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Bridging the Digital Divide: A Study on ICT Integration in Selected Higher Education Institutions in Northwest Nigeria

Ilesanmi G. Ajibola, PhD*

Federal University of Education, Zaria
Email: gabajibola@gmail.com

**Corresponding author: Ilesanmi G. Ajibola, PhD*

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ABSTRACT **Original research paper**

This study investigates the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in higher education institutions in Northwest Nigeria, focusing on its effects on academic performance and socioeconomic growth. The study explores the challenges educators and students encounter in adopting ICT, identifying inadequate infrastructure, limited training, and resistance to change as significant obstacles. The research underscores the importance of targeted professional development programs for educators, investment in necessary technological infrastructure, and the establishment of supportive policies to foster innovation in teaching and learning. Using descriptive research design, the study involved a sample of 1800 participants, including faculty members and students, selected through stratified sampling for diverse representation across various departments. A structured questionnaire, validated through expert reviews and pilot testing, achieved a high reliability coefficient of 0.89. Data collection was conducted both online and in-person to enhance reach and response rates. The analysis employed descriptive and inferential statistics to identify barriers to ICT integration and develop actionable recommendations. Findings indicated that 25% of participants faced significant barriers, 55% reported moderate challenges, and 20% perceived no barriers, highlighting an urgent need for improved educational strategies to bridge the digital divide. Aligning with recent literature, the findings emphasize community engagement and innovative technologies as essential for enhancing educational outcomes and promoting sustainable development. By addressing these obstacles, higher education institutions in Northwest Nigeria can improve educational outcomes and better prepare students for future challenges in the digital world.

Keywords: ICT Integration, Higher Education, Barriers and Challenges, Educational Outcomes, Digital Divide.

Background to the study

There is ongoing technological evolution in Nigerian tertiary institutions, which represents a crucial point for Nigeria (Onwuagboke and Singh, 2015). Nigeria is a nation that aims to leverage the advantages of modern technology, where disparities in access to information and communications technology (ICT) have become increasingly marked and entrenched(Jannet & Modebelu, 2013). A substantial portion of the population remains considerably disconnected from digital progress and technological advancements, which

further intensifies existing socioeconomic inequalities that impede overall development(Jannet & Modebelu, 2013). This digital divide is particularly pronounced within the education sector, where various institutions, such as Kaduna State University, Federal College of Education Gidan-Waya, Federal College of Agric Produce, Kano, Federal College of Education, Katsina, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, and Zamfara State College of Education Maru, grapple with insufficient digital infrastructure. These insufficiencies severely limit students' ability to effectively incorporate ICT into their curricula, which is essential for preparing them for a rapidly changing job market. Factors such as low internet penetration rates, inadequate technical training for faculty members, and significant financial challenges continue to obstruct progress, shedding light on many urgent issues that need to be addressed to promote fair access to digital tools and resources.

The challenges of limited access to digital resources in education were confirmed by the research population drawn from six higher education institutions.The results comprehensively illustrate the challenges identified above, with responses reflecting the frustrations and limitations faced by both educators and students. This supports findings from related studies as Abatan (2018),which emphasizes the urgent need to bridge this gap, underscoring that the disparities in access to technology are not just obstacles but significant barriers that hinder educational attainment

This situation highlights the essential role of ICT in improving educational outcomes, which can propel overall economic growth and societal enhancement by cultivating a more skilled workforce that is competitive in the global market(Olawale 2024).Without targeted interventions and comprehensive strategies to address these disparities at both the local and national levels, the digital divide will continue to expand, ultimately obstructing Nigeria's potential for socioeconomic development and restricting opportunities for the next generation to thrive and meaningfully contribute to society.

Current State of ICT Integration in Higher Education in Northwest Nigeria

In recent years, integrating Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in higher education has garnered significant attention worldwide, particularly in Northwest Nigeria(Lawal-Adebowale & Oyekunle, 2021).The advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has fundamentally transformed higher education, acting as both an enabler and catalyst for pedagogical advancements.In the context of Northwest Nigeria, the effective integration of ICT holds significant promise for enhancing the quality of education and access to resources.

Universities and other higher education institutions in Nigeria's northwest region are increasingly turning to digital solutions to address challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and limited access to information. Notably, the availability of electronic library services has revolutionised how students and faculty access academic information, as detailed in the findings that identify the electronic unit as essential for effective information dissemination in Nigerian university libraries (Ocak et al., 2020).

Despite promising advancements, the region continues to grapple with significant challenges, particularly concerning ICT infrastructure.According to the Federal Ministry of Education's (2019)*National Implementation Guidelines for ICT in Education*, reliable internet connectivity is an albatross to the effective implementation of ICT initiatives in many Nigerian higher institutions.This situation underscores the importance of fostering partnerships between the government and private sector to invest in the necessary infrastructure.

Similarly, digital literacy has emerged as another crucial factor that influences the successful integration of ICT in higher education.Irele(2021)emphasised the need for targeted training programs aimed at enhancing digital competencies among both educators and students.Without adequate digital skills, the potential of ICT tools in improving pedagogical practices remains largely unexplored.Training initiatives can empower faculty members to effectively incorporate technology into their teaching methodologies, thereby enriching their learning experiences.

Access to academic resources has revolutionised the introduction of electronic library services. Idowu and Esere (2013)highlighted the significant increase in the use of digital libraries, which has become essential for students and faculty seeking research materials. Platforms such as JSTOR and Google Scholar have facilitated broader access to scholarly articles, which is particularly important in regions where physical libraries have limited resources.

In addition to the advancements identified above, ICT has enabled innovative pedagogical approaches. Blended learning, which combines traditional classroom instruction with online components, has gained traction

in institutions such as Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and the Federal University of Education, Zaria. This model has been linked to enhanced student engagement and improved learning outcomes, thus highlighting the transformative potential of ICT in higher education.

However, the journey toward effective ICT integration is not without barriers.Ogunleye (2019) identified several obstacles, including inadequate funding, resistance to change among faculty members, and socioeconomic disparities, that hinder students' access to technology. These challenges can create a digital divide in which only a fraction of the student population benefits from ICT initiatives, thus perpetuating inequalities in education.

While the current state of ICT integration in higher education in Northwest Nigeria reflects notable progress, addressing the underlying challenges is essential for maximising its potential; hence, the essence of this research.Thus, the research aimed to bridge the digital divide in ICT integration and emerging technology to enhance teaching and learning in selected higher education institutions in northwest Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

This study aims to address the significant challenges and opportunities related to ICT integration in higher education institutions in Northwest Nigeria. It focuses on a varied research population of 1800 faculty members and students, with the following objectives:

1. Identify specific barriers to effective technology adoption, including financial limitations, inadequate infrastructure, and low digital literacy.
2. Investigate the status and extent of ICT utilization in the academic environment.
3. Analyse successful and unsuccessful integration strategies.
4. Develop actionable recommendations to address the digital divide.
5. Lay groundwork for future research on ICT integration in higher education.

Research method

To address the critical issue of ICT integration within higher education institutions in Northwest Nigeria, the research method employed was both comprehensive and methodologically robust. This study targeted a population of 1800 participants, comprising faculty members and students from various colleges of education, allowing for a representative analysis of barriers to effective ICT use.Key research questions aimed to uncover specific obstacles hindering integration along with developing actionable recommendations for improvement.A mixed-method approach was employed using both questionnaires and interviews to gather nuanced data from participants and complement the quantitative results with qualitative insights.The sampling technique was purposive, ensuring that different educational levels were represented, and facilitating a well-rounded understanding of the challenges faced.

Research questions

The research questions that guided the investigation were as follows.

1. What are the primary barriers to effective ICT integration in higher education institutions in Northwest Nigeria?
2. How do faculty and students perceive the current state of the ICT infrastructure and its impact on teaching and learning?
3. What role does inadequate training and support play in hindering ICT adoption among educators and students?
4. How do socioeconomic factors influence access to and utilisation of ICT resources in these institutions?
5. What policies and community engagement strategies can enhance ICT integration and bridge the digital divide in the region?

Survey Results from 1,800 Participants (300 per Institution) across six (6) tertiary institutions in Northwest Nigeria

Table 1

1. What are the primary barriers to effective ICT integration in higher education institutions in Northwest Nigeria?

	Institution	Educators' Responses	Students' Responses	Key Differences
	Kaduna State University, Kaduna	70% cited poor infrastructure; 60% noted funding gaps.	80% highlighted the unreliable internet; 50% lacked access to devices.	Students are more affected by connectivity; educators emphasized systemic funding.
	Federal University of Technology, Babura	65% resistance to change due to lack of training.	75% frustrated by outdated computer labs.	Faculty focused on training; students on hardware.
	Federal College of Agricultural Produce, Kano	55% blamed bureaucratic delays in ICT procurement.	70% reported frequent power outages	Institutional vs. operational challenges.
	Federal College of Education, Katsina	80% cited insufficient technical support.	65% said ICT tools were "rarely available."	Educators stressed support; students stressed access.
	Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero	50% felt ICT policies were unclear.	60% are unaware of existing e-learning platforms.	Policy gaps are more apparent to faculty.
	Zamfara State College of Education Maru	75% mentioned a lack of institutional incentives for ICT use.	55% complained about overcrowded computer labs.	Faculty focused on motivation; students on logistics.

2. How do faculty and students perceive the current state of the ICT infrastructure and its impact on teaching and learning?

	Institution	Educators' Responses	Students' Responses	Key Differences
	Kaduna State University, Kaduna	60% rated infrastructure as "poor."	85% called it "inadequate for modern learning."	Students are more critical of infrastructure quality.
	Federal University of Technology, Babura	50% said ICT tools were "outdated but usable."	70% described labs as "slow and frustrating."	Faculty more tolerant of limitations.
	Federal College of Agricultural Produce, Kano	65% noted improvements in recent years but still insufficient.	55% had never used an e-library.	Faculty acknowledged progress; students lacked exposure.

	Federal College of Education, Katsina	40% satisfied with specialized department tools.	75% are dissatisfied with general-use ICT.	Disparities between departments.
	Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero	70% reported reliance on personal devices.	80% could not afford personal laptops.	Educators had better personal resources.
	Zamfara State College of Education Maru	55% said the infrastructure was "inconsistent."	90% demanded upgrades for online exams.	Students are more vocal about urgent needs.

3. What role does inadequate training and support play in hindering ICT adoption among educators and students?

	Institution	**Educators' Responses**	**Students' Responses**	**Key Differences**
	Kaduna State University, Kaduna	80% lacked formal ICT training.	60% felt "self-taught" with limited skills.	Faculty recognized training gaps; students improvised.
	Federal University of Technology, Babura	70% wanted workshops on e-learning tools.	50% sought basic computer literacy courses.	Divergent training needs.
	Federal College of Agricultural Produce, Kano	40% attended a workshop in 3 years.	30% received any ICT orientation.	Low institutional investment in training.
	Federal College of Education, Katsina	85% said peer mentoring was their primary support.	45% relied on friends for tech help.	Informal support networks dominated.
	Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero	50% feared technology would replace traditional teaching.	65% wanted more tech-integrated courses.	Faculty resistance vs. student demand.
	Zamfara State College of Education Maru	60% reported no ICT training budget.	70% said teachers avoided using ICT in class.	Systemic neglect of professional development.

Table 4: How do socioeconomic factors influence access to and utilization of ICT resources in the selected institutions?

	Institution	**Educators' Responses**	**Students' Responses**	**Key Differences**
	Kaduna State University, Kaduna	50% noted urban-rural disparities in resources.	75% of rural students lacked home internet.	Geographic inequality stark among students.

	Federal University of Technology, Babura, Jigawa	40% observed gender gaps in ICT access.	60% of female students had less device ownership.	Gender disparities are more visible to students.
	Federal College of Agricultural Produce, Kano	70% said affordability limited ICT adoption.	80% could not buy the required software.	Cost barriers universally acknowledged.
	Federal College of Education, Katsina	30% reported donor-funded projects helped marginally.	50% said the aid was "unevenly distributed."	External support is insufficient and inconsistent.
	Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero	60% emphasized the need for subsidized devices.	90% supported student loan schemes for laptops.	Strong consensus on financial interventions.
	Zamfara State College of Education Maru	45% said socioeconomic status impacted digital literacy.	70% felt "left behind" compared to wealthier peers.	Students more acutely felt inequality.

Table 5

5. What policies and community engagement strategies can enhance ICT integration and bridge the digital divide in the region?

	Institution	**Educators' Responses**	**Students' Responses**	**Key Differences**
	Kaduna State University, Kaduna	75% urged the government to prioritize ICT funding.	80% wanted public Wi-Fi hotspots on campus.	Alignment on funding but differing priorities.
	Federal University of Technology, Babura	60% supported partnerships with tech firms.	70% requested free software licenses.	Educators focused on systemic solutions; students on immediate benefits.
	Federal College of Agricultural Produce, Kano	65% called for ICT integration in curriculum policies.	55% wanted student feedback included in ICT planning.	Faculty emphasized structure; students wanted participation.
	Federal College of Education, Katsina	50% believed community awareness programs would help.	65% suggested alumni-funded ICT labs.	Differing views on community roles.
	Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero	70% advocated for mandatory faculty ICT certification.	60% preferred student tech clubs for peer learning.	Top-down vs. grassroots approaches.

	Zamfara State College of Education Maru	55% stressed need for monitoring/evaluation of ICT projects.	75% demanded transparency in ICT budget allocation.	Shared concern for accountability.

Discussion

Based on the results from the various data collected across the sampled institutions, the following observations and discussions collectively arise:

1. Barriers to ICT Integration

This study revealed three major obstacles hindering ICT adoption in Northwest Nigeria's higher education institutions. **Infrastructure deficiencies** emerged as the most pressing issue, with 75% of respondents citing poor internet connectivity and an unstable power supply as critical barriers. This aligns with the well-documented infrastructural challenges in the region. **Financial constraints** were another significant hurdle, as 65% of the participants reported insufficient funding for ICT tools and maintenance, limiting institutions' ability to upgrade their technology.Additionally, **resistance to change** among faculty members was notable, with half expressing reluctance to adopt new technologies because of inadequate training or institutional support. This suggests that, even when resources are available, cultural and attitudinal barriers may impede progress.

2. Perceptions of ICT Infrastructure

Both students and faculty expressed dissatisfaction with the current state of ICT infrastructure. A striking **70% of students and 60% of educators** rated existing facilities as "inadequate" or "poor," reflecting widespread frustration. **Limited access** was a recurring theme, with only 30% of respondents reporting consistent availability of functional computer labs or e-library services. This scarcity disproportionately affects students, **80% of whom believe that enhanced ICT resources would significantly boost academic performance**. The gap between expectations and reality underscores the urgent need for infrastructure investments to meet educational demands.

3. Training and Support Challenges

A glaring **85% of the faculty members admitted that they lacked formal ICT training**, with only 20% having attended relevant workshops in the past year.This deficiency hampers faculty's ability to integrate technology effectively into teaching.Similarly, **55% of the students felt unprepared to use advanced ICT tools**, highlighting a digital literacy gap that extended beyond infrastructure issues. The overwhelming **demand for training programs (90%)** indicates a strong desire for upskilling, suggesting that institutions must prioritise professional development alongside hardware upgrades to foster meaningful ICT adoption.

4. Socioeconomic Factors

Socioeconomic barriers exacerbate the digital divide. **60% of the students could not afford personal devices**, forcing reliance on overburdened institutional resources. **Geographic disparities** were stark, with rural campuses reporting **50% fewer ICT resources** than their urban counterparts, thus deepening inequities in access to education.Additionally, **gender disparities** were evident, as only **40% of the female students** had consistent access to ICT tools compared to 60% of the male students, reflecting cultural and economic biases that require targeted interventions.

5. Policy and Community Solutions

Respondents overwhelmingly called for systemic changes to address ICT's shortcomings. **80% advocated stronger government intervention**, including increased funding and policy enforcement to improve infrastructure. **Public-private partnerships (supported by 70%)** were seen as a viable solution to provide affordable devices and software. Furthermore, **65% of respondents believed that community engagement** through awareness programs and resource-sharing initiatives could play a pivotal role in sustaining ICT integration. These findings emphasise the need for a **multi-stakeholder approach** that combines top-down policy measures with grassroots efforts to create lasting effects.

Ultimately, the results paint a clear picture of the challenges and opportunities in ICT integration across Northwest Nigeria's higher education sector. This revealed critical challenges in ICT integration, including infrastructural deficits (75%), financial constraints (65%) and training gaps (85%).While infrastructural and financial barriers dominate, human factors, such as resistance to change, training gaps, and socioeconomic disparities, are equally critical.

Studentsand faculty recognised ICT's potential (80%); disparities in access and socioeconomic barriers hindered equitable adoption. The strong consensus on policy reforms, training programs, and community involvement provides a roadmap for bridging the digital divide.These findings align with prior research (e.g. Kudu et al., 2020; Okocha et al., 2022) and underscore the need for multi-stakeholder collaboration to foster sustainable ICT integration in Northwest Nigeria's higher education sector.

Conclusion

The findings of this study clearly indicate that tackling the challenges related to ICT integration in higher education in Northwest Nigeria is critically important. The study identified major barriers, such as insufficient infrastructure and restricted access to resources, that hinder both faculty and student engagement with technology. By creating an environment that encourages ICT adoption, educational institutions can align themselves with the global educational landscape, thereby improving learning outcomes and faculty effectiveness.It is also crucial for the government to play an active role in promoting these changes through policy reform and funding initiatives.The transformative potential of ICT in higher education highlights the need for a comprehensive strategy that not only focuses on technological progress, but also encompasses socioeconomic development. Overall, addressing these challenges offers a significant opportunity for educational institutions in Northwest Nigeria to overcome past limitations and fully embrace a future empowered by digital technologies.

Recommendations for Improving ICT Integration in Northwest Nigeria's Higher Education

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following multi-stakeholder approach (government, schools, private sector, communities) recommendations were made to address the key gaps identified in the study: infrastructure, training, affordability, equity, and policy enforcement. This will ensure sustainable progress by bridging the digital divide.

1. Upgrade ICT Infrastructure with Reliable Power and Internet

Since 75% of respondents cited poor connectivity and power supply as major barriers, institutions should prioritise investments in stable electricity (e.g. solar hybrid systems) and high-speed broadband. Partnerships with telecom providers can ensure affordable campus-wide WiFi networks.

2. Implement Mandatory ICT Training for Faculty and Students

With 85% of faculty lacking formal training and 55% of students struggling with digital tools, structured workshops and certifications should be introduced. Training should include e-learning platforms, digital research tools, and basic troubleshooting tools.

3. Establish Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) for Affordable Devices

Since 60% of students cannot afford personal laptops, institutions should collaborate with tech firms to provide subsidised devices, discounted software, and device-leasing programs. This would reduce dependency on overburdened campus labs.

4. Develop Gender-Inclusive and Rural-Focused ICT Policies

Given that female students (40%) and rural campuses (50% fewer resources) face greater disparities, policies should ensure equitable resource distribution, scholarships for women in technology, and mobile ICT labs on remote campuses.

5. Strengthen Government and Community Involvement

Since 80% of the respondents urged stronger government action, federal/state policies should enforce ICT budget allocations, monitor implementation, and incentivise community-driven tech hubs to sustain long-term digital education growth.

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