

A Review of Instructional Delivery in Social Work Education Using ICT Tools

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Doi:10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n10p468

Abstract

Education has been aptly referred to as a veritable tool for meaningful development. The quality and effectiveness of teaching determine to a great extent the overall quality of education and the attainment of educational goals and objectives. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been globally acclaimed as a tool that can accelerate and promote teaching and learning (National Policy for Information Technology, 2001). As opined by Kirschmer and Waperies, (2003), Information and Communication Technology can make the school more efficient and productive, there by engendering a variety of tools to enhance and facilitate teachers' professional activities. This theoretical paper reiterates the vital role of ICT in effective teaching and learning generally and essentially in Social Work Education. It kicked off by examining the concepts of ICT and social work; establishing the need for ICT tools in instructional delivery in social work. The paper thereafter examined some applications of ICT tools in Social Work Education delivery and emphasizes the need for social work educators to judiciously utilize the opportunities and benefits inherent in ICT oriented instructional delivery. The paper concludes with a caution on the potential impact of ICT on professional identity of confidentiality.

Keywords: *ICT, Social work, instructional delivery*

1. Introduction

Education has been recognized as playing significant role in the overall development of man. Thus it was articulated in the National Policy on Education that it is the greatest investment that a nation can make for the quick development of its economic, political, sociological and human resources (FRN, 2004). The quality and effectiveness of teaching determine to a great extent the overall quality of education and the attainment of set educational goals and objectives. If truly education is a veritable indicator of national development, then, of utmost significance is the teacher, his methods and his application of modern technology in instruction. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been identified as playing important role in accelerating and improving the quality of education. There is every indication that when used appropriately, ICTs constitute potent tools for enhancing traditional teaching, learning and research in higher institutions of learning.

1.1 Research questions

- What are the vital roles played by ICT in effective teaching and learning generally and essentially in Social Work Education?
- Is there any need to use ICT tools as instructional delivery in social work?
- What are the potential benefits of utilising ICT tools as instructional delivery in social work education?

1.2 Research Objectives

The objectives of this paper are:

- To reiterate the vital role of ICT in effective teaching and learning generally and essentially in Social Work Education.
- To examining the concepts of ICT and social work, in order to establishing the need for ICT tools in instructional delivery in social work.
- To examine some applications of ICT tools in Social Work Education delivery in order to emphasize the need for social work educators to judiciously utilize the opportunities and benefits inherent in ICT oriented instructional delivery.

1.3 Literature review

1.4 Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

The term ICT cuts across all spheres of human endeavour globally. It is a term commonly used worldwide. UNESCO (2005) defines ICT as the combination of the computer, telecommunication and media technologies. This simple but loaded definition corrects the impression that ICT is limited to computer. Thus ICT as a term is broader than computer. It is the combination of the potentials of computer, telecommunication and electronic media using the digital technology. Information and Communication Technology has the potential for not only introducing new teaching and learning practices but also for acting as a catalyst to revolutionize the education system. It can empower teachers and learners and promote the growth of skills necessary for the 21st century workplace (Trucano quoted by Yusuf and Yusuf, 2009).

Yusuf (2000) however sees ITC as an electric application of computing, communication, telecommunication and satellite technology. Again, Abubakar and Hassan (2010) refer to ICT as the process by which information is collected, kept, processed and disseminated. Information and communication technologies have been said to offer the following advantages, namely, they offer a constructivist approach to learning through the provision of interactive learning experiences. ICTs increase students' performance and interactivity with instructional programmes. Learning through ICTs is more effective as they provide opportunities for using multiple technologies (video, computer, and telecommunication) thereby providing visualization aids in the internalization and understanding of difficult concepts and processes which gives opportunities for providing links between theory and practice.

ICTs provide opportunities for students to gain valuable computer skills which are germane in today's job market thus preparing students for most careers and vocations. They provide opportunities for flexible learning as course information are always available and accessible, thereby catering for students of different learning styles. Students are therefore encouraged to develop their problem-solving skills and this promotes student's creativity. The opportunities for student's collaboration and communication on projects are increased. They aid students in collaboration on group works as students can develop their own group pages and discussion board.

Furthermore, students can collaborate with lecturers and other students worldwide in various professional organizations. Generally, studies have confirmed that the integration of ICT in teaching is positively leading to radical shift from the traditional teacher-directed or didactic approaches to a more student-centered or constructive approach (Lopez, Kirscher and Woperies, quoted in Yusuf, 2005). ICTs can engender variety of tools to support and facilitate teachers' professional competence. Information and Communication Technology have become social and working lives within social work, ICTs play a vital role in helping social work Educators and professionals to store and share information that contribute to new forms of practice.

1.5 Social Work defined

Social work is the professional activity of helping individuals, groups or communities to enhance or restore their capability for social functioning and to create societal conditions favourable to their goals (NASW, 2008). Skidmore et al quoted in Mojinyinola and Adegoke (2003) define social work as an art, a science or a profession that helps people to solve personal, group and community problems and to attain satisfaction for personal, group and community relationships through practice.

Its field of practice among others including family and child welfare, correctional work, medical and psychiatric service, public assistance, public education, public health, recreation and informal education (Smalley quoted in Mojinyinola and Adegoke, 2003). Social work practice is often generic, involving all the three traditional methods (case

work, group work and community organization). A common feature of the definitions above is the helping nature of the profession and the main focus of ensuring the effective social functioning of the individual, group and community by reducing problems inherent in human relationship and enriching living via improved human interaction.

Essentially, social work evolved from humanitarian and democratic ideals which emphasise respect for the equality, worth and dignity of all people, hence the principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work. It is thus a discipline that promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance overall well-being.

1.6 ICT and Social Work Education

In the same way that ICT has been found to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in other disciplines, social work has also been benefiting tremendously from the judicious and appropriate use of ICTs. The use of ICT is central to the field of social work and this is mainly concerned with exchanging information and sharing assessments with other students, lecturers and professionals.

Information and communication Technology as it relates to social work education and practice can be defined as "any electronically mediated activity" used by social workers in the administration and evaluation of social services as well as in social work education (NASW and ASWB, 2005). Examples include computers, electronic mail (e-mails), land line telephones, cell phones, the internet, social networking websites (SNWs), facsimile machines, video teleconferencing brochures and fact sheets newsletters and other digital devices.

As opined by Garret, (2005) Walman and Rafferty (2008), NASW and ASWB (2005), for the past three decades, technology has changed social work education and practice so significantly to the point where it would be a daunting challenge for social work practitioners to function effectively without technologies. Beaulaurier and Radisch (2005) also report that there are lots of information on computer technology applications in social work and social work education today. Indeed, audio visual and other forms of technologies facilitate tremendously, contemporary social work practice.

Rocha (2001) notes how technology has changed the face of policy practice in recent years as well as the ease with which practitioners use the computer to create professionally – looking brochures, flyers, newsletters, memos, business cards, reports etc. Even more phenomenal about the influence of technology is the pace at which the internet is being used by social workers and educators today. The NASW and ASWB, (2005) note that Geographic Information Systems (GIS) is now being used in community practice to identify community assets for use by community members.

Mallen and Houtstra, (2007) again discussed how land line telephones can be useful in group therapy for rural clients and families experiencing difficulties and who, because of distance are unable to travel to service areas. They however highlighted the facilitation skills workers need to have when conducting telephone-based group therapies. In the same vein, the NASW and ASWB (2005), observe that the challenges technology creates today require a special set of skills and knowledge needed for effective education and practice. Parton (2008) however contends that technology has made social work more "informational" and less "social".

1.7 ICTs Tools Utilized in Social Work Instructional Delivery and Practice

On the various forms of ICT tools used in social work education and practice, Rocha (2011) identifies brochures and fact sheets, newsletters, e-mails websites, list serve, social networking sites (SNSs) as well as cell phones. She further maintained that each of the different technologies proves very effective in distinctive ways. The use of search engines such as Google enables both social work educators and learners access relevant information on every area of social work. Therapist and workers are also able to Google and retrieve information at ease within minutes (Zur, 2011). Current information in social work are garnered to constantly replace obsolete ones to broaden educators' and learners' knowledge base in the discipline for enhanced teaching and learning and research. In social work education the use of Adobe connect or Web Video conferencing can enhance distance learning and meeting.

ICT tool such as electronic mail (e-mail) facilitates with reduced cost, communications among educators and students globally and locally between social work lecturers and students. It is also an important ICT tool in direct practice among social workers and between social workers and clients. Vital information on issues of policy, resources, standards, statistics and guidance can be accessed using on-line data bases. There are myriads of on-line training packages and courses in social work which social work educators, students and practitioners can embark upon to enlarge their scope in the discipline. Some of these are social care institute for excellence (SCIE), which is an online service for everyone involved in the social care and social work sector, also training for care – which deals with social care courses and social care training.

Having examined a few of the numerous ICTs used in social work education delivery and practice and their effectiveness, it is pertinent to delve briefly into concerns raised about the issue of ethics in social work. Confidentiality is a principle guiding social work, it is the preservation of secret information about the client which is disclosed in the course of the professional relationship. Confidentiality thus serves as a pivot in social work. The issue of confidentiality is worrisome in view of the overt characteristic of some of the ICT tools. It could be said that the use of technology in social work is both an opportunity and a threat to the profession. In spite of abundant information on the use of ICT in social work education and practice, there are little or no agreed-upon, definitive standards to follow in ensuring ethics.

Research is however emerging to suggest that even though technology avails communication and interaction and wide knowledge opportunities, the same technology does not allow for a professionalised view from educators and practitioners. One of the draw backs of the use of technology is the possibility of making a third party or an unintended target to be privy to information he or she is not supposed to have access to (McCarty and Clancy, 2002). Hence, Social work educators must be cognizant of these ethical concerns as they adapt and integrate ICTs into their instructor delivery.

2. Conclusion

Indisputably, ICT has impacted social work in both instruction delivery and the way it is practiced. In truth, it has brought positive changes to classroom teaching and learning. Little wonder, UNESCO quoted in Yuen et al (2008) submitted succinctly that educational systems around the world (Nigerian educational system inclusive) are under increasing pressure to use the new Information Communication Technologies.

In line with the primary mission of social work profession, social work education is geared towards producing adequately skilled social workers whose services will enhance well-being and help the basic human needs with particular attention to the empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed and living in poverty. In order to live up to the historic mission of the profession in the age of ICT, social work knowledge and skills on appropriate use of technology is necessary, in order to be able to utilize ICT tools effectively in instruction delivery and be relevant globally in this 21st century.

Social work profession is relatively new in Nigeria. It is a growing profession. To enhance its speedy and steady growth, social work education should promote interactive learning through seminars, group discussion, case studies role play with judicious use of ICT to enhance communication with all systems globally. These are essential in the formation of well skilled social workers who will respond adequately to the numerous social problems in Nigeria.

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