

UNDERSTANDING INSTITUTIONAL AND FACILITY RELATED CHALLENGES AFFECTING THE APPLICATION OF ICT SKILLS TO ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES BY FACULTY STAFF IN SAMPLED NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES.

By

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Abstract

The study aimed at understanding institutional and facility-related challenges affecting the application of ICT skills to academic activities by faculty staff. The three full-time universities in Benue state were purposively selected to form the population of the study; namely, University of Agriculture, Makurdi; Benue State University, Makurdi; and University of Mkar, Mkar. The descriptive survey design was adopted with a total population of 1, 537 faculty staff. Out of this population, 306 faculty staff were drawn as a sample for the study, using the simple random sampling procedure. A validated questionnaire was deployed for data collection; while charts, frequency tables and simple percentages were used for data analysis. The study revealed that institutional and facility-related challenges affecting faculty staff' ICT skills application to academic activities in the universities in Benue State include: inadequate funding of ICT ventures, lack of sponsorship for ICT training, inadequate ICT facilities, unstable power supply and poor internet connectivity. Based on this, it was recommended that the government should annually provide ICT development fund to universities for bankrolling of ICT projects, and the management of respective universities should ensure more spending on providing ICT facilities, stable power supply, and sound Internet connectivity as this would greatly enhance academic activities in the universities.

Keywords: ICT Skills, Faculty staff, Nigeria, Universities, Challenges, Application

Introduction

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) has become a substantial part of people, communities and societies all over the world. The centrality of these technologies is due to the change it has instigated by influencing the mode of completing daily tasks. With this development, the behaviours of people toward their daily activities have been greatly influenced. Today, people are increasingly considering ways of living, working, and interacting that are not facilitated by ICT as unwelcoming, outlandish and outmoded (Tor, Wisdom & Ezekiel, 2019). Thus, faculty staff in universities are not immune from this experience, because of the load of academic activities that duty has laid upon them to cope with daily.

Academic activities are critical to the university life and development. Such academic activities broadly consist but not limited to instruction delivery (teaching), evaluation and research, supervision, instructional materials acquisition, collaboration, publication and communication. According to Abba & Adamu (2019), these academic activities are fundamental to the survival of universities in the modern world. It is more so because the quality of programmes of instruction and output of universities in terms of graduates and research are all dependent on the effectiveness and efficiency of academic activities, which are chiefly undertaken by faculty staff. Interestingly,

ICT has eased the stress associated with the conventional method of executing tasks, by initiating technology-driven means of performing statutory roles with improved speed, accuracy and efficiency.

The fact that ICTs are identified as sources for increased productivity, has informed the decision of many institutions to adopt them in Nigeria. The increasing popularity of these technologies in universities and its attendant impact on academic works, pressured most faculty staff in Nigerian universities to develop skills or abilities for integrating them into their professional jobs. This is more so because real success in today's technology-laden work environment depends largely on the depth of faculty staff in the use of digital equipment. However, a body of studies (Archibong, Ogbiji & Anijaobi-Idem; 2010; Azuh, and Modebelu, 2013) independently conducted bared that the integration of ICT into statutory onuses of faculty staff is not yet a complete success story even for the skilful lecturers. While many factors could be responsible for this situation, this study only seeks to understand institutional and facility challenges encumbering effective use of ICT skills in achieving academic tasks by faculty staff in sampled Nigerian universities. This backdrop formed the premise of the study.

Statement of the Problem

ICT has become a dire necessity for professional practices, implying that the era of survival in any profession without gaining appreciable abilities in the use of ICT is gone. This justifies all the efforts, initiatives, and training put forward by professional bodies, institutions, government agencies and private firms to equip professionals with ICT skills for optimum performance at their workplaces. In the university circles, such efforts are increasingly yielding results as studies have shown good levels of ICT skills of faculty staff in Nigerian universities (Shidi, Igyuve & Tyonum, 2015; Ridwan, Tor & Mohammed, 2019). However, Archibong *et al.*, (2010), Azuh and Modebelu (2013) disclosed that the integration of ICT into academic activities by faculty staff is not yet a complete success story even for the skilful ones. This situation assists in casting a doubt on enabling environments in universities that guaranty ICT skills application to academic endeavours by faculty staff. To avoid holding unsubstantiated claims, this study pursues to empirically understand the institutional and facility-related challenges affecting the application of ICT skills to academic activities by faculty staff in sampled Nigerian universities.

Research Questions

1. What are the institutional related challenges affecting the application of ICT skills to academic activities by faculty staff in the universities in Benue State?
2. What are the facility-related challenges affecting the application of ICT to academic activities by faculty staff in the universities in Benue State?

Literature Review

In their study, Kpolovie and Awusaku (2016) highlighted inadequate ICT technical personnel as one of the challenges hamstringing the effective application of lecturers' ICT skills in performing academic activities. This limit the extent of ICT training of lecturers and by extension, affects its application. This has made universities to depend largely on private commercial vendors to provide ICT services such as procurement, installation, use and training.

These services are mostly commercial and lack academic content and result (Kpolovie and Awusaku, 2016). In a similar study, Archibong, Ogbiji, and Anijaobi-Idem (2010) identified lack of adequate funding has one of the challenges that have a ripple effect on the procurement and use of ICT in Nigerian university education. Also, there is usually little or no sponsorship from the university for ICT training of faculty staff and slight priority is given to hardware and software acquisition (Archibong *et al*, 2010).

In another study, Fagbe, Amanze and Oladipo (2015) identified poor attitude toward change in technology as a challenge. This poor attitude slows down every quest by universities to adopt new technologies that can be applied in academic routines of faculty staff. Degraft-Otoo (2012) enumerated lack of top management support for training, failure to provide adequate resources (finance, people and time) required to implement the training and failure to understand the training needs as some of the institutional problems challenging ICT skills application. Also, Muzaffar and Malik (2013) identified extra workload, insufficient time, conflict with teachers working schedule as impediments to general training. In agreement, Nwachukwu and Asom (2015) uncovered that too much workload for academic staff hinders them from applying their computer skills. The result of these challenges is nominal or non-application of ICT skill. This would breed ineffectiveness and inefficiency in their academic duties.

Inadequate ICT facilities and poor maintenance culture have also constituted a great challenge in smoothly applying ICT skills by faculty staff in universities (Fagbe *et al.*, 2015; Ezeugwu *et al.*, 2016). Improper maintenance hinders the durability of ICT facilities. This would result in unproductive or non-functionality of facilities that would have been used to enhance academic chores. Apart from this, absence of enabling environment, including the unsatisfactory performance of Internet service providers and absence of incentives to promote innovation and risk-taking, keep lecturers from applying skills to perform academic tasks (Drummond *et al.*, 2016). Access and immediacy of ICT facilities present a problem to faculty staff (Archibong *et al*, 2010). The basic tools needed for practical works are not usually obtainable, and where they are available, they are either not accessible or highly guarded because of the low ration. Apart from this, Nwachukwu and Asom (2015), Ojeniyi and Adetimirin (2016) found inadequate power supply and poor internet connection as the major factors hindering lecturers from using ICT facilities.

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The full-time universities in Benue state were purposively sampled to form the population of this study; namely, University of Mkar, Mkar; Benue State University, Makurdi; and University of Agriculture, Makurdi. This decision was arrived at because of the limited empirical evidence on the subject matter of this study in the context of Benue State. The questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection after it was subjected to content and face validity. Using the instrument, a pilot study was conducted on ten (10) faculty staff outside the target population after which the result of the pilot study was tested using Cronbach alpha reliability test, and a reliability level of 0.98 was obtained. Following this result, the instrument was judged reliable because the calculated reliability index was significantly higher than the benchmark value of 0.5 (Allison, 2012). The simple sampling procedure was used for sample selection since it gives every member of the population equal chance to be a part of the sample. A total of 306 copies of questionnaires were distributed to the population of 1, 537 faculty staff in the three aforesaid universities, out of

which 273 copies were returned and used for analysis and reporting. The data generated were analyzed using charts, frequency count and simple percentages. The benchmark of 50% was used for the decision. Any item that ranked from 50% and above was regarded as accepted; while any item from 49% and below was regarded as rejected.

Results

Table I Institutional Related Challenges

S/N	Challenges	University	F	%	Remark
1	Lack of sponsorship for ICT training	UAM	93	68	Accepted
		BSUM	64	58	Accepted
		UMM	16	57	Accepted
2	Too much of ICT access regulations	UAM	21	15	Rejected
		BSUM	22	20	Rejected
		UMM	7	25	Rejected
3	Inadequate funding of ICT ventures	UAM	90	66	Accepted
		BSUM	56	50	Accepted
		UMM	16	57	Accepted
4	Excessive official engagements	UAM	24	18	Rejected
		BSUM	52	47	Rejected
		UMM	7	25	Rejected

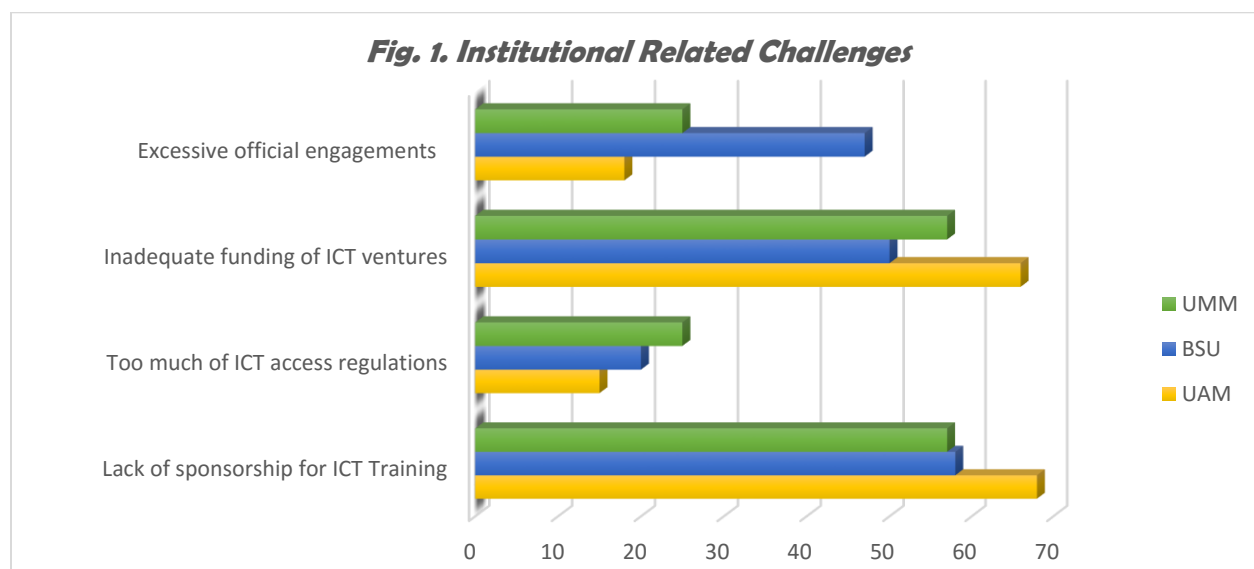


Table 1 and Fig. 1 explicitly presents the institutional challenges faculty staff encountered in their efforts to apply ICT skills in academic activities. It is glaringly that the respondents from the three studied universities agreed on inadequate funding of ICT ventures and lack of sponsorship for ICT training over the 50% benchmark. However, too much ICT access regulations and excessive official engagements received responses below the 50% benchmark in the three universities. It can, therefore, be held that inadequate funding of ICT ventures and lack of sponsorship for ICT training is the institutional related challenges affecting lecturers' ICT skills application in the universities in Benue State.

Table 2 Facility Related Challenges

S/N	Challenges	University	F	%	Remark
1	Poor Internet connectivity	UAM	117	86	Accepted
		BSUM	86	78	Accepted
		UMM	15	53	Accepted
2	Unstable power supply	UAM	123	91	Accepted
		BSUM	98	89	Accepted
		UMM	17	60	Accepted
3	Inadequate ICT facilities	UAM	108	80	Accepted
		BSUM	94	85	Accepted
		UMM	17	60	Accepted

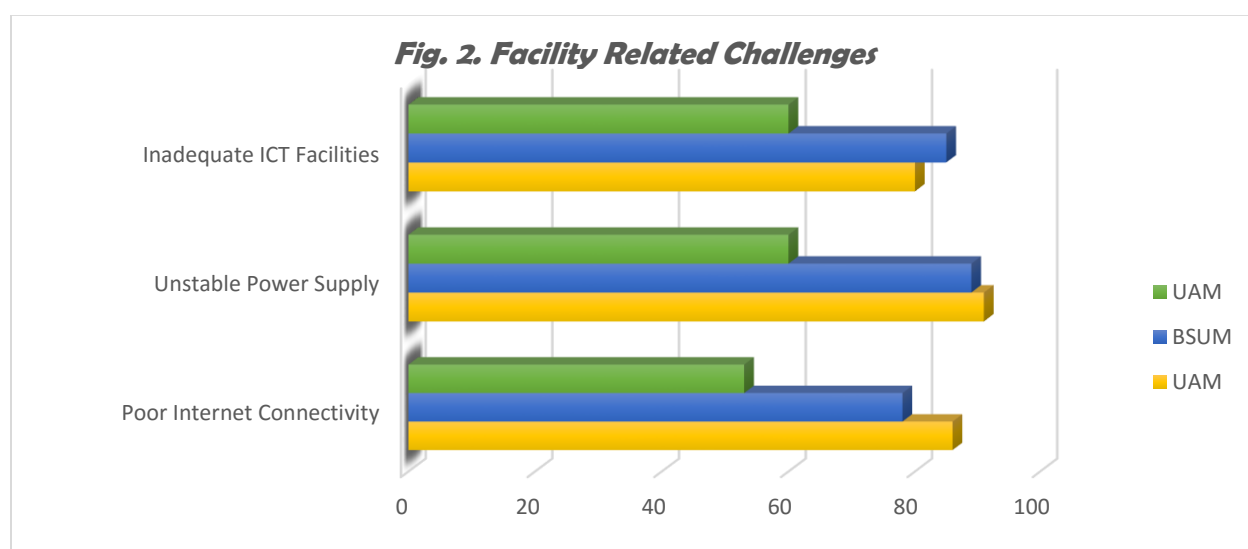


Table 2 and Fig. 2 clearly shows the facility-related challenges affecting faculty staff in applying their skills to perform academic activities. Using the decision rule, it can be seen that all the items outlined received responses above the benchmark of 50%. It can, therefore, be inferred that faculty staff from the three universities are affected by the challenges of inadequate ICT facilities, unstable power supply and poor internet connectivity in the course of applying their skills in academic activities.

Discussion of the Findings

Mere possession of ICT skills does not guaranty application to academic duties except there is enabling environment that consistently supports the application of such skills. With this understanding, the researchers were spurred into seeking an understanding of the institutional challenges hindering the smooth application of ICT skills to academic activities by the faculty staff at the universities in Benue State. A look at table I and Fig. 1 unequivocally bared inadequate funding of ICT ventures and lack of sponsorship for ICT training as the challenges deterring skills application by the subjects of the study. The result unmarks the fact that these universities are facing common challenges at the institutional level. This could either be attributed to lack of deep

understanding of the role ICT plays and how to make the best out of it to enhance academic activities in this global age, or inconsistent financial and infrastructural support received from the proprietors of the universities. The finding of this study reveals support for Archibong, *et al.*, (2010), who identified lack of sponsorship for ICT training and funding as challenges impeding the use of ICT by academic staff in Cross River State, Nigeria. Conversely, the discovery of this study negates the finding of Nwachukwu and Asom (2015), who uncovered that too much workload for academic staff hinders them from applying their computer skills. The computer ought to be an escape route amid extra workload. By implication, the academic activities in these universities might not be effective and efficient except the challenges are timely surmounted.

The application of ICT skills by faculty staff is also affected by facility-related challenges. This is more so because ICT skills application hinges on the provision of required facilities, in terms of quality and quantity, that are critical in smoothing academic activities of faculty staff. The result as flaunted on Table 2 and Fig. 2 revealed that faculty staff from the three universities are affected by the challenges of inadequate ICT facilities, unstable power supply and poor internet connectivity in the course of applying their skills to perform academic activities. Even though these universities are not of the same type, it is also seen here that the universities have shared challenges. This might be that irrespective of the type of university in Benue State, investment in the adoption of ICT facilities has not been given supreme priority. The discovery of the study aligns with Archibong *et al.*, (2010), Ojeniyi and Adetimirin (2016), who uncovered that poor Internet connection and limited ICT facilities stand as great impediments to exercising ICT skills in academic activities by lecturers. Also, the result aligns with Nwachukwu and Asom (2015), who identified inadequate power supply as one among the challenges of using computers for academic activities by lecturers. By implication, limitedness of ICT facilities would limit the effective use of ICTs for lecturers' roles, and in the long run, there would be a decline in the speed, timeliness and accuracy of their tasks. With this, academic stress would also become inevitable since the facilities that ease academic endeavours are grossly lacking but the roles of lecturers are constantly getting complex in the present age.

Conclusion

Premised on the result of the study, it was concluded that institutional and facility-related challenges affecting faculty staff' ICT skills application to academic activities in the universities in Benue State include: inadequate funding of ICT ventures, lack of sponsorship for ICT training, inadequate ICT facilities, unstable power supply and poor internet connectivity. The three universities have shared challenges. This indicates that faculty staff in the universities under study would not be very effective and efficient in carrying out their academic activities except the challenges are timely conquered.

Recommendations

Arising from the outcomes of the study, it was recommended that:

1. The government should annually provide ICT development fund to universities for bankrolling of ICT projects. This would accelerate ICT development in universities and provide enabling ground for faculty staff to be more effective in integrating ICT in academic endeavours.

2. The management of respective universities should ensure more spending on providing ICT facilities, stable power supply, and sound Internet connectivity as this would greatly enhance academic activities in the universities.

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