

AN ASSESSMENT OF ICT AGAINST WRITTEN SOURCES IN HISTORIOGRAPHY: THE CASE OF NIGERIAN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION

¹Shehu Sule, ²Olanisimi Bankole Dickson and ³Abdulrahman Bala Audu

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Abstract

As a discipline, historiography depends on the availability and reliability of sources for reconstructing the past. For a long time, historians have relied on oral traditions, written records, and archeological evidence to construct narratives of historical events. However, these sources have weaknesses, particularly in terms of bias, distortion, and subjectivity. The introduction of information and communication technology (ICT) into the academic space has provided opportunities to address these weaknesses. This study assesses the effectiveness of information and communication technology (ICT) against written sources in historiography, with emphasis on colleges of education in Nigeria. This study employed a comparative and qualitative approach, focusing on students and lecturers who were taught history using both ICT tools and traditional written sources. The findings revealed that ICT enhances student engagement, improves the accuracy of historical accounts, and allows for wider accessibility of sources. While written sources provide durability and remain indispensable, they often lack inclusivity and are prone to decay, whereas ICT offers long-term preservation through digitization. This study concludes that ICT does not replace written sources but complements them by offering a broader, more objective, and accessible framework for historiography. Recommendations are made for the integration of ICT into history education curricula, the digitization of archives, and the training of lecturers and students in digital literacy.

¹An indigene of Obangede, Okehi Local Government Area of Kogi State, is a lecturer in history department, FCT College of Education Zuba-Abuja. He holds B.A (Hons) History degree from Bayero University Kano, Post-Graduate Diploma in Education from University of Maiduguri, Master Degree and PhD (Military History) from the Nigerian Defence Academy Kaduna. He has authored and co-authored articles in both local and international books and journals. A member of the editorial board of Zuba Journal of Arts and Social Sciences and the co-editor of Contemporary Issues in National Development, both publications of FCT College of Education Zuba-Abuja.

²An indigene of Ode-Ondo town in Ondo East Local Government of Ondo State. A lecturer with Department of History, FCT College of Education, Zuba-Abuja, he holds B. A. (Ed) History from Adeyemi College of Education, Ode-Ondo and his M. A. History, Gender and Development from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. He has authored and co-authored journals and chapters in books in Universities. He has worked with Ministries of Education in both Katsina State and Abuja and also took up responsibilities with some non-governmental organisations. He is happily married with children.

³Hails from Kuje, Kuje Area Council of FCT and is a lecturer in history department, FCT College of Education Zuba-Abuja. He holds Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) Economics/History from Niger State College of Education, Minna, B.A (Hons) History degree from Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, He has participated in academic conferences. He is a member of Historical Society of Nigeria (HSN). He is happily married.

Introduction

The reconstruction of the past has always depended on the quality of sources available to historians. Traditionally, written sources, such as manuscripts, archival records, correspondences, diaries, and official documents, have played a central role in preserving and transmitting historical knowledge. Much of what is taught in schools and colleges of education in Nigeria is still derived from such written texts, many of which were inherited from colonial scholarship. Although these sources provide continuity and durability, they are not without flaws. They often reflect their authors' biases, omit critical perspectives, or suffer from mutilation, loss, and deliberate distortion. Oral traditions, though equally valuable in African historiography, are vulnerable to memory lapses, exaggeration, and selective transmission, while archeological remains require interpretation through other, often subjective, sources. These problems have consistently raised questions about historiography's objectivity, reliability, and accessibility.

The advent of information and communication technology (ICT) offers new opportunities for overcoming these challenges. Digital archives, online newspapers, audio-visual recordings, and internet-based platforms allow for more consistent, verifiable, and enduring preservation of historical information. Unlike traditional sources that are prone to distortion, ICT enables the recording and storage of events as they occur, making them accessible to scholars, teachers, and students across time and space. In the Nigerian context, where history education has struggled with poor funding, outdated texts, and declining student interest, ICT can revitalize teaching and learning. Its application in colleges of education is particularly important, as these institutions are tasked with preparing the next generation of history teachers.

The justification for this study is its relevance to multiple stakeholders. It offers strategies for integrating ICT into teaching and scholarship for lecturers and researchers. It promises a more engaging and reliable learning experience that enhances comprehension and retention for students. For curriculum planners and policymakers, it provides evidence to support the modernization of history education and its alignment with global digital learning standards. Ultimately, this study seeks to bridge the gap between traditional historiography and modern innovations by showing how ICT complements, rather than replaces, written sources.

Accordingly, this study has four objectives. The general objective of this study is to examine the relevance of ICT in preserving historical data and teaching historiography in Nigerian colleges of education. Specifically, this study seeks to determine the usefulness of ICT in storing information for historians, assess the efficacy of ICT compared to written sources in ensuring objectivity and reliability, examine how ICT contributes to the long-term preservation of historical information without distortion, and demonstrate how ICT can make the study of history more practical, stable, and engaging for students. By pursuing these aims, this study underscores the significance of ICT in revitalizing history education and reinforcing the credibility of historical narratives in Nigeria.

Literature Review

The discipline of history relies on sources for the reconstruction of the past. Traditionally, historians have relied on oral traditions, written records, and archeological findings to construct narratives. However, each of these sources has inherent limitations that raise questions about accuracy and objectivity. To address these challenges, scholars have increasingly turned to information and communication technology (ICT), which provides new tools for preserving and transmitting historical knowledge. This section clarifies the key concepts of ICT, written sources, historiography, and objectivity while situating them within existing scholarship.

Information and Communication Technology

ICT refers to the collection of technological tools and resources used to create, store, manage, and share information. According to UNESCO (2002), information and communications technology (ICT) includes computers, the internet, storage devices, and communication platforms that facilitate the transfer of knowledge in various forms. Pierre and Andala (2020) described ICT as a transformative force in education, while Lateef and Muniru (2020) highlighted its role in promoting teaching and learning efficiency. In Nigerian schools, Haruna (2010, 2014) emphasized that ICT improves record-keeping, lesson delivery, and student engagement, although challenges such as poor infrastructure and inadequate training persist (Sheyin & Aderibigbe, 2019).

Written Sources

Written sources are recorded accounts of past events in texts, manuscripts, inscriptions, or official records. Bloch (1946) and Carr (1961) regarded them as the cornerstone of historiography because they provided concrete evidence and chronological sequencing. Their merits include durability, documentation, and credibility; however, they are also prone to bias, selective omission, and destruction. In Africa, writing traditions, such as Egyptian hieroglyphs, *nsibidi*, and Arabic manuscripts, played significant roles in recording history before colonialism (Sule, 2022). Despite these strengths, the accessibility and inclusivity of written sources are often limited, hence the need for supplementary approaches like ICT.

Historiography

Historiography is the study of how history is written, including its methods, sources, and interpretations. The Encyclopedia Britannica (2024) defines it as the analysis of past events through a critical examination of sources. According to Daniels (1992), historiography is not simply the recording of facts but the interpretation of evidence shaped by the context of the historian. Ikime (2006) emphasizes that both indigenous perspectives and colonial legacies have influenced historiography in Nigeria. ICT now contributes to historiography by broadening access to sources, preserving records in digital formats, and reducing the reliance on fragmented or biased narratives.

Objectivity in History

In history, objectivity refers to the pursuit of truth without distortion from personal feelings or external influences. Hornby (2015) defines it as the condition of only considering verifiable facts. Leopold von Ranke, as cited in Bevir (1994), argued that the historian's duty is to present history "as it actually happened." Conversely, Charles Beard contended that total objectivity is unattainable because historians inevitably approach sources with biases (Boldt, 2014). By storing events in real-time formats, such as video and audio, ICT provides a mediating ground, which reduces the dependence on selective memory and subjective interpretation.

ICT and Historiography in the Context

ICT does not replace written sources but complements them by digitizing archives, recording oral traditions, and making historical information accessible globally. Students can compare multiple narratives, cross-check evidence, and develop critical thinking skills by integrating digital platforms into history education. Daniels (1992) and Marwick (1970) argued that the future of historical study depends on adapting sources to contemporary contexts. In Nigeria, this adaptation is crucial for revitalizing history education in colleges of education, where reliance on outdated textbooks has discouraged interest in the discipline.

The literature reveals that while written sources remain indispensable, they are insufficient on their own. ICT provides solutions to the challenges of bias, distortion, and inaccessibility, thereby enriching historiography and strengthening history education in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, comparative research design to examine the relevance of ICT against traditional written sources in historiography, with a focus on Nigerian colleges of education. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for in-depth exploration of the meanings, perceptions, and experiences associated with the history of teaching and learning through different sources of knowledge.

Area of study

The research was conducted within selected Nigerian Colleges of Education, where history is taught as part of the teacher training curriculum. These institutions were chosen because they are responsible for preparing future history teachers at the secondary and primary levels. They also reflect the broader challenges of higher education in Nigeria, such as inadequate resources, poor infrastructure, and uneven ICT integration.

Data Sources

Data were drawn from two main sources:

- i. **Written Sources:** This included textbooks, archival documents, manuscripts, and other printed materials traditionally used in teaching historiography. These were assessed for their durability, accessibility, and reliability in the reconstruction of the past.
- ii. **ICT-Based Sources:** Online archives, digital newspapers, video documentaries, internet-based resources, and multimedia recordings of historical events were included. Emphasis was placed on the integration of these sources into classroom instruction and research activities.

Data Collection

Information was gathered through classroom observations, teaching experiments, and informal interviews with lecturers and students. In the experimental classes, one group of students was exposed primarily to written sources, while another group was introduced to ICT-supported teaching (digital archives, videos, and online newspapers). Notes on student engagement, comprehension, and retention were taken.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed thematically. The two groups were compared to identify differences in academic performance, critical thinking, and enthusiasm for history. The analysis also highlighted each method's strengths and weaknesses. The findings were interpreted in light of existing scholarship on historiography, objectivity, and ICT in education.

Limitations of the Study

The uneven availability of ICT infrastructure across Nigerian colleges of education has limited the scope of this study. In some institutions, poor internet access and erratic electricity supply restricted the use of ICT. Additionally, some lecturers and students lacked adequate training in using digital tools, which may have influenced their experiences. Despite these limitations, this study provides valuable insights into the comparative role of ICT and written sources in the field of history education.

Findings and Results

The comparative analysis of written sources and information and communication technology (ICT)-based materials in teaching historiography at Nigerian Colleges of Education revealed several key findings. These findings highlight the ways in which traditional and modern tools influence student learning, comprehension, and historical interpretation.

Student engagement and retention

One of the most striking findings of this study was the level of engagement demonstrated by students exposed to ICT-based teaching. Classes that incorporated videos, digital archives, and online newspapers exhibited higher student participation. Learners expressed excitement when they could “see” history unfold through video

clips of Nigerian independence in 1960, civil war documentaries, or digitized colonial records. These visual and auditory resources stimulated curiosity and made the subject matter more relatable.

In contrast, students in the written-source group were less participatory, with many limiting themselves to memorizing passages from textbooks. During post-lesson assessments, ICT-exposed students demonstrated better retention, recalling not only dates and events but also the broader context. For example, when asked about the transition to civilian rule in Nigeria in 1999, ICT students were able to describe the mood of the event based on video coverage, whereas the written-source group relied on fragmented textbook accounts. This means that ICT enhances experiential learning and more firmly embeds historical events in memory.

Accuracy and consistency of information

Another important finding was the degree of accuracy and consistency provided by ICT. Written sources often present contradictions, especially in the dating of events or the characterization of historical figures. For instance, textbooks sometimes differed on the exact date of the 1929 Aba Women's Riot or on the role of Herbert Macaulay in nationalist struggles. These discrepancies created confusion among students who relied solely on written texts.

ICT reduced this problem by offering triangulation opportunities. Students could consult multiple sources simultaneously, such as digitized colonial records, Nigerian newspaper archives, and international media coverage. This allowed them to cross-check facts and identifies areas of bias. In one case, students comparing Nigerian and British newspaper reports of the same event quickly recognized differences in perspective, deepening their understanding of subjectivity in historical writing. This demonstrates how ICT strengthens historiographical analysis by broadening the range of accessible evidence.

Development of critical thinking

The study also found that ICT fostered critical thinking skills in a way that written sources did not. The students exposed to ICT-supported instruction were encouraged to question, debate, and analyze. For example, when students were shown multiple online accounts of Nigeria's civil war, they were able to identify Igbo, Yoruba, and Northern perspectives and then engage in classroom debates about why these differences existed.

This contrasts sharply with the written-source group, where students tended to reproduce information verbatim from textbooks without interrogating the context. Therefore, ICT nurtures inquiry-based learning, pushing students beyond rote memorization toward independent reasoning. This finding confirms earlier research (UNESCO, 2007; Haruna, 2014) that ICT can transform passive learners into active participants, especially in disciplines such as history, where interpretation and perspective matter greatly.

Preservation and accessibility

This study also revealed that ICT significantly improves the preservation and accessibility of historical information. Many Nigerian archives and libraries struggle with poor storage facilities, leading to the loss or mutilation of valuable documents. For example, some colonial records in the Kaduna National Archives have been damaged beyond use. Written sources are also geographically restricted, requiring students to consult them physically.

ICT provides solutions to these challenges through digitization. Historical documents can be electronically scanned and stored, making them available to a wider audience across Nigeria and beyond. In one case, students could download digital versions of West African Pilot newspapers from the 1950s, which would otherwise be difficult to access in print. ICT also ensures long-term preservation, as digital copies are less vulnerable to fire, insects, or natural deterioration than paper records. This accessibility fosters inclusivity by providing equal access to historical materials to students from remote areas.

Limitations of the Use of ICT

Despite its benefits, the study also found that ICT integration in colleges of education faced several limitations. Infrastructure posed a major challenge. Poor electricity supply, weak internet connectivity, and lack of information and communication technology (ICT) equipment hindered the effective use of digital tools. In some cases, the classes had to revert to traditional chalk-and-talk methods because projectors or computers could not be powered.

Another limitation was the lack of adequate training. Some lecturers were unfamiliar with ICT resources or lacked the technical confidence to integrate them into their teaching. Similarly, students from rural backgrounds often initially struggled with digital platforms. These challenges demonstrate that while ICT has great potential, its benefits cannot be fully realized without institutional investment in infrastructure and capacity building.

Overall, ICT improves student engagement, enhances retention of historical knowledge, promotes accuracy, and strengthens critical thinking. Written sources, while foundational, are more often characterized by bias, inconsistency, and inaccessibility. Thus, ICT serves as a complementary tool that addresses many of these weaknesses. However, infrastructural and human-capacity challenges remain significant barriers to its full adoption in Nigerian colleges of education.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this study underscore the transformative potential of ICT in addressing the limitations of written sources in historiography, especially in Nigerian Colleges of Education. Although written sources have historically formed the backbone of historical research and pedagogy, this study reveals that ICT significantly enhances accuracy, accessibility, and student engagement. The results are interpreted considering existing scholarship and situated within broader debates on historiography and history education.

ICT and Student Engagement

The observation that ICT-based teaching improves student engagement aligns with earlier studies by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2007), which emphasized that multimedia resources foster learner-centered education. In contrast to passive learning associated with written sources, ICT stimulated curiosity and experiential learning. This finding supports Haruna's (2010, 2014) argument that ICT can transform classroom dynamics by making learning more interactive and relatable. It also confirms Daniels's (1992) argument that history must adapt to contemporary realities if it is to remain relevant to new generations.

Objectivity and reliability of the sources

The results also demonstrate that ICT reduces inconsistencies and biases often found in written records. Students using ICT could cross-check dates, compare multiple perspectives, and evaluate sources' reliability. This finding resonates with Leopold von Ranke's insistence on factual accuracy (Bevir, 1994), but it also echoes the views of Beard and other postmodernists, who argued that no single historical account is fully objective (Boldt, 2014). ICT bridges these positions by enabling students to make balanced judgments by offering access to diverse sources. In the Nigerian context, where colonial records frequently misrepresented African realities, the ability to consult both indigenous and foreign digital archives equips students to critically interrogate inherited biases.

Critical thinking and historical interpretation

The development of critical thinking among ICT-exposed students supports Marwick's (1970) assertion that history must cultivate analysis rather than rote memorization. ICT enabled students to engage with diverse voices, debate interpretations, and reflect on narratives shaped by political and cultural factors. This aligns with

Carr's (1961) famous view that history is a dialogue between the past and the present, mediated by the historian's questions. ICT tools, such as comparative newspaper archives or documentary footage, provided students with multiple lenses to examine the same event, leading to deeper interpretation and reducing the risk of one-sided historical narratives.

Preservation and accessibility of historical data

The study found that ICT improves the preservation and accessibility of historical materials, which has long been a challenge in Nigeria. Many archives suffer from inadequate facilities and poor storage, leading to the deterioration of key documents (Sule, 2022). ICT ensures preservation through digitization, while improving accessibility as students and lecturers can consult documents remotely. This supports the assertion of UNESCO (2002) that ICT democratizes knowledge by bridging geographical and institutional divides. In effect, ICT offers a pathway for preserving Nigeria's historical heritage for future generations while making it accessible globally.

Challenges in ICT Integration

The limitations of ICT integration revealed by the poor infrastructure, unstable electricity, and lack of ICT literacy are consistent with earlier findings by Sheyin and Aderibigbe (2019). These structural barriers highlight the need for sustainable investment in Nigeria's educational system. The enthusiasm of students and lecturers for ICT-based learning reveals that overcoming these challenges could yield significant benefits. Without institutional commitment, the potential of ICT to transform history education will remain underutilized.

Synthesis Using Historiographical Debates

The findings affirm that historiography requires a blend of multiple sources. Written documents provide durability and a sense of continuity, but information and communications technology (ICT) offers objectivity, inclusivity, and accessibility. This synthesis reflects Ikime's (2006) argument that to remain relevant, African historiography must integrate indigenous perspectives with modern methods. ICT allows this integration by digitizing oral testimonies, manuscripts, and colonial archives, bringing them together in a common space for comparison. ICT strengthens the reliability of historical reconstruction and expands the scope of historiographical inquiry.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to strengthen the teaching of historiography in Nigerian colleges of education and to balance the use of information and communications technology (ICT) with traditional written sources:

- i. Integration of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) into the History Curriculum:** ICT should be deliberately incorporated into the history curriculum at colleges of education. Digital archives, online newspapers, and documentaries should be a part of formal lesson planning. This will ensure that students consistently engage with both traditional and modern sources.
- ii. Provision of ICT Infrastructure:** Government and educational stakeholders must prioritize the provision of reliable electricity, strong internet connectivity, and ICT facilities such as projectors and computer laboratories. Without such infrastructure, ICT's transformative potential will remain unrealized.
- iii. Training and Capacity Building:** Lecturers and students must receive digital literacy training. Regular workshops and capacity-building seminars will enhance the effective use of ICT tools in teaching and learning. This will empower lecturers to integrate ICT confidently and enable students to critically analyze digital sources.

- iv. **Digitization of Archival Materials:** Nigeria's fragile historical documents should be digitized for preservation and accessibility. Collaborative efforts between the government, universities, and international partners could accelerate this process. Digitized archives would reduce the risks of loss and broaden access to researchers and students nationwide.
- v. **Blended Use of ICT and Written Sources:** ICT should complement, not replace, written sources. A blended approach ensures that the accessibility and objectivity of ICT balance the durability of written records. Students should be encouraged to cross-check textbooks with online archives to build stronger critical reasoning skills.
- vi. **Policy Support and Funding:** Policymakers in education should create policies and funding frameworks that extend ICT integration to the humanities. This would ensure that history is not marginalized in ICT reforms, which often focus only on science and technology fields.
- vii. **Further Research:** Future studies should explore the long-term effects of ICT on historical reasoning and teaching outcomes. Comparative studies across different Nigerian regions and other African countries would enrich the understanding of the role of ICT in reshaping historiography.

Conclusion

The reliability of sources and the challenge of objectivity have long been central concerns in historiography. Although foundational, written sources are often saddled with biases, distortions, and accessibility issues. Oral traditions and archeological remains, though valuable, also suffer from subjectivity and fragility. This study evaluated the role of information and communication technology (ICT) against written sources in historiography, focusing on its application in Nigerian colleges of education.

ICT significantly improves student engagement, comprehension, and retention by providing interactive, real-time, and verifiable historical data. ICT also enhances objectivity by allowing access to multiple perspectives, enabling cross-verification of facts, and reducing reliance on distorted or incomplete records. While written sources remain indispensable for documentation and durability, ICT strengthens their utility by expanding access and improving preservation through digitization. Together, ICT and written sources offer a balanced approach to historical reconstruction.

The discussion further situates these findings within global historiographical debates, demonstrating that ICT bridges the divide between positivist calls for factual accuracy and postmodern critiques of subjectivity. ICT has the potential to revitalize history education, address infrastructural gaps, and prepare students for critical and analytical engagement with the past in the Nigerian context. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, poor internet connectivity, and limited ICT literacy must be addressed for these benefits to be fully realized.

This study underscores that ICT does not replace but complements written sources, offering a more inclusive, accessible, and objective historiography. For Nigerian Colleges of Education, integrating ICT into the teaching of history represents not only a pedagogical innovation but also a necessary step toward preserving and transmitting the nation's past more effectively.

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