Exploring the Experiences of Rural College Students in a Global Village

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ABSTRACT---- *For the past few years, the concept of the world becoming a 'global village', as a result of much reliance on information technology (IT) has taken centre stage in the language and works of many people. The concept has caught up well with people in developed countries but in the developing countries, the same may only be said for those blessed to be residing in the urban centres. The purpose of this research is to get into the world of first semester students of Esayidi Technical and Vocational Education and Training College (Umzimkhulu Campus) in order to explore their experiences in a global village and establish the extent they use IT tools for communication and educational purposes. An explorative survey research approach was used to explore the experiences of the forty participants employed for this study. The participants were recruited by means of the lottery sampling system and the social media questionnaire tool was used to collect data from them which was descriptively analysed. Findings from the study indicated that the participants in this study mostly resided and schooled in rural areas so had not been exposed to the concept of a global village but were gradually making use of ICT tools for communication and educational purposes since enrolling at the college.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

"A man's feet must be planted in his country, but his eyes should survey the world." These were the words of George Santayana, a philosopher and writer, many years ago. As if in response to Santayana's statement, the modern era is such that people around the South Pole can instantly access information about those in the North Pole. More amazing is the fact that the development and use of information and communications technology (ICT) or information technology (IT) tools has made it possible for scientist on planet earth to communicate with those who are in space or Mars. The 21st century has birthed people, who live in a 'global village' by virtue of them being computer literates and these computer literates are able to use the computer and its associated gadgets to access information and solve problems at any moment and in almost every corner of the earth.

According to Robertson (1990), globalization refers to the concrete structuration of the world as a whole which may take on different forms at different points in human history. He further believes that globalization involves realities as well as concepts, the growing density and complexity of the international, the transnational and the supranational fields, and the heightened awareness of such tighter interconnectedness. Robertson's conceptualization of the world as global village (globalization) transcends both the physical and the virtual world. He throws light on how people in all corners of the world have been and continue to be connected through the power of information and communications technological tools such as the computers, mobile phones and tablets.

It is believed that countries need to be ready to acquire and make use of the available ICT as a matter of national concern and specifically for schools since the modern student should be prepared not only for the tasks at school but also for the job market which has become very competitive in recent years (Amponsah, 2014). In ranking the network readiness of 142 countries in 2013, South Africa placed 70th with a score of 3.87, which was an improvement by two points from the country's 72nd rank in 2012 (World Economic Forum, 2013).

Further, in a seminar in 2010, the Commonwealth of Learning was of the opinion that the transformation of teaching and learning environments had already taken place worldwide. This, they believe has resulted from the introduction of information and communications technologies (ICT). Moreover, Van Wyk in a paper presented at the Education Association of South Africa (EASA) Conference on 13thJanuary 2015, elucidated that the main reason why he created blogs was to ensure that his distance learning students visit his blog at specified times to access their assignments and comment on ongoing activities. This, to a very large extent, allows students who were already IT compliant to acquire more 'citizenship' rights in the global village we live in today, and also help those who are not yet compliant to IT to acquire their 'citizenship'. Both the Commonwealth of Learning and Van Wyk strongly believe that the changes ICT has

brought leads to generation of new information sources and new information processes, which have emanated in changing roles of teachers as well as the way students learn in and outside the classroom.

By virtue of the rural nature of the location of Esayidi Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College (Umzimkhulu Campus), thus, same for most of its students, this study explores the experiences of first semester (N4) students in a global village and establish the extent they use IT tools for communication and educational purposes.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

The Umzimkhulu Campus is one of the six campuses of Esayidi TVET College. It is located in the Umzimkhulu local municipality in the Kwazulu-Natal Province. According to Statistics SA (2013), the Umzimkhulu local municipality is the most populated municipality out of the five in the Sisonke District. The total area covered by the Umzimkhulu local municipality is 2436 km^2 with a total population of 180,302.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Information Technology

Information technology, for the past few decades, has emerged as a vibrant field since societies are shifting from industrial societies to information societies. Information Technology (2008) traces this phenomenon to the late 1980's when time-shared mainframe computers were replaced by desktop workstations and personal computers. It is however indicated that as the personal computer became more powerful and more connected, it became more complex and so created room for a networked microcomputer environment. However, it took just a period of time for the microcomputer environment to pave way for the web browsers which has dominated and made IT the paradigm that is recognized and accepted for its ability to do multiple tasks and help in solving problems that were hitherto its emergence complex or too difficult to solve.

> *Information Technology in its broadest sense encompasses all aspects of computing technology. IT, as an academic discipline, is concerned with issues related to advocating for users and meeting their needs within an organizational and societal context through the selection, creation, application, integration and administration of computing technologies* (Information Technology, 2008:9].

This explanation encompasses the broad usage of IT in a variety of ways by different classes of people, including college students. *ITdesk.info* (2011) narrows the definition of IT by indicating that it is a technology which makes use of computers to gather, process, store, protect, and transfer information. *ITdesk.info* makes the submission that it is unimaginable to work on a computer which is not connected to the network, thus, the term information and communications technology (ICT). It is further stated that computing has become the defining technology of our age and it is and continues to change how we live and work. As a matter of necessity, computers have become integral to modern culture.

As rightly postulated by the World Economic Forum (2013), measuring the economic and social [for the sake of this research, educational] impacts of ICTs is crucial. The position that in looking at the national readiness index, aspects of the way ICTs are transforming both the economy and society must be included.

Globalization

As the universe continues to expand, planet earth seems to be contracting each second. The contraction, which is virtual but not geographic, has been made possible by the use of ICT to communicate and be 'technologically present' at different places at the same time. The modern era is characterized by people doing business across boundaries with the use of the internet while students access materials from virtual libraries from across the ocean without the need to be physically present. Lecturers and supervisors are also able to have contact with their students in the asynchronous mood through the use of ICT tools. The realization of breaking geographical boundaries by the introduction of ICT is termed 'global village' which emanates from the notion that in a typical village, there are few people with little physical infrastructure, thus making it possible for the inhabitants to live communally and interact freely with each other almost at every time.

In defining globalization Worsley (1984) postulates that it is not a terminal state or a reunion of the entire human species under a single society. He sees globalization to be an ongoing trend. Indication from Worsley's assertion is that the modern era does not need to be under a single government or be at one place physically, yet there is a departure from a state of people being confined by geographical location to a point where communication goes on instantly across all the corners of the earth and beyond.

The increasingly mediated and digitalized essence of culture has opened up the world both geographically and socially, hence, globalization which has been made possible by the introduction of ICT, cannot be said to be a one-dimensional process but made up of several partly independent trends which all put together cannot be said to be a new phenomenon (Appadurai, 1990; Kellner, 2000; Kohn, 1971).

The World as a Global Village

In narrowing the scope of this research to the concept of a global village, hands point to McLuhan, who first used the term global village in the 1950's. He is believed to have used the term as he worked with the Seminar in Culture and Communication at the University of Toronto in Canada. A major criticism of McLuhan's use of a global village is that he only tried to communicate with an elite audience.

Dery (1995) reduced the whole idea of a global village as a 'utopian vision'. He strongly believed that McLuhan was living in a world of fantasy because as he puts it "we are not there yet". Brown and Fishwick (1999) also disagree vehemently with McLuhan by declaring that his whole idea was a utopian and retrospective vision which had failed to materialize. In a similar fashion, Danesi's (2000) outlook of McLuhan and his idea as a communication theorist, who seeks to transform the world into a global village with the aid of electronic technology [information and communications technology tools].

McLuhan envisioned opposition of his dream of the world becoming a global village in his lifetime or in the remote future so he made the following statement:

> *The more you create village conditions, the more discontinuity and division and diversity. The global village absolutely insures maximal disagreement on all points. It never occurred to me that uniformity and tranquility were the properties of the global village. It has more spite and envy. The spaces and times are pulled out from between people. A world in which people encounter each other in depth all the time. The tribal-global village is far more divisive — full of fighting — than any nationalism ever was. Village is fission, not fusion, in depth all the time. (McLuhan, 57–58).*

It is an understatement mentioning that McLuhan was a pioneer in the idea of the world becoming a global village at a point in time and to establish that the dividends of his idea and tenacity to stand firm in the face of stiff opposition is being reaped now and will continue to be the case, as long as ICT continues to take centre stage in education, business and governance in 21st century.

The Classroom as a Global Village

Not only has the world been connected by ICT tools to be a global village. Schools are also migrating from the traditional classroom mood to using technology both in the synchronous and asynchronous moods. In most parts of the developing world, teachers at higher levels moved from the traditional chalk-and-talk to the use of projectors and public address systems, especially in instances where they have to deal with large number of students. As Van Wyk (2014:135) rightly puts it, *"The 21st century has drastically changed the pedagogical assumptions of how our digital natives are taught. Schooling must provide more for students than a homogeneously assessed, predetermined, one-size-fits-all model, or it will fall short of the expectations of the contemporary classroom."*

Per the dictates of the modern era to turn classrooms into modern ones and help learners migrate into the global village, the Deputy President of South Africa together with the Premier and Education Member of Executive Council (MEC) for Gauteng launched a new paperless education system pilot project in January 2015. They rolled out the pilot project with the hope of giving learners access to learning material, workbooks and other subject matter through the use of ICT (www.southafrica.info, 2015). The project, termed 'The Big Switch', is believed will turn ordinary classrooms into state-of-the-art ones which are connected by the internet where learners will have the pleasure of using computers and tablets that will be freely provided by the Department of Education, thereby making schooling a more exciting experience than it used to be.

In a bid to push the agenda of making the classroom a paperless one, thus, making use of ICT tools in the teaching and learning process, Old Mutual donated laptops, modems, projectors and 3g cards, which cost R1.2 million, to the Department of Education in 2014 to help in preparation for e-learning. During the presentation, the Education MEC stated, "If we can migrate from paper to digital solutions, I see no reason why a chalkboard and a duster cannot be declared history because every learner will have a tablet and an interactive board, every teacher will have something to work on as a device" (www.Gautengonline.gov.za, 2015).

The use of ICT in all endeavours in life and especially in education cannot be overemphasized. Amponsah (2010) firmly believes that if teaching and learning can be successful, every geographical or pedagogical barrier should be thoroughly dealt with. If the barriers to teaching and learning can effectively be dealt with, ICT ought to be resorted to. Again, Amponsah (2014) asserts that teaching in the modern era should equip learners with skills and knowledge that would enhance their competitive edge in the modern day job market and should also make them ready to fit into the world of work when giving the opportunity. The question is if learners are not equipped with ICT tools as they learn in schools, where and when will they get the opportunity to be trained and how will they fit into life outside the classroom?

It is in line with this assertion that a research by Edudemic Staff in 2014 indicated that many top educators and administrators view the idea of a paperless classroom as inevitable in education in today's digital age. They establish that a paperless classroom will promote a more efficient and organized classroom while preparing students for the practical world outside classroom walls (www.edudemic.com, 2014).

In the nutshell, it is a matter of necessity to equip teachers and learners with ICT tools in their learning if life in the modern era is relying more on technology than it used to be. Seemingly, the ICT tools have become the paper and pen of

the modern era, making its usage inevitable and for that reason they have to be relied upon in order to make learners experience and understand the world in which they live in.

4. CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The modern day learner is expected to be a migrant of the global village by being able to effectively make use of ICT tools in the learning process as well as the working environment. In a bid to push the agenda of making the classroom a global village, South Africa has made some remarkable strides, especially in the Gauteng Province. In spite of the strides made in the Gauteng Province, ***ITdesk.info*** (2011) indicates that there are still computer illiterate persons who are unable to participate in modern society due to their inability to use the computer and its related ICT tools. It is further established that people living in the rural areas and those with learning difficulties are lagging behind when it comes to being citizens of the global village.

Based on the scenario depicted in this section of the study and the fact that the Umzimkhulu Campus of Esayidi TVET College is a rural setting, with most of its learners also coming from the rural areas, this study seeks to explore the experiences of first semester (N4) students in a global village and establish the extent they use IT tools for communication and educational purposes.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The explorative survey approach was applied in this study in order to describe the characteristics of participants' (Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun, 2012) per their experiences in a global village. A sample size of forty first semester students offering Data Management was used for this study. The participants were selected through the lottery sampling method. A social media tool questionnaire was adapted for the purpose of this study. To validate the instrument used for collecting data, factor analysis was employed by categorizing similar questions under different sections, while content validity was also ensured by making sure the questions covered what the research covers only (Bryman, 2012). A Cronbach's alpha coefficient run on the social media questionnaire tool gave a score of 0.79, which indicated that the questionnaire is reliable to be used for this research. The data that emanated from the questionnaire were edited, coded and statistically analysed. The results were then presented descriptively in the form of frequency tables, histograms and a line graph.

Ethical Considerations

Before embarking on this study, clearance was sought from the Principal of the campus where participants were selected from. The participants were informed in writing concerning the objectives of the study, the time and meeting place, as well as what is expected of them as they answer the questionnaires**.** They were also assured of strict confidentiality of information that they give and their right not to answer the questionnaires without any repercussions if they so wished. Participants were also assured that the data they were providing will be kept for a period of six months after the study and will be destroyed afterwards. Finally, participants were made to read and sign an Informed Consent Form before they completed the questionnaires.

6. RESULTS

Questions one to five on the survey questionnaire were used to elicit information on the personal information of participants. Though the questions asked do not form part of the core issues this research seeks to unravel, it helped in identifying and corroborating some of the findings of this study. The biographical data of the participants is summarised in the table that follows.

Table 1: Biographical data of participants

Gender	f	%	Age (in years)	f	%	Location of home	f	%	Location of school attended	f	%	Last school attended	f	%
Male	18	45	up to 20	12	30	Urban	2	5	Urban	8	20	College	4	10
Female	22	55	21-25	22	55	Rural	38	95	Rural	32	80	Secondary	34	85
			26-30	6	15							Others	2	5
Total	40	100		40	100		40	100		40	100		40	100

Based on the data on Table 1, 55 percent of participants are females and the rest are males. Those in the age range of 21-25 represents the most frequent age group, while 95 percent of participants resided in rural areas, 80 percent attended rural schools and 85 last attended secondary schools before enrolling at the college.

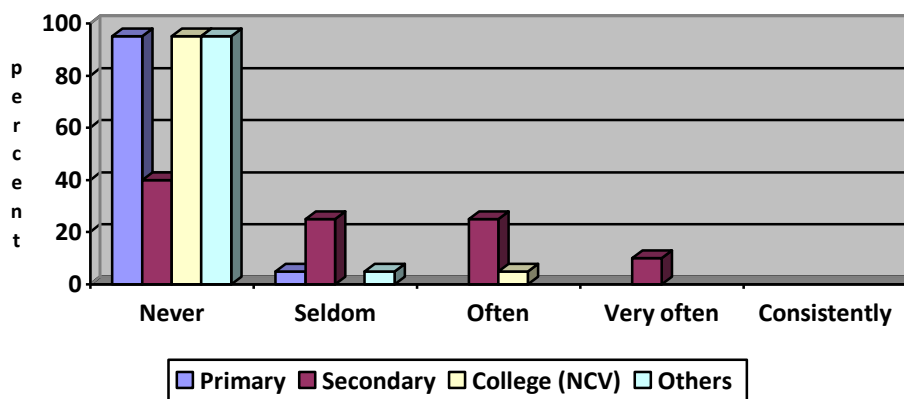**Figure 1: Use of ICT prior to enrolling at the college**

Figure 1 above illustrates that 95 percent of participants never used ICT tools at primary school, college (NCV) level and other institutions respectively, while 40 percent answered never for the secondary school level. It is also observed that only 10 percent of participants used ICT tools at the secondary school level and another 5 percent used it at the other institutions level.

Table 2: Use of social communication tools for communication purposes

Type of social media	Never	Seldom	Often	Very often	Consistently
E-mails	50%	50%			
MXit	50%	25%	15%	10%	
Facebook	25%	20%	25%	10%	20%
Blogging	100%				
Twitter	75%	25%			
Wikis	100%				
SMS		20%	5%	25%	50%
YouTube	55%	45%			
WhatsApp	10%	5%	10%		75%
WeChat	90%	5%	5%		
Skype	100%				

The indication from Table 2 is that Facebook, SMS and WhatsApp surface as the social communication tools mostly used for communication purposes while Blogs, Wikis and Skype have never been used by participants.

Table 3: Use of social communication tools for educational purposes

Type of social media	Never	Seldom	Often	Very often	Consistently
E-mails	85%	10%		5%	
MXit	95%				5%
Facebook	60%	35%	5%		
Blogging	100%				
Twitter	100%				
Wikis	95%			5%	
SMS	5%	75%	20%		
YouTube	90%	5%	5%		
WhatsApp	15%	20%	25%	10%	30%
Skype	100%				
WeChat	100%				
Google	5%	10%	10%	10%	65%
Online dictionary	15%	15%	25%	10%	35%

In terms of using communication tools for educational purposes (research and learning), it is indicated on Table 3 that SMS, WhatsApp, Google and Online dictionaries are mostly used by participants in varying degrees while Skype, Bloggs and Twitter have never been used.

Figure 2: Use of Google and Online dictionaries for educational purposes
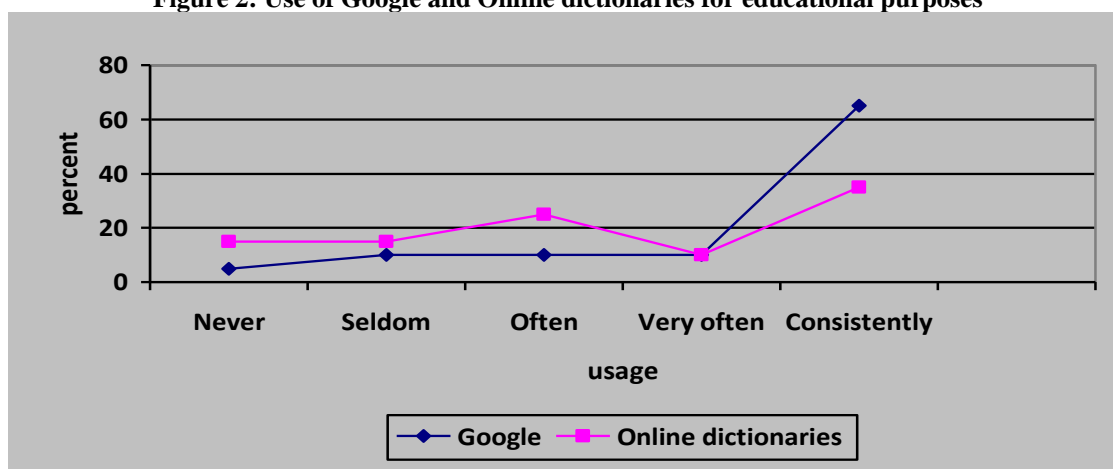

Figure 2 outlines that only 1 respondent, that is 5 percent of all participants never used Google for educational purposes while the remaining 39 making up 95 percent result to the use of the application for educational purposes. With Online dictionaries, 3 participants who comprise 15 percent of participants never use Online dictionaries but the remaining 37 making up 85 percent use the application in varying degrees.

7. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Biographical data of participants
Information Technology (2008) traces this phenomenon to the late 1980's which means that the participants in this study are supposed to be citizens of the global village since the majority of 55 percent are in the age range of 21 to 25 and 30 percent are even 20 years or younger. However, the contrary was the case and this can be attributed to the rural nature of participants' residences. As much as 95 percent of the participants reside in rural areas and consequently 80 percent attended rural schools where IT was not available. Considering the fact that the concept of turning the classroom into a global village (paperless classroom) has only started in Gauteng in January 2015 (www.southafrica.info, 2015) and the ranking of South Africa at the 70th position out of 142 countries (World Economic Forum, 2013), indicates that not all areas in South Africa are involved in the 'big switch', hence the participants not yet being citizens of the global village up to the time they finished high school.

Use of ICT prior to enrolling at College
To somebody who has been raised up in a typical South African rural setting and schooled under same circumstances, the idea of a global village would be more of a mirage. McLulan's idea of the world becoming a rural village was seen as a 'utopian vision' (Dery, 1995; Fishwick, 1999). Of course, 95 and 80 percent of the participants in this study are from rural settings and attended rural schools respectively so it comes as no surprise that 95 percent never used ICT at the primary school and other institutions (learnership) and NCV levels respectively before enrolling at the college.
Danesi's (2000) notion that McLuhan's idea of a global village is a only a theory explains why the participants had not been able to access IT up to the time they completed high school. For them, IT is meant for the rich and urban dwellers, since most of them reside with their family and friends and do not, as a matter of urgency need those tools before they communicate with other people, though the lack of it might be affecting them in one way or the other. Again, participants would be more comfortable in a physical or geographical village than a virtual or global village until such a time that infrastructure has been laid to make them ready to use IT as those in the urban centres.

Use of ICT tools for communication purposes
According to Santayana (undated), people are expected to survey the world from their own geographical locations. Santayana's assertion establishes the importance of ICT and its ability to enhance communication instantly across various locations at the same time. It is evident from the data collected in this study that as at the time students enrolled at the college, most of them were already using ICT for communication purposes. It must however be put on record that their means of communication is mostly limited to the use of mobile phones. Half of the participants use emails and MXit respectively, while 75 percent use Facebook and 90 percent use WhatsApp. All these applications are found on even simple phones which the participants in this study are mostly using.

Until such a time that the paperless classroom concept in Gauteng (www.gautengonline.gov.za, 2015) is rolled out to cover the whole of South Africa or most of the rural folks start working in order to afford computers or tablets, the use of other communicative social networking tools would be an impossible mission. The assertion by Worsley (1984) that globalization is not terminal but an ongoing trend gives some hope that with time, even those in the rural areas will have a share in the use of ICT and thus migrate to become citizens in the global village.

Use of ICT tools for educational purposes
The rural setting from which most of the participants reside and the rural schools they attended have not impinged on their ability to use ICT for educational purposes since enrolling at the college. This reinforces Van Wyk (2014) and Commonwealth of Learning's (2010) idea that pedagogical assumptions of how our digital natives are taught has drastically changed in order to suit modern trends. The findings of this research proved how 95 percent of participants use SMS and Google respectively and 85 percent use WhatsApp and Online dictionaries respectively for educational purposes. The findings under the previous subheading that participants are using mobile phones as the ICT tool for communication is still reflected when it comes to the gadget used for educational purposes, which is for research and learning purposes, where they search for information and send questions, answers or explanations to their mates and teachers.

It is in line with this assertion that a research by Edudemic Staff in 2014 indicated that many top educators and administrators view the idea of a paperless classroom as inevitable in education in today's digital age. They establish that a paperless classroom will promote a more efficient and organized classroom while preparing students for the practical world outside classroom walls (www.edudemic.com, 2014).

Use of Google and online dictionaries for educational purposes
ITdesk.info (2011) defines IT as a technology which makes use of computers to gather, process, store, protect, and transfer information. This definition ties in with the findings of the study whereby 95 percent of the participants rely on Google for information and research purposes while 85 percent also resort to the use of online dictionaries for the definition and explanation of words.

The Education MEC for Gauteng indicated that the essence of a paperless classroom is to give learners access to learning materials, workbooks and other subject matter through the use of ICT (www.southafrica.info,2015). It therefore comes with little surprise that in spite of the rural areas participants of this study come from, coupled with the rural nature of the college they still heavily rely on Google and online dictionaries as ICT resources to facilitate their learning.

It must also be put on record that the Umzimkhulu Campus of Esayidi TVET College has a library building big enough to accommodate hundreds of students at a time, yet it is not stocked with a single book, hence the only way students studying on the campus can access additional information apart from what is in their textbooks and notes givien by lecturers is to make use of ICT tools. That is the reason why they use Google and onlne dictionaries, which they are familiar with and which are also easy to access.

8. CONCLUSION

This study identified that participants who are mostly from the rural areas were not introduced to the use of ICT even till the time they completed high school. It was unveiled that those who were fortunate to be part of the global village were using mobile phones, which does not give them full citizenship right in the global village. It was however established that within the short time participants have studied on the campus; they have been able to extend their use of ICT in terms of communication and educational purposes. The bottom line is should the right foundation be laid and access given to the rural folks as those in urban centres, they can migrate into the global village and use all ICT facilities available.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the need to make ICT available to every citizen of the nation should be a national concern, hence, government and stakeholders should work hard to avail these facilities to all corners of the country. Also, ICT should be incorporated in all areas and levels of study at school so modern day students will be fully prepared for the job market and perform creditably when employed. Further, students should be aided to move beyond the use of the mobile phone as the only ICT tool for communication and educational purposes to the use of computers connected to the internet and tablets as well. Lastly, the onus rests on teachers to also prepare themselves to be citizens of the global village before they can fully impact on the students who are put under their care.

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