

Zambian teenager's ICTs skills boosted

by: Tovin Ngombe

In whatever human trait you view Information Communication Technologies (ICTS) most people have widely accepted that it plays a key role in shaping the social economic development of any society.

But the technical nature and the complexities involved in understanding ICTs tools have created the digital divide between the developed countries and the third world nations.

However, the spreading of ICTs in the African countries though at a slow pace is a non-stop venture, hardships would be encountered, some projects will succeed, others will fall apart, but the benefits are too many to outline.

Hence the key to alleviating these hurdles lies in educating the already excluded people for them to effectively use and understand the basic ICT tools.

Global Teenager Project

The Global Teenager Project (GTP) launched in 1999 under the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) has opened up a window of opportunities for Zambian Schools to bring the full potential of ICTs into the classroom.

GTP was initiated to impart ICT skills and learning skills to secondary School pupils while increasing their understanding of other cultures through staging lively, global classroom debates in cyberspace.

GTP Country Coordinator for Zambia Mumbi Mwape says that the project has eight participating Schools, which are all found in Lusaka adding that there is room for expanding it to other provinces after gaining experience in Lusaka.

Mr Mwape disclosed at the GTP workshop for the teachers in charge in February 2005 that they were called to share information with a wider network, to enable them to be networking among themselves, to share their concerns, and to ensure that they all have a clear understanding of the project.

He says the GTP workshop would assist the participating Schools in the learning Circle to understand the role of ICT and to enable them share the researched information to the growing network.

Learning Circles are web-based, virtual environments for intercultural exchange and they provide a safe, dynamic and fun environment for GTP's exciting educational programme.

Twice a year, about eight to 12 classes from different schools link up via email to form 'virtual Learning Circles, the core activity of the Global Teenager Project.

They discuss a theme of their choice for the next 10 weeks and the outcomes of their discussions are posted on the Virtual Campus, a place where students exchange knowledge.

The classes select one theme from a shortlist of 14 general subjects ranging from health, environment, human rights, globalisation, and my Life.

Bridget Walubita a teacher from Bedfield School, which is privately owned pointed out that from the inception of the project at her School in 2003, it has assisted her and the pupils to acquire ICTs skills.

Ms Walubita says the pupils' exchange of information on culture with the rest of schools has assisted them in knowing how other countries handle it.

"The topic on culture has been interesting, it ranged from managing education, how culture has assisted them in shaping their education, and on whether students are allowed to wear trousers at School, to treat their hair, and to paint their nails," Ms Walubita noted.

GTP & Rhodes Park School

Ms Musonda Sakala a teacher at Rhodes Park School says the project has increased ICTs awareness among the pupils.

Rhodes Park School, which is privately owned, has 24 hours access to the Internet and pupils have access to it, Ms Sakala explained.

The School is the only one in the country that has introduced French in the learning circle to ensure that pupils participate with other countries that do not speak English.

She says that the School has an ICT component in its curriculum and has embedded the GTP in its programme.

Ms Sakala observed that part of the learning circle takes part during School holidays, which makes it difficult for pupils to respond to their friend's mails.

She appealed for the harmonisation of the learning circle since even other participating Schools in Lusaka face a similar problem.

GTP & Lake Road PTA School

Lake Road PTA School Teacher in charge Robby Mukwato says the pupils participated in topics such as culture and dance, which he described as rich topics.

He noted that 13 pupils participated in the learning circle, among them seven were from the secondary School while six were from the middle school.



Mr Mukwato, however, says that the dissemination of information was not enough as the School administration allowed them to be using the Internet to communicate to other participating Schools for one hour only.

“We had to go to the internet cafés to complete our work since only one computer is connected to the internet, we had a time frame for using the internet at our School for one hour only and it was not enough to communicate on Virtual campus,” he said.

The School joined GTP in 2004 and has found the programmes to be invaluable to both teachers and students Mr Mukwato revealed.

Lake Road PTA School, which is privately owned, has only 10 working computers, which are shared among 800 pupils from reception to secondary School.

Mr Mukwato says that the project has contributed to the improvement of the results in ICTs and the School has a Cambridge curriculum and a local curriculum.

But he said that : “ Private Schools have their own private Schools have their own programmes and have no interest in improving things in less profitable ventures. We can not get donor funding yet students are keen to learn.

He called for help from the well wishers and the GTP to assist them in having internet connectivity and buying more computer adding that it's a challenge for the pupils to obtain information and share it with other participating Schools.

GTP & Matero Girls High School

Matero Girls High School teacher in charge Rose Banda disclosed that the GTP has exposed the pupils to the ICT tools and it is being used as a device for teacher's teaching skills.

"We are really getting a lot which we can use. The aspect of communication is really working. GTP is a good tool for exposure, we are gaining ICT skills, researching, surfing the Internet, and pupils are chatting with other participating Schools," Mrs Banda narrated.

Matero Girls High School, which joined GTP in 2002, has 14 computers and only eight of them are working while six are broken down says Mrs Banda.

She, however, appealed for GTP to assist the School in acquiring Computers to meet demand among the growing number of pupils who are eager to learn ICTs.

"Us Matero Girls High School, we will be glad if the project will also assist us in acquiring computers. We will be grateful if people assist us it will push us a lot." Mrs Banda observed.

GTP & Chongwe high school

At Chongwe high school, which is, situated 45Km along the great east road from Lusaka city had no computers before the GTP started reveals Mr Musonda Sikombe a teacher in charge of the project.

Mr Sikombe says that Chongwe, which was picked as a pilot project, received seven computers from GTP and two second hand computers from the Computers for Zambian secondary Schools.

At the Chongwe high school the pupils have learnt researching skills using the computer though the knowledge is not fully exploited owing to the lack of Internet connectivity at the School.

He says that students had to be traveling for a distance of about 45 km to go to Microlink Technologies, which is an Internet service provider where they used to have access to the Internet.

Having to travel 45 km to access the internet at times delayed the pupils in responding to e-mails from their friends in the learning Circle.

Mwemba Malambo another teacher from Chongwe Secondary School disclosed that the School has about 1,000 students sharing the seven computers as a result only a handful of them benefit from the project.

At the time the writer of this article was conducting his research, students that participated in the 2004 learning cycle had already graduated but he managed to get the report that they left with their teacher in charge of the project..

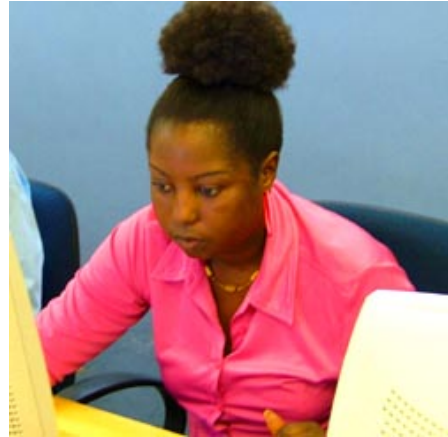
Chinga Zulu a graduate student from Chongwe High School says that he benefited from the project in the areas of social interaction and through discussions he met friends.

"I met through the net a lot of friends. I now know that countries have similar traditions, cultures, and that HIV/AIDS is a global problem. These are just a few of some things or knowledge that I gained," Zulu disclosed.

Zulu pointed out that despite the knowledge gained he encountered hardships in conducting the project.

"We, speaking as a group, never had the opportunity to be in the chat room. In our group only one person had the chance of sending E-mails. And this opportunity occurred once in every two weeks," Zulu noted.

Cletus Sikwanda a student from Chongwe High School who had been participating in GTP since February 2002 revealed that at the time the project started, the School relied mainly on their Co-ordinator from microlink for sending, receiving e-mails, and other learning cycle news.



“We have been exposed to different traditions and cultures in different countries and their environment and some of the former GTP students have been able to find employment owing to the skills they acquired from the learning cycle,” Sikwanda said.

But he cited the Internet connectivity as a major problem that the School has been experiencing since 2003.

“This meant that every time we wanted to send e-mails we had to travel about 45km from school and some activities of the cycle like the chart session failed to take place because the school could not afford transporting us to and fro,” he said.

Despite the difficulties that participating Schools have witnessed since the inception of the project, there is a bright future for it to improve owing to the country’s ICT background, which is still in its infancy in the education cycles.

Environmental Council of Zambia (ECZ) report on the computer courses

According to the Environmental Council of Zambia (ECZ) report on the computer courses, it highlights the poor performance of students in this course.

The reports notes that in 2000, 94 students entered for examination, 43 sat for it, three failed, 40 passed, 51 were absent, and in 2001, 83 enrolled for examination, 59 wrote the examination, five failed, 54 passed, and 24 were absent.

The Environmental Council of Zambia (ECZ) report states that statistics for students studying computers has been declining at an alarming rate, which, was attributed to the poor handling of subjects by teachers.

According to the Zambia Telecommunication indicators about 80 percent of the telephone lines are concentrated along the line of rail while the 20 percent is shared by the rest of Zambians through out the country.

Out of the country’s 10 million people, one telephone line is shared among 100 people, a scenario which entails that there are few people that have access to the telephone line. However, GTP has created a foundation for the country’s dream of improving the ICTs as the tool for achieving development.

Zambia is among the third world countries that have not realised much in the ICTs arena, but its ICTs draft policy has placed top priorities to achieving universal access by 2010.

The policy has outlined that without adequate and reliable connection to information and knowledge network, the country would be excluded from participating in the global village.

However, the GTP project is a window of hope for the country’s ICTs development among the pupils who have the potential to become reliable users of the skills acquired.

For further information contact iConnect coordinator
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www.iConnect-online.org is a knowledge sharing platform for Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in sustainable development. iConnect draws content from its partners, links resources and expertise and encourages collaboration. For the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD), the host of iConnect, this is a way to share experiences, lessons learned and ideas, and interact with communities and people with an interest in development and the applications of ICTs. These experiences can lead to a better understanding of the actual benefits of ICTs for Development (ICT4D). The core of iConnect will be a series of locally written articles on the impact and the use of ICTs for development. The articles have a strong focus on fact finding; objective information on ICT4D practices from a southern perspective: Southern content written by Southern people. i4d is the iConnect partner for Asia, and ECA is the iConnect partner for Africa, disseminating the articles to their public.
