



THE DIGITAL GAP AND THE FALLACY OF HOPELESSNESS IN NIGERIA



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Introduction

Today in Nigeria, many institutions of higher learning are concentrating their fire to selecting themes and sub-themes for their various conferences on digital literacy, digitalization with profound focus on digital glory. Rarely do you find them interested on whether same institutions of learning are ready to cope with new shift in paradigm. Let me inform you that there can only be glory of digitalization when the readiness challenges have been addressed. In the view of the author, this is the gap that requires urgent attention and robust discussion for digital literacy which many have accepted as good and underscored in its relevance. The emphasis here, is how to make the institutions and communities ready for digital participation. Clearly, there is a digital divide and the kernel of this paper is intended to identify such divide and bridge the digital gap to guarantee digital inclusion for greater participation within the philosophy of digitalization.

To address of the demands of this conference, the author sincerely shares his thoughts on institutionalization of digital inclusion in Nigeria as a country and Africa as a continent. This will give an opportunity to delve into practical, systemic and open-minded conversation that would spur the new approach for action, to address digital skill development, device access, internet access, technical support, e-waste management, marginalized groups, policy regulations and digital infrastructures.

Capacity of Nigeria to drive digitalization

The question here is whether Nigeria has economic wherewithal to drive digitalization in the country's tertiary institutions of learning. Nigeria as a nation has all it takes to be a super and great nation with organized structures that will attract the sea of eyes. The rich and abundant human and material resources are evident in this direction which in most cases are even understated. She cannot therefore afford to be a bye-stander or an on-looker in the cult of globalized and modern contemporary civilizations. Nigeria University Education is seen as a veritable agent and most potent catalyst and instrument per excellence for her to attain desired sustainable national development.

Another opposing view sees Nigeria as a very poor country. Looking closely, the question is, What is the GDP of Nigeria in the last three years? Harvard University has an endowment of \$ 50.9 billion USD as of 2022. This is definitely much more than Nigeria reserves as a country. Harvard is just a university in America.

The Bank of America made a profit of \$ 98.32 billion USD in PROFIT, NOT earnings in 2023. Please, what is Nigeria total budget in 2024?

National Health Scheme in the UK Budgeted £179.6 billion for the health sector in 2024. UK has over 41 million licensed vehicles with a population of about 67 million. Nigeria as a country has less than 15 million vehicles, with a population of about 200 million people. It is estimated that 7 out of a typical

Nigerian will spend money they do not need just to impress people. It is all about show up. Emirates group's revenue in 2023 was \$37.4 billion USD. How much did Nigeria as a country earn from our most celebrated crude oil in 2023?? Emirates group made a profit of \$ 5.1 billion USD in 2023.

Emirates airlines operates 49 flights per week to London Heathrow ALONE. This includes flying A380s. That is 7 flights per day to one airport in the UK. They also fly to Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, London Gatwick, Stansted, Manchester, and Newcastle. Check out Qatar Airways, too. Singapore has a population of 5.6M, but Singapore Airlines carried over 36M passengers in 2023.

Dubai has a population of 3m, but Emirates airlines carried about 52M passengers last year. Nigeria is almost at the centre of the world. A very serious advantage in connecting anywhere in the world. These countries are deliberately growing their aviation sector with the right strategy.

Consequences of Inventions And R&D

1. Stanford University

- The university's faculty and alumni have founded major technical companies including Google, Hewlett-Packard and Cisco Systems.
- A 2012 study by the university estimated that companies formed by Stanford entrepreneurs generated so much revenue that if they formed an independent nation, it would rank among the 10 largest economies in the world.
- Endowment \$27.7 billion as at 2019

2. Massachusetts Institute of Technology Mit

- MIT has produced: 90 novel laureates, 59 national medal of science winners, 75 MacArthur Fellows, and 29 national medal of technology and innovation winners.
- A study conducted by the university suggested that 30,000 such companies were active in 2014, employing 4.6 million people and producing annual revenue of \$ 1.9 trillion.
- Endowments \$ 1.38 billion as at 2020.

3. Harvard University

- Harvard university is the oldest institution of higher education in the United States.
- It has produced 48 Nobel laureates, 32 heads of state and 48 Pulitzer Prize winners. The university's \$39.2 billion endowment is the world's largest.

Centers, Peripheries and Dependency

The professoriate in developing countries is a profession on the periphery, Altbach (1998) with few exceptions research undertaken at major universities in the industrialized countries set the standard everywhere. Research universities in the industrialized countries are the centers of international knowledge (Chils 1972). These universities produce most of the research and control the key journals. The academic profession in developing countries is peripheral to international centres, the academic system in developing countries are without exception imported from the North America. The European modern universities were imposed by colonial powers. In many cases even the language of the colonial power was retained for instruction and research, the major European languages remained dominant in many developing countries, e.g English and French are still entrenched in Africa. No Africa language is used in Africa universities, English remains important and prefer by student because it is more advantageous in the market place. Language therefore is one element of the peripherality of academic profession in the developing countries.



Universities in the developing countries and the academic communities must function in an unequal world of centers and peripheries. Peripherality does not mean that academic in the developing world cannot undertake creative scientific or intellectual work, but it means that there will seldom stand at the frontier of world science and achieve any control over the main levels of academic power worldwide. Related to peripherality is dependency. Third world academics perceived themselves to be dependent to centres of knowledge and world scientific network. The inequality in world size, access to resources and institutional infrastructures contributes to dependency, in many developing countries, funding for research, participation in International conferences and programmes, access to academic collaboration is often dependent on external support from the North. The decision-making structures are based in the North and reflect the interest of the dominant academic communities, the situation is most extreme for Africa where almost all the research and funding for international linkages comes from external sources, foreign government, Multi-literal agencies, philanthropic foundations etc. African scholars and scientists are dependent on foreign funds and must comply with the particular priorities and programme of the founders for their research (Teferra and Atbach 2002).

In addition, the fact is that most academics in their small worlds of their department and their universities spend most of their time teaching and are thus unaffected in their daily life by the trends in international scholarship. The academic system relied on the north to give legitimacy to the academic world. While third world academics strive to keep abreast of world science there are distinct competitive disadvantage, the way in which the world of scientific publishing is organized discourages national and regional scientific communities from emerging in the third world. However, over reliance on the external norms disturbs academic development and introduces unrealistic expectations for the academic profession. Ultimately, these affect the nature and speed of sustainable development in developing world.

As articulated earlier, Nigeria as a country has all it takes to be a great nation, she therefore cannot be an onlooker in the cult of globalization and digital exploits.

The conception that Nigeria is rich to many is reduced to having natural endowments and even dexterity to manage our economy without corresponding benefits. Sadly, this aphorism has not been so in reality. There appears to be a misconception with reference to having tapped or untapped and this used of natural resources in relation to the anticipated proceeds therefrom as an indicator of wealth.

This situation has stimulated the author to hold the view that Nigeria appears to be a country of contrast with plenty but little available for use (hunger, poverty and japa syndrome, etc) or have you not heard that in other climbs, natural potentialities are the raw materials harness to oil the wheel of economic prosperity, but in Nigeria the story appears consistently in the reverse.

In other nations, people advertise what they intend to give out, but in Nigeria citizens advertised what they have no plans to relinquish, why the advertisement in the first place? Have you not heard or seen inscriptions in some Nigeria properties, that this land/house is not for sale. A country of contrast in deed.

Nigeria as a nation is often committed to follow the world order but the stamina with which she pursues these ideals, leaves much to be desired, today in Nigeria, what can we say is the nation's position on sustainable development goals SDGs, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, Globalization Emerging markets, Deregulation etc and now digitalization.

For Nigerian schools and communities to join the conversion and clearly participate in this new order, some fundamentals must be put in place. This is in line with systematic forward planning. Nigeria has not sufficiently explored opinion surveys and deliberation on digitalization as way to determine her readiness and capabilities to join the world in the digital exploits.

By the time Nigeria conclude with sincerity of purpose her surveys and deliberations on the need to reposition our institutions of learning, rural and urban communities with regards to the use of digital application to then we can begin to delve into higher level of digital literacy.

Surface is to say that there are digital illiterates in the Nigerian educational system, as you have then in the rural and urban communities who have little or no need for digital knowledge.



Gains Of Digital Inclusion

1. Digital health
2. Digital governance
3. Inclusive technology
4. Agric-technology
5. Digital entrepreneurship

Digital Gap

The digital gap, also known as the digital divide, refers to the disparities in access to, utilization of, and benefits from digital technologies.

Types of Digital Gaps:

1. Access Gap: Disparities in internet access, data sovereignty, device ownership, and connectivity.
2. Skills Gap: Differences in digital literacy, technical skills, and online navigation.
3. Usage Gap: Variations in how people use digital technologies.
4. Content Gap: Limited availability of relevant, culturally sensitive content.
5. Infrastructure Gap: Disparities in broadband, network quality, and speed.

Statistics:

1. 37% of global population lacks internet access (ITU, 2022)
2. 22% of Americans lack broadband internet (Pew Research, 2022)
3. 43% of seniors (65+) in the US lack digital literacy (Pew Research, 2020)

Causes of Digital Gaps:

1. Socio-economic factors (income, education, age)
2. Geographic location (rural/urban, developed/developing countries)
3. Lack of digital literacy and skills
4. Limited access to devices and internet
5. Affordability of digital technologies
6. Disability and accessibility barriers
7. Language and cultural barriers

Effects of Digital Gaps:

1. Exclusion from digital economy and job market
2. Limited access to education, healthcare, and government services
3. Reduced social connections and community engagement
4. Perpetuation of existing social and economic inequalities
5. Decreased economic opportunities and competitiveness

Solutions to Digital Gaps:

1. Digital inclusion initiatives (community programs, training)
2. Infrastructure development (broadband, connectivity)
3. Affordable devices and internet plans
4. Digital literacy education and online resources
5. Accessible technologies for people with disabilities
6. Culturally sensitive content and language support
7. Policy reforms and regulations (net neutrality, digital rights)

Quality is fitness of purpose: educational quality will be seen as providing learning experiences that guarantee achievement of its objective. To proceed, we will therefore focus our attention on the cardinal



points of educational quality; whether as inputs, output, contents, process, values and reputation at any given time; this is because education has no specific goals in itself...

Goals of Education

Education has no goal of its own. What we consider as educational goals are distilled expressions of the best minds of men, of what is educationally desirable. They are ideals of what is socially, culturally, politically and economically valuable. the goals are summarized from a supposedly world of idealistic purity and we give them meaning and form when deliberate actions are taken to make them operate.

However, the goals of education change with time. One thing that is permanent about human natures is change. The quest for utopia or a near perfect world where individual and societal goals and aspirations are fully realized provides the driving force for the continuous modification or alteration of the goals or education. But, most importantly, the fundamental changes in the value domains of societies provide the impetus for altering educational goals.

The changes in the goals of education are also gradual rather than spontaneous because the processes of change in societal values, goals and aspirations are gradual except in times of political upheaval or revolution as was the case in Russia in 1917.

The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity;

1. The inculcation into the individual the Nigerian society
2. The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around; and
3. The acquisition of appropriate skills, and competence both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society. (N.P.E., 1981, P.17).

The articulation of the goals of education with national objectives becomes a major criterion for determining the relevance of education and the 'good life' it portends to the society. Thus, the goals of education and national objectives are predicated on a semblance of the values of the society.

The goals of Nigerian education are geared towards the achievement of national or societal goals characterized by the following: How far after 63years of independence?

1. a free and democratic society;
2. a just and egalitarian society;
3. a united, strong and self-reliant nation;
4. a great and dynamic economy;
5. a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens. (N.P.E., 1918 P. 7).

Thus, the goal of education and national goals demand a curriculum whose contents are reflective of the above goals. This is why a shift of emphasis becomes obvious. Again, because of the inadequacies of the colonial educational policy which depicted a preponderous bias for literary education, the insatiable thirst for science and technology in the space age changed the orientation and contents of the new Nigerian educational curricula, especially, at the primary and post-primary school levels. This new emphasis embodied a flare for vocational and technical education and it represents a new-breed of aspirations and a change in the fundamental societal goals in terms of what is educationally desirable.

But these educational goals and national objectives cannot be achieved unless school administrators can perceive the relevance and the relatedness of these goals of education with the goals of school administration.

Owing to the dynamics that characterized human existence man's needs certainly will continue to change and this is how education that guarantees that fitness of purpose would equally metamorphosed accordingly.

1. The early Roman education focusses on development of oratory and this was reflective in the literature produced at that time
2. The two Greek city States of Athens and Spartan were more concern for developing democratic ideals and warlords respectively.



3. Today in these examples above certainly their educational system has moved away to addressing more recent challenges. The circumstance that nations find themselves shapes their thought in tailoring the educational systems to meeting their needs and desires.

Note, in Nigeria we inherited an educational system that was clearly bookish and to large extent non-functional and this does not encourage us to conduct groundbreaking researches capable of solving our confronted problems. We live in a country where the product of our researches is largely fake and cannot be relied on, on one hand, on the other even when the results of the research are genuine, there is also a difficulty in accepting and using such results and as such these results lie prostrates in library shelves accumulating dust.

If we must reinvent the wheels of educational system in Nigeria today, we must begin to develop value for indigenous researches by eliminating faking and bias and clearly attempt to use them to solve our problems. Nigeria as a country, appears not have value for their own in terms of research but can celebrate anything outside the shores of Nigeria.

Today, therefore calls for a deep sober reflection on the slow impact of the reality of University education on sustainable educational development in Nigeria and even up to sub Saharan Africa with its accompanied threats.

Challenges of digital inclusion

Access Challenges:

1. Digital divide: Disparities in internet access, device ownership, and digital literacy.
2. Infrastructure limitations: Insufficient broadband, connectivity issues, and slow speeds.
3. Affordability: High costs of devices, internet plans, and data.
4. Geography: Rural, remote, or underserved areas with limited access.

Skills and Literacy Challenges:

1. Digital literacy: Lack of basic computer skills, online navigation, and digital tools knowledge.
2. Information literacy: Difficulty evaluating online information quality and credibility.
3. Technical skills: Insufficient training in software applications, coding, and data analysis.
4. Language barriers: Limited content and services in non-dominant languages.

Social and Cultural Challenges:

1. Digital exclusion: Marginalized groups, elderly, and people with disabilities.
2. Socio-economic disparities: Low-income households, inadequate digital resources.
3. Cultural relevance: Limited content and services tailored to diverse cultural needs.
4. Online safety: Cyberbullying, harassment, and online security concerns.

Policy and Regulatory Challenges:

1. Digital rights: Privacy, data protection, and online freedom of speech.
2. Accessibility standards: Inconsistent or inadequate digital accessibility regulations.
3. Net neutrality: Ensuring equal internet access and speed.
4. Digital governance: Effective management of digital resources and infrastructure.

Economic Challenges:

1. Digital economy disparities: Unequal access to digital markets, jobs, and entrepreneurship.
2. Digital skills gap: Labor market demands for digital skills outpacing supply.
3. Investment in digital infrastructure: Funding and resource allocation.
4. Digital taxation: Fair taxation of digital goods and services.

Health and Well-being Challenges:

1. Digital addiction: Mental health concerns, screen time, and online behavior.
2. Online harassment: Cyberbullying, hate speech, and online abuse.
3. Digital health literacy: Accurate health information and online resources.
4. Telehealth access: Equal access to remote healthcare services.



Recommendations and Strategies:

1. Digital inclusion initiatives: Community programs, training, and access points.
2. Policy reforms: Inclusive digital policies, regulations, and standards.
3. Infrastructure development: Improved broadband, connectivity, and accessibility.
4. Education and training: Digital literacy, skills development, and online resources.
5. Partnerships and collaborations: Public-private partnerships, community engagement.

To achieve digital inclusion, you must adopt partnership centre framework to learning institution as implementation partners, organization as affiliate members and engage government as possible support partner through out the processes of full institutionalization of a safe sustainable digital inclusive Africa. Through Curriculum redesign, legislature and policies, committing teachers and students to shift and appreciate digital thinking. When these strategies as sincerely implemented, certainly, the thoughts that digital hope is lost, in the pursuit of digitalization agenda will remain a fallacy.

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