

Digitalization and Classroom Practices: An Effective Method of Improving Citizenship Education Standards

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Abstract: Digitalization and technology has invaded every sector of human life including the education sector. The digital revolution has left a huge impact on the way students communicate with each other, interact, access information and learn. The multiplier effect of digitalization also directly influences teaching of citizenship education as a subject that incarnates moral values to learners. The rapid digital advancement therefore puts to question the effectiveness of traditional teaching methods used in the teaching of citizenship education. From this background this paper attempts an understanding of the contributions of both the teacher and the student in improving citizenship education standards in a digitalized era. The paper employs a thematic analytical approach based on rigorous analysis on data collected. The findings reveal that digitalization provides an arrear of benefits both to the student and the teacher. Learning within a digitalized classroom is made simple, participatory, ICT skills are acquired and the teacher reaches out to a larger global audience. Notwithstanding there exist a variety of huddles that need to be surmounted for digitalization of classroom practices to be effective.

Keywords: Digitalization, Classroom Practices, Citizenship Education

Introduction

The proliferation of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) two decades ago, has had an unavoidable influence in the learning/delivery of lessons in every subject taught in secondary schools. This interesting development impacting the education sector falls within one of the fundamental components of the United Nations sustainable development 2030 agenda - quality education. The UN's aim is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all. Digital technologies have therefore emerged as essential tools to achieve this goal. Thus embracing the digital revolution and incorporating it into classroom practices is crucial for modernizing the teaching and learning standards of citizenship education in Cameroon. Our interest in this paper is primarily to expose the dual role of the teacher and the student within the context of digitalization as a tool to improving citizenship Education standards within the classroom environment. Secondly, the paper examines the opportunities that lies with using digital method in classroom practices as well as the challenges/obstacles involved with the use of this method.

Digitalization

Digitalization is the process of conversion of analog data (e.g. images, videos, text) into digital format. (The Oxford English Dictionary, 2019). It is the conversion of texts, pictures or sound into a digital form that can be processed by a computer. Or in another sense, digitalization is the conversion of existing data and documents into a digital format. Here data and information is converted from hard to soft copies. It can be done through typing, scanning, uploading, encoding using digital tools. This is done with the assistance of different computer programs. (Bailack, 2022)

Classroom Practices

Classroom practices are related to the actions and strategies teachers and students deploy in class during the teaching/learning process. They vary according to social, political and economic context. Classroom practices also include classroom management which is the set of procedures, strategies, and instructional methods that teachers use to create a classroom environment which promotes learning. Classroom management is essential to create a safe and well-ordered environment to teach and learn while promoting quality education and inclusiveness. In class, students must be taught in the best conditions to feel ready to learn with the same chances than other students in the classroom. Thus the student's learning outcomes are largely dependent on the type of pedagogy used by the teacher in the learning process, but also the learning environment within the -classroom (UNESCO, 2019)

Citizenship Education

Citizenship Education is the study of a citizen living and belonging to a community. It studies the political, legal and economic life of a community as well as its social and moral values. It enables citizens to understand challenging life situations and to handle them especially in this era of globalization (Ghansiyi, 2019) To Ngwoh, citizenship Education involves both formal and informal behaviour geared towards transforming both young and old people to become more active, informed and responsible in the execution of their activities in relationship to the State among other people and within the community as a whole (Kum, 2016). Citizenship Education is therefore a discipline that inculcates quality moral values on the student to enable the learner live responsibly, peacefully and harmoniously with his/her peers, environment, the community and the state at large.

Digitalizing classroom practices in the teaching of citizenship education simply means the use of modern technology (computers, mobile devices, the internet, software applications, social media, National Platform for distance learning and other types of digital tools to teach students). Digital learning increases access to education and knowledge while empowering students with the mindset and capabilities that sets them up for success in the present and future. Digital technology helps teachers with more interactive tools to enhance understanding and to reach out even to learners in remote areas. This new technology that came to reduce the impact of Covid-19 in the education sector has come to stay in this post Covid-19 era and beyond.

The Role of the Teacher in a Citizenship Education Digitalized Classroom Environment

The teacher has a key role to play within the classroom environment as far as utilizing digital tools in the teaching learning process geared towards improving Citizenship Education standards in Cameroon is concerned. The first key role is that of accepting and embracing the digital technological revolution in enhancing classroom practices. Some teachers can be very rigid to change forgetting that the only permanent thing that is constant/consistent is change.

Secondly the next key role of the teacher is to act as a guide and link to the knowledge community in relation to citizenship Education. For this to be possible, the teacher in question must possess additional ICT knowledge besides his general teaching skills. He must be versed with basic computer knowledge as to be able to manipulate basic computer software programs like Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, Microsoft PowerPoint etc. The Citizenship Education teacher is expected to manipulate digital gadgets like tablets, Smart phones, laptops, Cameras etc. Furthermore, the teacher must be capable of navigating confidently and successfully through different social media platforms like Facebook ,telegram, whatsapp, Youtube, Twitter, Skype, Google Chat, Hangouts etc. When these digital tools are explored in the teaching of Citizenship Education, within a classroom setting, it gives the student an opportunity to learn core moral values in a more relaxed, interesting, participatory, entertaining and organized classroom (Ngoran, 2023).

Added to the traditional communication skills of reading, speaking and writing coherently and clearly, there is a need to include Social Media Communication Skills in improving Citizenship Education standards in the classroom environment in this digital era. These skills include the ability to creating useful online content like short YouTube Videos perhaps focusing on social ills within

the school environment, drug abuse, prostitution etc. This could also be entered around creating Webinars, create online digital library, offloading online cartoons on citizenship values etc. social media communication skills is one of the prominent skill with which a Citizenship Education teacher can reach out even to distant learners within the learning community. (Sharma, 2017). Collaborative online forums can also be used to reach out to a greater student audience as well as enable teachers to share resources and engage in continuous professional development. (Ncho, 2023).

When the teacher uses digital devices to create useful content in a Citizenship Education classroom space, an important benefit is that the content can be exploited by a larger national audience beyond his immediate class. During the Covid period, the ministry of Secondary Education introduced the E-learning platform through which lessons were prepared and presented by facilitators on TV, Radio and online platforms. The digital revolution makes the Citizenship Education teacher to stay updated and competitive to the current global changes within the education sector. (Kuar, 2019)

The Role of the Student in a Digitalized Citizenship Education Classroom Environment

For digital tools to be effectively applied in the learning and teaching of Citizenship Education, there must be a close collaboration between the learner and facilitator. Our interest in this segment of the paper is to examine the role of the student in making the teaching and learning of Citizenship Education in a digitalized classroom possible.

Access to digital devices by learners is paramount to ensure effective learning in a digitalized classroom. Gadgets like smart phones, tablets, and laptops is primordial. With the used of these tools the teaching and learning of Citizenship Education in the classroom becomes easy and interesting. Access to these digital devices could be made possible by either parents or school authorities (Banla, 2023)

Having access to these digital tools is not enough to engage students in the teaching and learning activity in a digitalized era. The students in addition must be able to possess some ICT skills to enable them manipulate these devices for learning purposes. Therefore, school authorities need to ensure that some time is allocated in the school curriculum or program intended to develop student's digital skills. Thus learners must possess digital skills in order for activities in a digitalized classroom platform to be smooth, speedy and interesting (Ncho, 2023).

Besides having access to digital devices and digital skills the student must have access to a reliable and affordable internet connection within the classroom space. School authorities and the Ministry of Secondary Education must ensure that there is reliable internet connectivity on school campuses. This enables the students to equally have access to a variety of online resources, digital libraries, and other educational platforms as well as collaborate with their peers in respect to raising Citizenship Education standards.

Digitalization of classroom practices within the Citizenship Education discipline will benefit the student in the sense that it increases productivity. Research suggests that a person takes an average of 12 minutes to find the paper document or information they are looking for. With a well-executed digitalization and document imaging plan, this can be reduced to a few seconds or less with just a click on an ICT device. This will definitely increase the speed with which the citizenship program is covered. Besides the speed benefit involved with exploiting digital devices in classroom practices, the method benefits the learner and teacher in that documents, didactic material, pictures, maps are easy to access and always available (Kuar, 2019)

Challenges/obstacles to Digitalization of Classroom Practices

The effective utilization of digital technologies is becoming increasingly important as a tool of education success for schools and colleges across the globe. Cameroon is not an exception. However, Digitalization of classroom practices as a method of improving the standards in Citizenship Education faces significant barriers as follows;

Resistance to embrace digital technologies from the aging group of some Citizenship Education teachers is a major hindrance to the modernization of classroom practices in the discipline. Some colleagues are so rigid to change or resist adapting to new working conditions. Such obsolete behaviors have a direct negative effect on the standards of Citizenship Education.

A major obstacle to the digitalization of classroom practices as a method of improving Citizenship Education standards is inadequate electricity supply (Asher and Sahebe, 2022) According to the World Bank, less than half of the population in Sub Saharan Africa does not have access to electricity. In rural areas, the average goes down to just 28.5%. When individuals, schools and communities cannot power their computers and other digital gadgets, it becomes practically impossible to use these digital tools for education.

Another important barrier to effective digitalization of classroom practices is the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). Only 39.7% of the population in Africa use the internet. This is significantly lower than the global average of 66.3% (Asher and Sahebe, 2022). Thus the absence of fast reliable and affordable internet connection in villages and cities across the country deprives or prevents students and teachers from fully exploiting online resources in a digital era.

The inability of parents and guidance to afford digital gadget is a hindrance to learning/teaching process. This is due to low income level especially in the rural areas of Cameroon. Besides the fact that some students cannot afford these gadgets, many schools and colleges lack the equipment necessary for the effective digitalization of the teaching and learning process in schools. If the student cannot afford smart phones, tablets, laptops, such a student cannot be part of the digital revolution.

Lastly the digitalization of classroom practices as a vehicle to improving Citizenship Education standards is negatively affected by the existence of the ongoing socio-political crises in the restive North West and South West Regions of the country. The outbreak of the crisis in November 2016 greatly affected educational activities in the two regions. When the crisis escalated into a violent nature in September 2017, several schools and colleges shot down especially in the suburbs and rural areas of the two English speaking Regions. Thousands of students in schools and colleges in these regions were deprived of the right to education. Those who moved to other regions in search of education have been studying under deplorable conditions. The crisis has further compounded the poverty level of some English speaking Regions making it difficult for these students to afford these digital devices.

Conclusion

Digitalization is a global revolution that has come to stay. For digitalization of classroom practices to be fully implemented for the improvement of Citizenship Education standards, there must be a close collaboration between the teacher, the student and the state through the Ministry of Secondary Education. However, the realities on the ground make it very difficult for this method to be applied fully in schools in Cameroon. If obstacles like power outages, reliable internet connectivity, availability of digital devices can be surmounted, the benefits can greatly facilitate and motivate the teaching and learning of Citizenship Education in schools and colleges across the country.

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