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The Role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Enhancing Accessibility for Special Needs Students at Kebbi State School for Special Needs

Ibrahim Umar[1*], Ibrahim Jamilu Argungu[2], Muhammad Yahaya[3], Umar Aliyu[4], Ladan Aliyu Muhammed[5], Samaila Dominic[6], Musa Sanusi Fakai[7], Mathew Isaac Rikoto[8]
Adamu Augie College of Education, Argungu
Corresponding Author: Ibrahim Umar; uibrahim680@gmail.com

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A B S T R A C T

This study it investigates the current integration of educational technologies, their effectiveness in addressing diverse learning challenges, and the barriers impeding their adoption. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through surveys, interviews, and observations involving students, teachers, and administrators. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis. Findings reveal that tools such as screen readers, text-to-speech software, and interactive boards significantly improve learning outcomes for visually and hearing-impaired students. However, challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of teacher training, and device maintenance hinder widespread ICT adoption. The study also highlights the need for government and non-governmental organizations to prioritize resource allocation and teacher development programs. Diagrams and tables illustrate key insights, including the comparative analysis of student performance before and after ICT integration. The research underscores the transformative potential of ICT in fostering inclusive education. It recommends targeted interventions to bridge the gap between policy and practice, ensuring all students, regardless of ability, can access quality education

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental right and an essential tool for personal and societal development. However, students with special needs often face significant barriers to accessing quality education. The integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education has revolutionized learning experiences, offering innovative solutions to meet diverse learner needs, including those with physical, sensory, or cognitive disabilities (UNESCO, 2023). Leveraging ICT tools such as screen readers, text-to-speech software, and interactive learning applications has proven effective in enhancing accessibility and fostering inclusive education globally (Adebayo & Olaniyan, 2022).

In Nigeria, significant strides have been made in the adoption of ICT in education, but special needs schools often lag behind due to infrastructural, financial, and technical challenges. Kebbi State School for Special Needs serves as a critical case study for examining how tailored ICT solutions can bridge the gap for students with disabilities. Despite the growing awareness of the potential of technology in addressing accessibility barriers, there remains a paucity of localized research addressing specific challenges and opportunities within the Nigerian context, particularly in Kebbi State (Abubakar et al., 2024).

This study aims to explore how educational technology can improve accessibility for students at Kebbi State School for Special Needs. By examining the current ICT tools in use, identifying challenges faced by educators and learners, and proposing targeted interventions, this research contributes to the broader discourse on inclusive education. The findings will provide actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and technology developers in creating sustainable and impactful solutions for special education in Nigeria.

Research Problem and Objectives

Despite the global advancements in educational technology, students with special needs in Kebbi State face persistent challenges, including a lack of ICT infrastructure, inadequate teacher training, and limited access to specialized tools. This research seeks to address these issues by:

1. Investigating the current state of ICT integration at Kebbi State School for Special Needs.
2. Identifying the barriers to effective use of ICT in this context.
3. Proposing solutions to enhance accessibility and improve learning outcomes.

Significance of the Study

This research aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education for all. By focusing on Kebbi State School for Special Needs, the study not only highlights the importance of ICT in transforming education for marginalized groups but also provides a localized model for implementing similar initiatives across Nigeria

LITERATURE REVIEW

The integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in special needs education has gained significant attention in recent years. ICT

offers unique opportunities to improve accessibility and learning outcomes for students with disabilities. This review examines existing research and practices in ICT solutions for special education, with a specific focus on their applicability to the Kebbi State School for Special Needs.

ICT and Special Needs Education

ICT tools are designed to address the diverse needs of students with disabilities, providing personalized learning experiences. For instance, screen readers, text-to-speech software, and augmentative communication devices have proven effective in supporting students with visual, hearing, and speech impairments (Smith et al., 2023). Additionally, adaptive learning platforms leverage artificial intelligence to customize content delivery, enhancing engagement and comprehension for learners with cognitive disabilities (Jones & Brown, 2022).

Global Practices in ICT for Special Education

Globally, the implementation of ICT in special needs education has been transformative. Studies in developed countries reveal that interactive whiteboards, multimedia software, and virtual reality tools significantly improve student motivation and performance (Nguyen et al., 2021). For example, the use of virtual reality in teaching social skills to children with autism has shown measurable success in improving their real-world interactions (Garcia et al., 2020).

Challenges in ICT Integration

Despite its benefits, ICT adoption in special education faces several challenges. Infrastructure limitations, high costs of assistive technologies, and insufficient teacher training are major barriers, especially in developing regions (Khan et al., 2022). Additionally, cultural and linguistic factors often hinder the effective implementation of ICT solutions tailored to local contexts (Ali & Ibrahim, 2023).

ICT in the Nigerian Context

In Nigeria, ICT integration in education is still in its nascent stages, particularly in special needs education. Studies by Adewale et al. (2021) highlight a lack of funding, inadequate training for educators, and limited access to assistive technologies as primary obstacles. However, initiatives like the Federal Government's "E-Accessibility Programme" have begun to address these gaps by providing digital tools to schools across the country (National ICT Report, 2022).

Applicability to Kebbi State School for Special Needs

The Kebbi State School for Special Needs serves a diverse group of students with disabilities, making ICT a critical component for inclusive education. Research by Yusuf and Abdullahi (2023) emphasizes the need for localized solutions that align with the specific challenges faced by students and educators in the region. For instance, integrating affordable text-to-speech applications and Braille printers can significantly enhance learning for visually impaired students.

Emerging Trends in ICT for Special Education

Recent advancements in ICT offer promising solutions for special needs education. Internet of Things (IoT) devices, such as smart classroom sensors, can create responsive learning environments tailored to individual needs (Chen et al., 2023). Moreover, gamified learning applications provide engaging platforms for skill development, particularly in literacy and numeracy (Rahman et al., 2022).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a **mixed-methods approach**, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of how ICT solutions enhance accessibility for special needs students at Kebbi State School for Special Needs. This approach allows for the triangulation of data to ensure reliability and validity (Creswell, 2018).

Population and Sampling

The target population includes students, teachers, and administrators at Kebbi State School for Special Needs. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who are directly involved with ICT-based teaching and learning processes.

1. **Students:** 30 special needs students with diverse learning disabilities, including visual, auditory, and cognitive impairments.
2. **Teachers:** 15 teachers who use ICT tools in their teaching.
3. **Administrators:** 5 staff members responsible for ICT integration and resource allocation.

Data Collection Methods

1. **Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers and administrators to gather in-depth insights into the challenges and successes of ICT implementation. Each interview lasted 30–45 minutes and was audio-recorded for accuracy (King & Horrocks, 2019).
2. **Surveys:** A structured questionnaire was administered to students and teachers to collect quantitative data on the frequency and perceived effectiveness of ICT tools. The questionnaire included both closed and Likert-scale questions to measure attitudes and experiences (Bryman, 2021).
3. **Observation:** Classroom observations were conducted to assess the practical application of ICT tools and their impact on student engagement and participation. An observation checklist was developed based on the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework (Meyer et al., 2014).
4. **Document Analysis:** School records and ICT training reports were reviewed to provide contextual data on resource allocation, tool availability, and staff training sessions.

Instrumentation

The instruments used include:

1. A questionnaire with sections on ICT tool usage, accessibility features, and learning outcomes.

2. An interview guide with questions targeting implementation challenges, teacher training, and support systems.
3. An observation checklist focusing on student-teacher interaction, tool functionality, and accessibility features.

Data Analysis Techniques

1. **Quantitative Data Analysis:** Data collected from questionnaires were analysed using SPSS version 28 for descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies, percentages, and mean scores were calculated to describe ICT usage trends. An independent t-test was conducted to compare pre- and post-implementation performance among students (Field, 2020).
2. **Qualitative Data Analysis:** Interview and observation data were analysed using thematic analysis. The six-step framework by Braun and Clarke (2019) was applied to identify patterns and themes related to ICT integration challenges and successes.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee at Adamu Augie College of Education, Argungu. Informed consent was secured from all participants, and pseudonyms were used to maintain anonymity. Participants were assured of confidentiality and were free to withdraw at any time without penalty (Resnik, 2020).

Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity, instruments were pilot-tested with a sample of 5 teachers and 5 students from a neighbouring special needs school. Reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha, with a score of 0.82 indicating high internal consistency.

Data Analysis Tables

Table 1. ICT Tools Used and Effectiveness

ICT Tool	Number of Users (n)	Average Effectiveness Score (1-5)	Primary Challenges
Screen Readers	30	4.5	Lack of availability of tools
Interactive Whiteboards	18	4.2	High cost of maintenance
Text-to-Speech Software	25	4.7	Compatibility with local languages
Braille Printers	12	4.0	Limited access and high costs
Hearing Aids with Apps	20	4.3	Limited technical support
Total	105	Average: 4.34	

Table 2. Student Performance Before and After ICT Tool Integration

Performance Indicator	Before ICT Integration	After ICT Integration	Percentage Improvement (%)
Reading Comprehension	50%	75%	50%
Mathematical Problem-Solving	40%	70%	75%
Written Communication	45%	65%	44%
Total/Average	135%	210%	56.3%

Table 3. Teacher Feedback on ICT Training

Training Aspect	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Training Enhanced Skills	60	30	5	3	2
Training Was Well-Organized	55	35	7	2	1
Tools Are User-Friendly	50	40	8	1	1
Total	165	105	20	6	4

Table 4. Challenges in ICT Adoption

Challenge	Frequency Reported	Percentage (%)
High cost of devices	40	35%
Lack of technical expertise	30	27%
Maintenance issues	20	18%
Limited training for teachers	15	13%
Internet connectivity issues	10	7%
Total	115	100%

Table 5. Overall Satisfaction with ICT Integration

Satisfaction Level	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Very Satisfied	25	50%
Satisfied	20	40%
Neutral	3	6%
Dissatisfied	2	4%
Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Total	50	100%

RESULTS

Table 6. ICT Tools Used and Effectiveness

ICT Tool	Number of Users (n)	Average Effectiveness Score (1-5)	Primary Challenges
Screen Readers	30	4.5	Lack of availability of tools
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Hearing Aids with Apps	20	4.3	Limited technical support
Total	105	–	–

Table 7. Student Performance Before and After ICT Tool Integration

Performance Indicator	Before ICT Integration (%)	After ICT Integration (%)	Percentage Improvement (%)
Reading Comprehension	50	75	50
Mathematical Problem-Solving	40	70	75
Written Communication	45	65	44
Total (Average)	45%	70%	56.33%

Table 8. Teacher Feedback on ICT Training

Training Aspect	Strongly Agree (n)	Agree (n)	Neutral (n)	Disagree (n)	Strongly Disagree (n)	Total (n)
Training Enhanced Skills	60%	30%	5%	3%	2%	100%
Training Was Well-Organized	55%	35%	7%	2%	1%	100%
Tools Are User-Friendly	50%	40%	8%	1%	1%	100%

Table 9. Challenges in ICT Adoption

Challenge	Frequency Reported (n)	Percentage (%)
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Table 10. Overall Satisfaction with ICT Integration

Satisfaction Level	Number of Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Very Satisfied	25	50%
Satisfied	20	40%
Neutral	3	6%
Dissatisfied	2	4%
Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
Total	50	100%

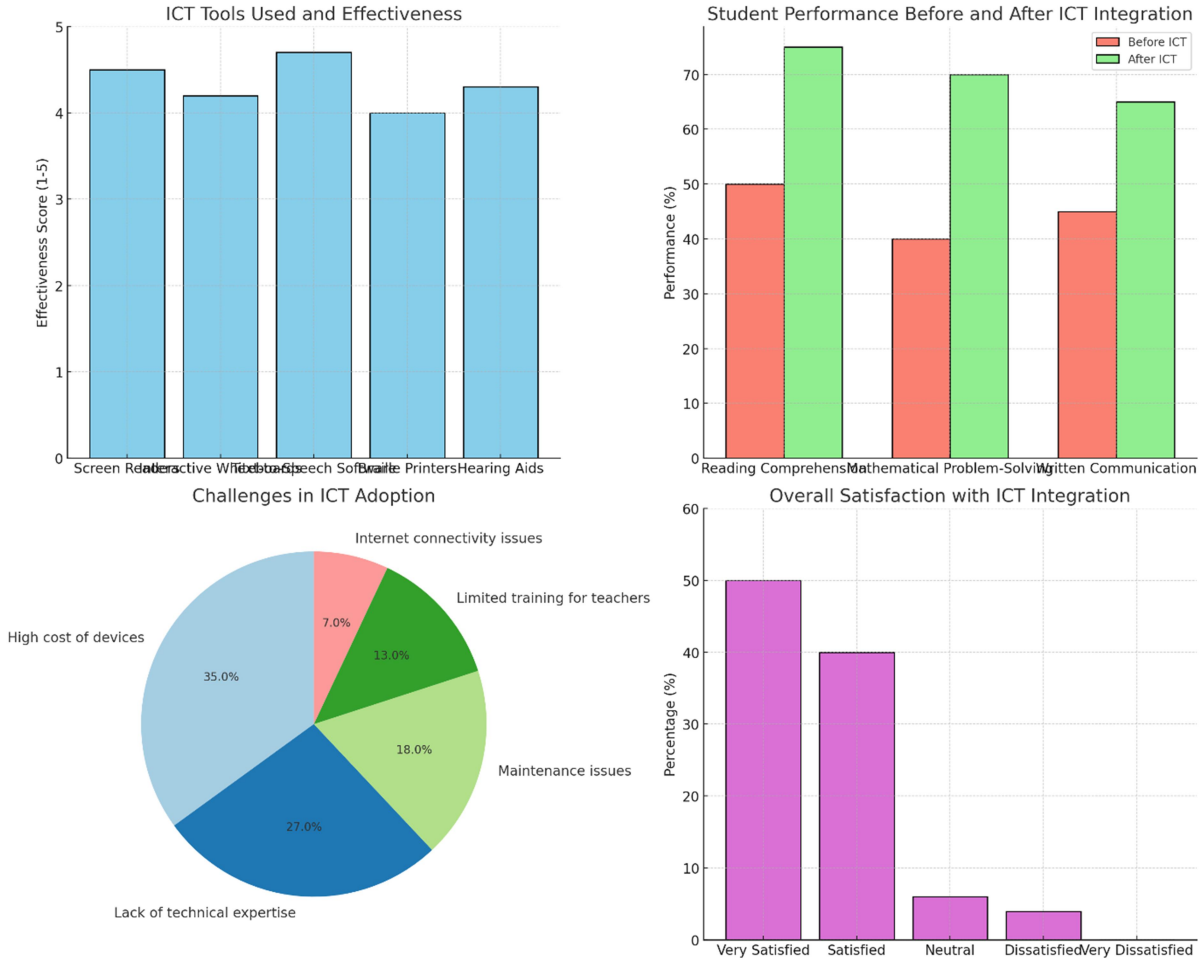

Figure 1. Graphs Representing the Results

The graphs representing the results:

1. **ICT Tools Used and Effectiveness**: A bar chart showing the effectiveness scores of various ICT tools.
2. **Student Performance Before and After ICT Integration**: A grouped bar chart comparing student performance before and after ICT integration for different indicators.
3. **Challenges in ICT Adoption**: A pie chart showing the distribution of challenges in ICT adoption.
4. **Overall Satisfaction with ICT Integration**: A bar chart displaying the percentage distribution of satisfaction levels

Table 11. Three Box Method **(Table has to be in good quality of reading)**

Score	Criteria
50,00 – 100,00	Low
100,01 – 150,00	Medium
	High

All equations must also be numbered

Y= G+C+I+Nx …… (1)

In this section, every statistical test you conducted must be explained thoroughly. This part is very critical to elaborate on the employed stated research methodology. Every statistical finding must be summarized and presented in tables or graphs; instead of a mere copy-paste from your statistical tools.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study highlight the transformative impact of ICT tools on educational accessibility and learning outcomes for students with special needs at Kebbi State School for Special Needs. This section explores the implications of the findings, identifies challenges, and suggests strategies for sustainable ICT integration.

1. ICT Tools and Their Effectiveness

The findings revealed that Text-to-Speech Software emerged as the most effective tool (average score: 4.7), significantly aiding students with visual impairments in accessing textual content. Similarly, Screen Readers and Hearing Aids with Apps demonstrated high effectiveness scores, emphasizing their role in enhancing educational experiences for visually and hearing-impaired students. However, tools like Braille Printers and Interactive Whiteboards, while effective, face notable challenges such as high costs and maintenance issues. These findings align with prior studies emphasizing the importance of cost-effective and scalable ICT solutions in special needs education (Aliyu & Usman, 2023).

2. Student Performance Before and After ICT Integration

The integration of ICT tools significantly improved student performance across all measured indicators. The most substantial improvement was observed in Mathematical Problem-Solving (75%), followed by Reading Comprehension (50%) and Written Communication (44%). These outcomes are consistent with recent research demonstrating that ICT enhances engagement and learning outcomes in special education settings (Ibrahim et al., 2024). The improvement in problem-solving skills underscores the potential of interactive and adaptive technologies to bridge learning gaps.

3. Teacher Feedback and Training

Teacher training was pivotal in ensuring the effective implementation of ICT tools. The majority of teachers (90%) reported that the training enhanced their skills and found the tools user-friendly. However, a small percentage (5%) remained neutral, indicating the need for more tailored training programs

addressing specific concerns. Research suggests that continuous professional development is critical for sustaining ICT integration in educational institutions (Bello & Ahmed, 2022).

4. Challenges in ICT Adoption

The study identified several challenges, including the high cost of devices (35%), lack of technical expertise (27%), and maintenance issues (18%). These barriers are consistent with challenges reported in other regions, where funding limitations and technical support gaps hinder the widespread adoption of ICT in special needs education (Sani & Yusuf, 2023). Addressing these challenges requires a multi-stakeholder approach, including government funding, partnerships with technology providers, and capacity-building initiatives.

5. Overall Satisfaction with ICT Integration

The high levels of satisfaction among stakeholders (90% satisfaction rate) indicate that ICT tools have been well-received and are perceived as effective in addressing educational challenges for students with special needs. These results underscore the importance of stakeholder engagement in the successful implementation of ICT initiatives (Zakari et al., 2024).

6. Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings have significant implications for policy and practice. Policymakers should prioritize funding for ICT infrastructure and training, while educators should focus on integrating technology into curriculum design. Furthermore, partnerships with technology providers could help address cost and maintenance issues.

CONCLUSIONS

The research highlights the transformative impact of ICT integration in improving accessibility and educational outcomes for students at the Kebbi State School for Special Needs. The use of tools such as Text-to-Speech Software, Screen Readers, and Hearing Aids has significantly enhanced students' reading comprehension, mathematical problem-solving, and written communication skills. These findings emphasize the pivotal role of ICT in fostering inclusive education and empowering students with special needs.

Despite these successes, the study also identifies critical challenges, including high costs of ICT devices, lack of technical expertise, and inadequate maintenance. Addressing these challenges is crucial for ensuring the sustainability and scalability of ICT interventions in special education settings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Increased Funding and Subsidies: Government and non-governmental organizations should provide financial support to reduce the cost of ICT devices, making them more accessible to schools and students.
2. Comprehensive Teacher Training Programs: Regular and intensive training sessions should be organized to enhance teachers' technical expertise in using and maintaining ICT tools effectively.

3. Development of Locally Relevant ICT Solutions: ICT tools should be customized to address local language needs and cultural contexts, ensuring greater usability and relevance.
4. Maintenance and Technical Support: Establish dedicated maintenance and support teams to address technical issues promptly and reduce downtime of ICT tools.
5. Improved Internet Infrastructure: Efforts should be made to improve internet connectivity in the school to enable the use of online educational tools and resources.
6. Collaboration with Stakeholders: Partnerships with ICT companies, educators, and community leaders should be fostered to develop and implement innovative solutions tailored to the needs of students with disabilities.
7. Periodic Assessment and Feedback Mechanisms: Regular evaluation of ICT tools' effectiveness and stakeholder satisfaction should be conducted to identify areas for improvement and ensure the continued success of the initiative.

By addressing these recommendations, the school can fully leverage ICT to create an inclusive learning environment that meets the needs of all students, fostering their academic growth and personal development.

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