different results at the end. The raison d'etre for education is enlightenment and development of the whole human person; it is aimed at cultivation of the mind, which is fundamental in all developments. The question now is: How much has education helped to improve African mentality, better the lot of Africans? Also, how far are they imbibing this development or transformation through communication and education? The main purpose of this research is to see innovative trends and advances, and we do this in philosophical style, through analytical method. We clarify expression by elucidation of its use in a discourse. We analyze concepts, words, ideas, experiences, etc., in order to bring deeper meanings and clarity of thought. Using Nigeria as an example, we see that the country is gradually experiencing astounding progress in technological application to the fields of education and Information and Communication Technology. In the education sector, as well as in

communication, technologies as computers, projectors, laptops, I-pads, digital libraries and the likes, have enhanced communication, learning and research in no small measure. The biggest appreciation of technological boost in Nigeria today is seen in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector. GSM technologies, up-to-date android versions, smart phones, latest laptops, I-pads, etc., have really made Nigerians feel like cosmopolitan citizens alongside their colleagues in developed worlds or countries.

Key words: Innovation, trend, advance, education, communication and Africa

Introduction

Looking at some countries in Africa, like Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana and the likes, we conclude that Africa is a developing continent. And likewise, with the Nigerian experience, we see that Nigeria is also a developing country, not as technologically advanced as the United States, France and most European and Asian nations, but the far-reaching worlds of technological revolution today has caught up with her. That the remarkable achievements or advancements of science and monumental technological feats have cut across all sectors of society: health, biomedical technology, transport, education, information and communication technology and the banking sector cannot be over emphasized. Other amazing areas where this candid transformation has been felt are in building and construction, power (electrical) generation, agriculture, military\warfare technology, industrialization, automation, among others. However, the main thrust of this research is to portray the innovation and novelties made in the areas of education and communication, mostly in education, owing to the scope or limitation of this research. But we must include communication, because education goes with communication, for it is through classroom or lecture hall communication that knowledge is transmitted to students, and of course through certain media.

Worthy of mention is the fact that the innovations in the different sectors of society in African countries are not solely the product or dividend of their governmental leadership, as many are the collaborative efforts of international and national agencies, foreign and local non-governmental organizations, religious bodies and the likes, with the leaders of the particular country in question. Taking United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as an example, which we know is an international agency that seeks to build peace through international cooperation in education, the sciences and culture. In their mission in brief, it portrays that:

Owing to inadequacy of political and economic arrangements of governments to bring lasting and sincere support to the people, UNESCO holds that peace must be built upon intellectual and moral solidarity of humans. Owing to this UNESCO develops educational tools to help people live as global Citizens free of hate and intolerance. UNESCO works so that each child and citizen has access to quality education.¹

We now first define the basic concepts in this work before plunging into deep analysis; we start with innovation and trend.

Innovation - Innovation is the creation, development and implementation of a new product, process or service with the aim of improving efficiency, effectiveness or competitive advantage. This definition is good, though it points mostly to the business sector, but we dovetail it to the education sector, which is, of course, a business of its own kind. Another definition from Wikipedia holds it “as the multi stage process whereby organizations transform ideas into new/improved products, services or processes, in order to advance, compete and differentiate themselves successfully in that market place”.²

Trend - A trend is a general direction into which something is developing or veering toward. The term may also mean fashion. The verb “to trend” means to develop or change in a general direction. In the world of social media (communication), if something trends, it is the topic of many posts.³ Likewise, there are trends in education as well.

Advance – to advance means to proceed, to move forward in a purposeful way, to make progress. Thus, advances mean development or improvement. Employing it in this research, we mean education and communication have improved, owing to many innovative trends.

Africa/African Nations

Africa is the world’s second largest and second most populous continent, after Asia. At about 30.3 million Km², including adjacent islands, it covers 6% of earth’s total surface area and 20% of its land area. With 1.3 billion people as of 2018, it accounts for about 16% of the world’s human population. Despite the wide range of natural resources, the continent is the least wealthy per capital in large part due to the legacies of European colonization in Africa. Despite this low concentration of wealth, recent economic expansion and the large and young population make Africa an important economic market in the broader global context. When we talk of African nations, we are talking of 54 countries in Africa : Nigeria, Ethiopia, Egypt, DR Congo, Tanzania, South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, Algeria, Sudan, Morocco, Angola, Mozambique, Ghana, Madagascar, Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, Malawi, Zambia, Senegal, Chad, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Guinea, Rwanda, Benin, Burundi, Tunisia, South Sudan, Togo, Sierra Leone, Libya, Congo, Liberia, Central African Republic, Mauritania, Eritrea, Namibia, Gambia, Botswana, Gabon, Lesotho Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Mauritius, Eswatini, Djibouti, Comoros, Cape Verde, Sao Tome & Principe, Seychelles. Included are four dependent territories: Reunion, Western Sahara, Mayotte and Saint Helena.

Communication

Communication is “a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system or symbols, or behavior”.⁴ Portraying some definitions of communication by some authors, C.S Okunna writes that Fiske (1990, P.1) defined communication generally as “social interaction through messages” and Mowlana and Wilson (1988, P.9) defined it as “social interact by means of messages.” Also, Jayaweera (1991, P.17) defined it “as an interaction process through which persons or groups relate to each other and share information, experience and culture.”⁵ She also noted three basic types of communication, namely: **Intra-personal**, which is within oneself or within a person, **Inter-personal**, which is between two persons or with micro group (organizational communication) and **Mass communication**, which is with macro group. “Mass communication is a process of imparting and exchanging information through mass media to large segments of population”.⁶ In our research, all the above types and definitions of communication are inclusive. In the olden days, local media of communication are employed, but as the world changed from global world through global sitting room, towards digital sitting room, owing to advancement of technology, communication likewise goes digital nowadays, as we will see below.

Education

Etymologically, education is derived from the Latin word “educare”, which means to lead forth, drag out or to pull out ideas which are believed to be innate from childhood.⁷ Education implies to lead out of darkness, a bringing forth into light. It is enlightenment. Thus, the goal or purpose of education, prior to 1960 (in Nigeria), was simply to lead into light or enlightenment/development of the new generation of civil servants and public servants who would take over from the colonial masters in all facets of the society.

Education has various definitions. Education is defined as the process or means by which the individual is acclimatized to the culture or environment in which he is born in order to advance it.⁸ Education here is believed to be the process and an instrument both for social and economic development. Again, education has been defined as a deliberate systematic and sustained effort to transmit, evoke or acquire knowledge, values, attitudes, skills and sensibilities.⁹ Here, education is seen from the universal sense of its formal and informal contents. All aspects of learning that enable the individual interact fully with his environment are emphasized. It is the process of facilitating learning or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits.¹⁰ **Educational methods** include: storytelling, discussion, teaching, training and directed research. Education is the primary vehicle through which children and even adults learn the norms, values and skills they need to function in society.

Another writer, Reid, holds that “education is a purposive activity towards ends which are rightly or wrongly deemed to be good”,¹¹ while Essien posits that we think of education and educated in terms of the very restrictive labels of engineers, mathematicians, doctors, lawyers, nurses, rather than in those of citizens.

Giving much insight on education in the great Books of Western world, we are meant to understand that education is not itself so much an idea or a subject matter as it is a theme to which the great ideas and the basic subject matters are relevant. It is one of the perennial practical problems which men cannot discuss without engaging in the deepest speculative considerations. And it is a problem which carries discussion into and across a great many subject matters, namely: the liberal arts of grammar, rhetoric and a logic, psychology, medicine, metaphysics and theology, ethics, politics and economics. Thus:

It is a problem which draws into focus many of the great ideas : Virtue and truth, Knowledge and opinion, art and science, desire, will, sense, memory, mind,

habit, change and progress, family and state, man, nature and God.¹²

African Education in Antiquity (Nigerian Experience)

British missionaries in the 1840s introduced formal Western education in the country. The Methodist and Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) started first and were supported by the government, especially in building of elementary or primary and secondary schools,¹³ while Catholic missionaries later came and helped a lot to make education what it is today, owing to their pattern of pure formal education, for it is not just for learning service and songs as in Anglican CMS. Before the advent of the colonial masters and British missionaries in Nigeria, traditional/indigenous education and Islamic north- education have been in existence. Through the latter, children were drilled in the teachings of Qur'an and Arabic alphabets. In traditional education, students are taught practical skills needed to function well in traditional society. Children learn to sweep village square, clear bushes for farming, and the likes, and they also learn other things they need to become adults. Girls learn domestic skills, while older boys go for apprenticeship to master craftsmen. We now see the types of education.

Informal education: In the basic division of education, we have informal education and this refers to the one that can occur outside a structured curriculum. It can occur through conversation and exploration, and enlargement of experience can occur unnoticed. It includes home schooling, auto-didacticism (self-teaching) and youth work.

Formal Education is the one normally delivered by trained teachers in a systematic intentional way, within a school, higher education or school or university. It is on a regular basis, formally recognized. The programme is rigid and credential is gotten.

Non-formal Education includes various structured situations which do not either have the level of curriculum, syllabus, accreditation or the certification associated with formal learning, but have more structure than that associated with the informal, which typically takes place naturally and spontaneously as part of other activities. Examples include: swimming session for toddlers, community-based sports programmes, boys' scouts and girls' guilds programmes, community or non-credit adult education courses, professional conference style seminars and continuing professional development.

Innovations Aim at Quality Education

Quality education is one that focuses on the whole child- social, emotional, mental, physical and cognitive development of each student, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status or geographical location. It prepares the child for life, not just for testing. And quality education is needed for development of Nigeria, African nations and indeed the whole world at large. This is the sole reason quality education is number four in sustainable developmental goals. By this we mean the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice. Sustainable development goals are global goals or a collection of 17 interlinked global goals designed to be a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all¹⁴ (by 2030). The 17 SDGs were adapted by all United Nations member-states in the 2015 general assembly, with 169 targets to reach or to be achieved by 2030. The goals and targets are universal, meaning they apply to all countries around the world, not just poor countries. Here are the 17 sustainable development goals to transform our world:

1. No poverty; 2. Zero Hunger; 3. Good Health and well being; 4. Quality Education;
5. Gender equality; 6. Clean Water and Sanitation; 7. Affordable and clean energy;
8. Decent work and Economic Growth; 9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure;

10. Reduced Inequality; 11. Sustainable city and communities; 12. Responsible consumption and production; 13. Climate action; 14. Life below water; 15. Life on land; 16. Peace and justice, strong institution; 17. Partnership to achieve the goal¹⁵

Roles of Education

Education is a Vehicle for Change/Transformation

Education is a veritable means of change or transformation, for the human person and his society and environment as well. Education plays an important role as far as holistic development of man is concerned. First, premium is placed on the development of the human mind or cultivation of mind, and this is seen to be fundamental to all development. And it is from here that development starts and then reaches other sectors. Man is to be advanced holistically or integrally in both social, religious, political and in other perspectives. When we talk of advancement or development, we mean advancement of the whole man, whole facets, institutions, segments, practices and values (moral and ethical inclusive). All these are under the roles education plays in formation of the human person. And when it is done, change or progress has been made.

Education Helps in Value System Re-orientation and Ethical Sanitization

Most Africans, and especially their leaders, are self-centered and corrupt. Lack of self-discipline, both as individuals and as a society, is a major setback to the country/continent. The major problem of Africans is corruption. Corruption is the decline in ethical values, thus getting into moral anarchy, modernization of values, much recognition and esteem to riches and intellects and conceptual debasement of leadership itself. Owing to the above evils, there is urgent need for ethical sanitization and re-orientation of our value system. We need to hold in esteem the value of hard work and inculcate it into our youths, as France Fanon said that work over and above everything defines the essence of man and defines the existence of man as well. Another is

the value of truth, for truth is now a scarce commodity. Others include the value of respect for the elders and superiors, self discipline, and finally the value or respect for life, which has mostly been violated in our country Nigeria since the presence of Boko Haram terrorists/insurgents in 2009, Fulani herdsmen, kidnappers, gunmen and bandits as well, since 2015, under Muhammadu Buhari-led government.

Innovations in Communication

Innovation in Information, Communication and Technology in Africa/ Nigeria Experience

African countries are gradually experiencing astounding progress in technological application to the fields of education, Information and Communication Technology, banking, building and construction, power generation, among others. We elucidate vividly on the influence or the wave or revolution of innovative communication gadgets in the above sectors.

The experience in the banking sector is interesting, even the old people who did not enjoy e-banking facilities now do bank transactions with ease from the comfort of their homes. The hand phones (sets) or cell phones are now used to transact money and any deals beyond the usual Automated Teller Machine (ATM) transactions and Point of Sale (POS).

In the education sector, technologies as computers, projectors, laptops, I-pads, digital libraries and the likes have enhanced learning and research is no-small measure.

On building and construction, architects and civil engineers are transforming Nigeria to meet global standards, thanks to computer technology and mechanization. Power generation for industrial, public and individual use has known several boosts from various sectors, as hydro-electricity, solar energy, use of inverters, and petroleum energized plants of different categories. This really is a big boost to

business growth, industrialization and attaining comfort in our homes above others.

The biggest appreciation of technological boost in Nigeria today, however, is seen in the Information and Communication Technology sector. GSM technologies, up-to-date android versions, smart phones, latest laptops, I-pads, etc., have really made Nigerians feel like cosmopolitan citizens, alongside their colleagues in Europe, America, Asia and the Arabic worlds, working and communicating like partners under one assumed government. The media houses have been transformed and information base of Nigerians have been improved upon. Even in religion and education sectors, teachers, priests and pastors are now teaching and preaching with devices like projectors, computers, I-pads and other internet sources for effective teaching and evangelization. Gospels are delivered through the internet using packages in cell phones and smart phones like Facebook, Whatsapp and the likes.

INNOVATIONS IN SOME AREAS IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

Innovation by Introduction of Entrepreneurial Skill Acquisition

This area has made a gigantic move in so many countries in Africa. For example, Nigeria and even Zimbabwe and many other countries have witnessed and continue to witness promotion of entrepreneurial skill acquisition through vocational training. In Nigeria, it is compulsory for secondary schools to select one or two basic skills and teach to students in both theory and practical (or practice). However, not only students, but youths are also equipped with entrepreneurial skills that will enable them to create their own employment or business and employ others as well. This is more effective when organized by some genuine philanthropists and faith-based organizations, as some political appointees do enrich themselves with such vocational training and empowerment programmes on behalf of

government, owing to corruption which is really a big obstacle towards Nigerian and African development. However, the establishment of youth skill acquisition centers, vocational training centers, and conducting youths equipment or empowerment programmes have been the greatest innovation in the educational field, as this has raised many African youths and families from poverty to prosperity; thus, Africa's development is assured, as a good informal sector of the economy is being built up. Students are trained in music, clothing, farming, poultry, metal fabrication, fishery, and the likes.

Innovation through Introduction of Adult Education

This is another novelty introduced in the field education in African countries that has surely made enormous progress. From this, we learnt that no one is too old to learn. From the Nigerian experience, we hear of old men graduating from secondary school, but the latest is that reported in news media, including independent online news this 30th June, that a 71-year-old woman breaks record in UNILAG, bags Ph.D.¹⁶ UNESCO declared it that adult education can help tackle pressing economic, social and environmental challenges. Yet, too many adults still lack adequate learning opportunities. Promoting stronger adult learning and education policies and practices in UNESCO member-states is a core mission of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.¹⁷

Introduction of Continuing Education Programme (CEP)

Adult learning and education has paved way for another similar programme in the tertiary institution called CEP and this is at least being intended for adult learners, especially those beyond traditional undergraduate college or university age. But nowadays, it is not made for adult alone, as it is a kind of post-secondary learning programme and it includes degree credit courses, by young and adult students, businessmen and women that do not have opportunity for regular programmes. It is also available in polytechnics, colleges of education and the likes.

Introduction of Distance Learning

Distance learning is another milestone evolving from this adult learning and education. Owing to quick advancements in the area of the ICT, some of the programmes mentioned above in adult learning and in CEP can be done on campus as well as online, thus, emergence of Online-Education in Africa.

Introduction of Virtual learning

Virtual learning is distance learning conducted in a virtual learning environment with electronic learning or study content designed for self-paced (asynchronous) or live web-conferencing (synchronous) online teaching and tutoring.¹⁸ This virtual learning, through the help of computer and internet, is now made popular, even in Africa, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Constant Innovative Trends in Instructional Materials

Great improvements have been made pertaining instructional materials used nowadays in teaching-learning situation. It is just like in communication, like in Nigeria today, owing to much improvement in the ICT, GSM technologies, up-to-date android versions, smart phones, latest laptops, I-pads, etc., have really made Nigerians feel like cosmopolitan citizens alongside their colleagues in developed worlds/countries. It is still the same communication, though this one may be called, “*classroom or lecture hall communication*”. Instructional materials are those devices, or things that facilitate learning. It helps the teacher to teach well and the learner to learn well. UNESCO made emphasis on this and made it a cause for concern and work in science education, while seeing steady decline in enrollment of young people in science courses.¹⁹ We have hard and softwares, projected and non-projected, print and electronic media, visual, audio and audio-visual. And owing to innovational trends, nowadays, it is very easy for teachers to select the ones best suited for easy teaching and learning of a particular subject. However, consideration is done basing on the clarity, legibility, simplicity,

relevancy, durability, portability, manageability, flexibility, adequacy, storability and operative easiness.

Innovation by Great Emphasis on Education of Women

UNESCO agenda on education of African girls is a meaningful project. UNESCO lists women and Africa as priority areas for development, thus science education aims not only to generate a more science-oriented youths but places particular emphasis on the education of girls. It also hopes to have a positive impact on economic and social development by influencing teachers and curriculum planners.²⁰ This is one of the areas that witnessed the greatest advancement in the field of education as far as Africa is concerned. In the olden days, one used to hear that “women’s education ends in kitchen”, but with the number of African women professors and doctorate degree holders nowadays, it is quite obvious that women are outnumbering men as far as teaching/learning is concerned. This is evident with the Nigerian experience, where the number of female students in the tertiary institutions and number of females teaching in nursery, primary and secondary schools surpasses that of males with a good margin. However, low salary payment to teachers and lecturers by the Nigerian government and private school proprietors contributed more to this.

Innovation through Introduction of Environmental Education (and Ecological Sciences)

This was done to ensure improvement in the quality of life of all people and their environment. Environmental education is key for respecting nature and for achieving international agenda, including Millennium Developmental Goals (MDGs), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Convention to combat Desertification (UNCCD) and United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD, 2005-2014).

Innovation in Building Blocks or Structures

This area can never be forgotten. We mean the efforts to make teaching-learning environments conducive. This is seen by the construction of new schools, classrooms or lecture hall blocks and administrative blocks, hostels, library, ICT units and the likes. This is done by bodies like the UNESCO, UNISEF, federal government under Universal Basic Education (UBE), state governments through the ASUBEB (in Anambra, for example), school parent/teacher associations or dialogue, old boys associations, religious associations, families, philanthropists and the likes.

Innovation in Pedagogical Process and in Teaching Qualification

Another area is in pedagogical process. "Pedagogy which is concerned with the art of teaching is generally seen as a systematized and planned effort to impart knowledge to one who requires it, usually by one who not only possesses that knowledge, but also is qualified to impart such knowledge."²¹ One thing that is certain is that the innovation made here depends on a particular teacher or lecturer and application of teaching methods. And in the area of teaching qualification, certainly innovations are made and this is the sole reason why teachers in primary schools, secondary and even tertiary institutions rush each time to update their certificates or qualifications.

Innovation in Curriculum/Syllabus and in System of Education

Here, we see modernization of curriculum or syllabus after some years, owing to *aggiornamento*, that is, to update what is in the system before and make it current. Sometimes the whole system is changed. For example, in Nigeria, there was change from 6-3-3-4 system to the idea of basic education 9-3-4 system, and all these changes are geared towards quality education.

Innovation in Educational Evaluation and Supervision

In classroom or lecture hall communication, using cyclic model, the teacher teaches the students through various media. He gives assignment or evaluates them through examination and equally gets

feedback through their scripts. Now, we can see there are a lot of innovations pertaining to students' evaluation. Apart from teacher-made test, achievement and certification test that are common, we see innovations by introduction of continuous assessment test and even ranking test like Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) and post-UTME. And finally in supervision, there are updates on how to carry out both clinical supervision and quality assurance. All these innovations and novelties really have something to offer.

Evaluation

Thus far, we have gone through education in its cradle stage in Africa till nowadays, as it blossoms with certain innovations in various spheres. Most of innovations or novelties came into existence owing to advancement of science and technology which is education in its own sphere; as we know, education cut across different fields of human endeavour. Technology helps much in education, especially in its work of formation, information and reformation. This is a sort of Enwisdomization, and it is an improvement, advancement, as well as development via technology.

Novelties or innovations in certain spheres of the education sector are aimed towards quality education. Quality education is one that focuses on the whole child- social, emotional, mental, physical and cognitive development of each student, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status or geographical location. It prepares the child for life, not just for testing.

Also quality learning is purposeful learning in which learners are provided with the ability to effectively learn and retain skills and knowledge gained. The skills in question are 21st century skills and the quality learning is usually associated with or based on the student satisfaction with the learning processes.

African education today (however, with the Nigerian experience) in comparism with that of yesteryears has really made a tremendous

improvement or progress, not only on the area of introduction of science and technological advancements, but also in curtailing the rate of illiteracy, for indeed illiteracy and the percentage of population without any schooling have decreased in the past several decades, and this is not only pertaining to Nigeria and Africa, but in most other countries in the world. Thus:

Today, there is some form of compulsory education in most countries. Due to population growth and proliferation of compulsory education, UNESCO has calculated that in the next 30 years more people will receive formal education than in all of human history thus far.²²

Another truism is innovation in certain spheres of learning is to equip students with 21st century skills. Owing to rapid change from global world to digital world, with digital economy and technology and their effects on the work places, there arises a great demand on educational system to prepare students for the workforce. Thus, education forms, informs and reforms students and workers towards meeting the demands of the changing and increasingly digital work place and society.

21st century skills which are series of higher order skills, abilities and learning dispositions have been identified as being required for success in the 21st century society and work-places by educators, business leaders, academics, and governmental agencies. Many of these skills are associated with deeper learning, including analytic reasoning, complex problem-solving and teamwork, compared to traditional knowledge-based academic skills.

Conclusion

As we praise UNESCO and other foreign, local and international agencies that support teaching and learning activities in Africa, in view of development of Africa, we pay more attention to the development of the whole human person or man himself whom we know is the primary agent of development and the beneficiary of

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development as well. This holistic development of man is the task of education. Finally, as corruption is antithetical to development, Africans and, especially, African leaders should imbibe the transformation of the whole man through education and eschew or avoid corruption which is very obvious more than anything else and stands as an unyielding obstacle in African's (and Nigerian's) path towards self-realization, self-actualization and, of course, authentic auto-developmentalization.

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