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CONTENTS

Active Teachers, Passive Learners: Reflections On Paulo Freire's 'Pedagogy of The Oppressed' and Related Works Augustus A. Adeyinka	1
Cultural and Economic Problems of Widowhood in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State Dr. (Mrs) Enekeme Ayibatari Blessed	9
Assessment of The Teaching Effectiveness of Computer Studies Teachers in Junior Secondary Schools in Ogun State, Nigeria Adebanjo, Adetayo Adekunle	16
Factors Influencing Students' Attitude Towards University Education in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria Numonde, Davidson (Ph.D)	22
Influence of Entrepreneurial Education in Curbing Unemployment and Insecurity in Nigeria Adamu Ibrahim & Abdullahi Usman Musa	29
Factors Responsible for Anti-social Behaviour among Secondary School Students in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State. Nwamadi, Love (Ph.D)	38
Negotiation and Assertiveness Training as Effective Communication Tools in Fostering Healthy Sexual Behaviour among School-going Adolescents in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State Torubeli, Victor Ayebami (Ph.D)	46
Analysis of Teachers' Distribution in Delta State Technical Colleges: Implication for National Development Ayonmike, Chinyere Shirley (Ph.D)	58
Effect of Problem Solving and Concept Mapping Strategies on Students Learning of Geography Concepts in Yenagoa Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. Dr. Frank-Oputu, Ekima Ayibaene	69
Prerequisite Knowledge and Attitudes to Chemistry Practical as Correlates of Students' Practical Skills and Performance in Senior School Chemistry Ogunleye, B. O. (Ph.D)	80

CONTENTS CONT'D

Differential Validity of The Draw-a-man Test and The Standard Progressive Matrices As Predictors of Reading Performances of Primary School Pupils in Yenagoa Metropolis. Agnes Ebi Maliki (Ph.D) & Kebbi, Janet Amasingha (Ph.D)	89
Secondary School Teachers' Opinion On Petroleum Subsidy Removal and Its Impact on Their Economic Power: Implication for Curriculum Implementation Amosun P. A; Ayo – Vaughan A. F. & Omoko Eloho	95
Enhancing Training Effectiveness: Making A Case for Training Needs Assessment Udu, Gabriel Obasi Chigozie (Ph.D) & Anele, Clement A.	104
Adolscents' Views on Sexual and Reproductive Health in Egor Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria Okoza Jolly (Ph.D)	113
The Place of Language in the Teaching of Literature Justina Lere Charles-Zalakoro (Ph.D)	122
A Review of Digital Addiction and Calling for Safety Education Ruth Ochanya Adio-Moses	132
Job Placement Competencies Required by Industries for The Employability of Mechanical Technology Education Graduates Ominabo John Nyenami	142
Perceived Effects of Housing Infrastructures on Health Status of Undergraduate Residents of Ajibode Community in Akinyele Local Government Area of Oyo State Fadoju, Andrew Olu (Ph.D) & Alabi, Celestina Enevara	150
Empowering The Girl-Child Through Entrepreneurship Education Theresa Ebieren Dorgu (Ph.D)	158
The National Guidelines for School Meal: Applicability in Bayelsa State using Okolobiri Community as an Example Kalada G. McFubara, Boma George, Prosper Ikiba, Rugina Tarimobo-Otobo, Ebiwari Abaiola, Andrew Fiateide & Daniel Mac-Eteli	164

A REVIEW OF DIGITAL ADDICTION AND CALLING FOR SAFETY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

In reviewing digital addiction, this paper recognize that digital technology has been useful in various sphere of life and the reach is undeniable, with an "average" user spending long hours on their phone or online daily. The demands of modern lifestyles have also lead to heavy dependence on various digital technologies for information, inter-personal relationships, entertainment and even economic transactions. There is no doubt that the over dependence on digital technology may result in addiction. Digital addiction is similar to other addictions; those suffering from it exhibit compulsive behavior and use the virtual fantasy world as a substitution for real-life human connection. Although all of its true effects are not known, the impacts on an addicted user's life are serious and may lead to social isolation, anxiety, depression, immune system disruption, brain damage and even death. Indeed, se are all at the receiving end of digital technology and deserve adequate safeguards and protections against the attendant risks of this technological revolution. In recommendations, health and safety education, time restriction and constant monitoring should be employed to safeguards health ways of using digital technology.

Keywords: Addiction, Digital, Health, Safety, Technology

INTRODUCTION

The new digital age has brought about extraordinary developments in technology and this is beginning to alter the way many people access, use and react to information. The digital and internet technology is evolving at a very fast rate, and the things thought to be impossible are now becoming a reality. The reach is very amazing; long queues have disappeared from the banks due to automated teller machines (ATM), time spent on traveling is reduced due to phone calls, and a lot have been produced to improve entertainments and to make life easy in every way. Indeed this consistent digital and internet technological developments that help connect the world can be seen as either beneficial or detrimental to human relationships and health.

Some of the most prominent digital technological innovations which have greatly affected many aspects of our lives are smart phones, laptops, iPod, and many more. These gadgets depend either partially or totally on the internet technology to function properly. Today the internet continues to grow day by day at an incredible speed and about 32.7% of the world's population have access to the internet. The internet has become ubiquitous, faster, and increasingly accessible to non-technical communities and social networking and collaborative services, enabling people to communicate and share interests in many more ways. Sites like Facebook, Twitter, Linked-In, YouTube, Flickr, Second Life, Delicious, Wikis, and many more have made it possible for people of all ages to rapidly share their interest of the moment with others everywhere (Briggs, 2012).

The World Wide Web is altering human social interaction and the way the brain processes information. Consequently, scholars dive into the potential of gadgets addition and its psychological and behavioral implications, scholars remain torn on whether technological gadget addiction exists but ultimately agree that the new digital age does influence the development of the human mind. There has been so much debate about how to define this addiction, but no one has been able to agree on anything (Razieh et al, 2012). Most definitions of digital addiction, include continued use of technology even after it has caused problems in one's social and professional life (Gencer and Koc, 2012), it is also seen as an increasing trend of compulsive behavior amongst users of technological devices (Briggs, 2012). In order to define digital addiction, Christakis (2010) compared the key components of addiction to include preoccupation with the substance or behavior; repeated unsuccessful attempts to reduce it; mood disturbances related to reduction attempts; greater usage than anticipated or desired; jeopardizing employment, relationships or education; or lying about usage. All of these criteria, at least theoretically, can be seen in digital addiction.

Cassidy, (2014) noted that almost 4 in 10 young people fear they are addicted to the internet, this research also noted that youngsters could leave themselves vulnerable to cyber bullying. Rao, India, and Reddy (2012) found that addicts spend about forty (not attribute to work-related time) hours per week on the internet and video game players who play two to seven hours per day become less aware of what is going on around them even when they are not playing. Those who use the internet excessively have a different brain composition than those who spend less than two hours each day (Cohen, 2011). This is not the only frightening effect that too much technology can have on a person there are more to be reviewed by this paper.

What is Digital Addiction?

In order to explain what digital addiction is, it is important to define an addictive behavior. Addiction according to Cash (2011) begins to take hold when we do it too much; the brain is forced to withdraw neuro-receptors in an effort to restore balance especially when we no longer get the high from the same level of activity or drug use. In the case of behavioral addictions, that withdrawal involves primarily psychological symptoms (irritability, restlessness, poor concentration, increased anxiety and depression, etc). Once an addiction takes hold, the addict is either chasing another high or trying to avoid withdrawal. This, in turn, leads to obsession and engaging in the behavior in spite of negative consequences. Addictive behavior is also reported to mean compulsively repeating a behavior at the cost of everything in life. The addict may not sleep, miss out on relationships, social interactions, health, well-being. Any addictive behavior will cause the same damage in the brain at the receptors as a drug will do (CBS, 2012).

Wikipedia (2014) states that digital addict is colloquially used to describe a person whose interaction with technology is verging on excessive, threatening to absorb their attention above all else and consequently having a negative impact on the well-being of the user. Wikipedia (2014) explains further that when it is used as a conversational phrase, digital addict describes an increasingly common dependence on devices in the digital age. The phrase "Digital addiction" is used to pinpoint the possible warning signs in being over exposed to technological gadgets. The rate at which digital gadgets is used in daily activities is ever-increasing and the possibilities of becoming dependent upon them is becoming frightening.

Digital addict is used as an overarching phrase to suggest an increasing trend of compulsive behavior amongst users of technological devices, recognizing that over-exposure to and over-use of technology can result in dependence, leading to behavioral symptoms similar to any addictive disorder, as the user neglects to maintain a healthy balance between using technology and socializing outside of it. The negative side-effects of overusing technology is attracting increasing attention as a legitimate psychological disorder. Unrestrained use of technological devices may impact upon developmental, social, mental and physical well-being and result in symptoms likened to other behavioral addiction (Woollaston, 2013). Some studies have sought to establish a connection between internet use and patterns of behavior and recommended further study within an appendix of the physiological manual that will demonstrate the addictive qualities of technology as warranting further medical and academic research. (Jerald, 2008; Ollie, 2013).

Digital addiction is therefore a behavior-oriented addiction and maybe described as the physical and mental dependence on the use of digital devices. Whilst still debated, the potential for internet or digital devices to have addictive qualities is an emerging concern. A research shows that the majority of students studied to be “addicted” to their technological devices, when forcibly separated from technology exhibited symptoms similar to those experienced when withdrawn from an addictive substance (International Centre for Media and the Public Agenda, 2011). The potential developmental side-effects of internet use are also recognized by the American Academy of Pediatrics in children under two years of age (Council of Communications and Media, 2011). Furthermore, South Korea's concern for the attachment its younger generation has to technology is even greater, with their parliament considering passing a law to curb obsessive game use within the country by classifying online gaming as a potentially anti-social addiction (Cavaliere, 2008).

Apart from digital addiction researchers have also reported another technological addiction known as Internet addiction disorder (IAD), also called problematic or pathological Internet use. It is characterized by an individual's inability to control his or her use of the Internet, which may eventually result in marked distress and functional impairments of general life such as work or academic performance, social interaction, occupational interest and behavioral problems (Aboujoude, 2010). Kids can get natural high when logging onto the internet and when playing the latest video game, or instant-messaging with their friends. There can be an almost compulsive need to get the digital boost. This need is not going unnoticed by professionals.

What Are The Different Types of Digital Addictions?

Digital addictions manifest in several ways that cover various degrees and areas of technological usage. The following are as listed by Gandolfi (2010) and PsychGuides.com (2014)

- Media addiction: Television, movies, video, games, music.
- Information overload: Too much online surfing which leads to decreased productivity at work and fewer interactions with family members.
- Compulsive Addiction: Excessive time spent on the phone or in online activities such as gaming, trading of stocks, gambling and even auctions; often leads to overspending and problems at work.
- Cybersex Addiction: too much surfing of porn sites; often affect real-life relationships.
- Cyber-relationship Addiction: Excessive use of social networking sites to create

relationships rather than spending time with family or friends; may destroy real-life relationships.

Others are Virtual Addiction, Internet Addiction and On-line Solicitation. Gandolfi (2010) also provided a new list of other types of digital addiction to include Facebook Addition Disorder (FAD), YouTube Addiction Disorder (YAD), Google Search Addiction disorder (GSAD), Widget Addiction Disorder (WAD), Twitter Addiction Disorder (TAD), Blackberry Addiction Disorder (BAD).

Possible Reasons for Digital Addiction

The world is much busier now than ever before; from work, to errands, to schools, to shopping, almost everyone is constantly on the go. Today's digital technology enables us cut down on traveling by making phone calls, surfing the web, sending e-mail, and text messages all with one small device. While the use of phone and other socially interactive digital devices have been very convenient, continuous use and dependence will likely lead to the addiction of these digital devices. A DoubleClick poll recently found that as many as four in ten Americans consider their high speed internet connections "essential" to their daily lives convenient in everyday and another two in ten said that they felt the same way about their CD and DVD players, along with their cable subscription (Bosworth, 2005). Technological gadgets have become a necessity rather than a convenience. Indeed the use of different technological gadget has brought about great reduction in interpersonal relationships and face-to-face interaction and thereby negatively impacting life at home, work and play. The reliance on technology may therefore be a possible reason for addiction.

Sunwoo and Rando (2002) enumerated some reasons for digital addiction to include: personal factors such as low self-efficacy, introspective characteristics, impulsive behaviors, lack of communication skills and a feeling of isolation. Other possible reasons for internet addiction is social in nature, such as weak family support, and a combination of socio psychological factors derived from interpersonal relationship between the individual and the family. Internet-related factors such as easier internet access, longer internet usage-time, and superior internet skills are also possible reasons for addiction. Human beings are often motivated by a need to feel a sense of belonging; however, those who experience social anxiety and those who fear having face-to-face conversations usually turn to their phones and the internet to fulfill this need (Pierce, 2009).

Cell phones have also provided the freedom to busy parents, enabling them to engage in family activities with their children during work hours (Lanigan, 2009). The integration of computers into homes has also allowed people to keep up with relatives at different corners of the world with just the click of the mouse thanks to e-mail and social networking websites such as Facebook and many more. While technology has provided instant access to family members, it has lead to isolation from face to face interaction. Conversations that were once held at the dinner table are now being replaced by cold text messages. While the medium effectively relays the message, it lacks the substance that a face-to-face conversation provides, Gandolfi (2010) reported that 83% of kids in the US who don't have friends socially use the internet to find and keep online friends. A lot of people including children now hang out in web cam, cell phones, e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms, blogs, discussion boards, web pages, download/upload sites, facebook, twitter and so much more.

Furthermore, people are getting busier and adopting easy and fast lifestyles. Quality family time is now hard to come by, yet when the time is created it is spent in front of a screen and planned around the media, such as TV shows. Even when family members spend time together by using media in proximity to one another, they often engage in separate activity (Bugeja, 2005). For example, it is common to see a family in a car on a family trip with the parents making a business call on their cell phone while the kids in the backseat watch DVD (Aric, 2010). Indeed the habit of using digital technology on a daily basis has increased the time people spend looking at computer screens than at each other and visiting homepages rather than homes.

Risk Factors for Digital Addiction

The risk associated with digital addiction are numerous and not limited to the ones presented in this article. The summaries as presented by Helpguide (2013) are listed below:

• **Suffering from Anxiety:** The use of digital devices to distract self from worries and fears leads to anxiety disorder such as obsessive-compulsive disorder which may contribute to excessive email checking and compulsive Internet use.

• **Depression:** The Internet can be an escape from feelings of depression, but too much time online can make things worse. Internet addiction further contributes to stress, isolation and loneliness.

• **Presence of other Addictions:** Many Internet addicts suffer from other addictions, such as drugs, alcohol, gambling, and sex,

• **Lack of Social Support:** internet addicts often use social network sites, instant messaging, or online gaming as a safe way of establishing new relationships and more confidently relating to others.

• **Unhappiness:** the Internet could feel more comfortable than real-life friends.

• **Stress:** While some people use the internet to relieve stress, it can have a counterproductive effect. The longer the time spent online, the higher the stress levels will be.

• **Cyberbullying:** excessive use of the internet will also lead to cyberbullying which has been described as the bullying that takes place using electronic technology. Electronic technology includes devices and equipment such as cell phones, computers, and tablets as well as communication tools including social media sites, text messages, chat, and websites. Examples of cyberbullying include mean text messages or emails, rumors sent by email or posted on social networking sites, and embarrassing pictures, videos, websites, or fake profiles.

The Effects of Digital Addiction

Excessive gaming, viewing online pornography, emailing and text messaging have been identified as causes of a compulsive-impulsive disorder by Dr Jerald Block, a leading psychiatrist and author of an editorial for a respected American Journal of Psychiatry. Block, (2008) argues that the disorder is now so common that it merits inclusion in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders and stated that digital addiction has four main components. These are, Excessive use; often associated with a loss of sense of time or a neglect of basic drives, Withdrawal; including feelings of anger, tension and/or depression when the digital gadget is inaccessible, The need for better gadgets; more software, or more hours of use with negative repercussions, including arguments, lying, poor achievement,

social isolation and fatigue. Block (2008) concluded that digital addiction is now a serious public health issue that should be officially recognized as a clinical disorder. People with this illness show signs of “a loss of sense of time or a neglect of basic drives, withdrawal, feelings of anger, tension, and/or depression” when deprived of access to computers and other digital technologies.

Lin, Zhou, Du, Qin, Zhao, Xu and Lei (2012) reported a primary case study in South Korea, which has the greatest use of broadband in the world. 10 people died from blood clots for remaining seated for long periods in internet cafes. South Korea now 'considers internet addiction as one of its most serious public health issues'. The government estimates that around 210,000 South Korean children are affected and in need of treatment, of whom 80 per cent might need drugs targeting the brain and nearly a quarter could need to go to hospital. An average primary school pupil spends about 23 hours per week gaming, Block (2008) also noted that another 1.2 million are believed to be at risk of addiction and required basic counseling. There has been alarm over a rising number of digital addicts dropping out of school to spend more time on computers.

The “addiction” to digital technology does not only have the potential to affect the mental well-being but can also cause intolerance among users to others around, especially when in public. Young people are undoubtedly becoming very rude because of overuse or misuse of digital technology. This rudeness and lack of manners can be observed nearly everywhere - from phones ringing during classes, to aggressive driving while on the phone, to offensive language during phone calls in public. In 2001, Public Agenda, a nonprofit research organization, surveyed approximately 2000 Americans via telephone in order to examine their attitudes regarding moral and ethical behavior associated with phone use. Almost half of the participants say they often see people using cell phones in a loud or annoying manner in public, yet only 17% of cell phone users admitted participating in this annoying behavior. The results of this poll concluded that people are unaware of their lack of manners or are just simply in denial (Carter, 2006).

The amount of time spends immersed in the media environment affects the way one behaves and interacts outside of that space. The student who spends nearly 30 hours a week on a Blackberry will be prone to taking a phone call during a class, when in religious places, or at other inappropriate times. They may also stay awake at night for chats and browsing. According to Professor Michael Bugaja of Iowa State University, the availability of media invites abuse, and when these abuses become habitual, these actions cease to be taboo. Bugaja calls this phenomenon “digital displacement” and defines this “as what happens when the demands of the real-world conflict with those of the virtual, resulting in too many people paying too much attention to gadgets and ignoring reality” (Jagadesh, 2013; Mandell, 2007).

The addiction to digital technology and its products have seriously distracted adolescents from their school work Gandolfi (2010), can cause serious health problems; a study finds that internet addiction may actually damage the brain – the same as too much alcohol or drugs (CBS News 2012). Another study attempted to link illegal downloading of online content and internet addiction to inappropriate and even “deviant” behavior in teenagers (Navarro, Marcum, Higgins and Ricketts, 2014). Depression and bi-polar disorder in its depressive swing were co-morbid features of pathological internet use (Young, 1999) smoking, drug abuse were also related to digital addiction (Gencer, 2012). Indeed today's technology calls attention in several ways at once (texting and driving, listening to music while doing homework, talking on the phone while surfing the internet etc). This means only

partial attention is given to each task that is performed and the stress placed on the brain causes burnout (Rao, 2012) or leads to “popcorn brain” as noted by Cohen, (2011). Digital addiction is also directly linked to people who have social anxiety (Razieh, 2012).

These are not the only adverse affects of abusing technology. When people become more isolated and interact more with technology, gene transcription starts to malfunction, immune systems are disturbed, and there are more heart risks. They also have a higher risk of contracting a chronic disease (Das, 2011). Technology addiction affects the way brains recall information (Rao, 2012). It also reduced motor and psychological development (Jagadesh, 2013). In addition to the social and physical effects, there are also psychological effects. People who are addicted to technology regularly experience irritability, and do not think clearly (Rao, 2012). Part of the reason why certain technologies like online games and applications on a smart phone are so addictive is because they give those who use them “psychological highs” (Cash and McDaniel, 2014). Technology is clearly addictive and has many negative outcomes. Surveys show that digital addiction interferes with night's sleep leading to headache, body pain and fatigue. This is a major, health issue and calls for health education. A survey, shows that 33% of mobile workers admitted that they check their phones for email and message throughout the night. 50% of those surveyed said, they wouldn't even think of going to bed without have their phone's tucked under their pillows. This may not only present a medical challenges but also personal safety challenges.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION FOR SAFETY EDUCATION

The need for health and safety education in reducing the problem of digital addiction cannot be over emphasized. This is because digital addiction has a lot of negative impact on the health and safety of individuals including children and adolescents. There are evidences that technological garget such as Smartphone, ipad, tablet, etc usage is responsible to blur the distinctions between the work and family life (Idugboe, 2011; Block, 2008; Dong, Lu, Zhou, and Zhaor, 2011). Due to the simple and light designs of the devices, most employees now take their work into the home domain which results in work home interference (WHI). As a consequence, the blurring work and family life might worsen work-family balance or even lead to the disintegration of such family, leaving the children to grow under a single parent.

It is also essential to provide people with safety education concerning cyber bullying which is another issue connected to digital and internet addiction. People especially children who are bullied are more likely to use alcohol and drugs, skip school/work, experience in-person bullying, be unwilling to attend school/work, have lower self-esteem and have more health problems.

Cohen (2011) warned that it may be dangerous if patients start avoiding personal interactions with doctors for mandatory tasks, due to the increase of people who now seek for medical help-on-line and even search names of drugs for different health challenges. The study by Pei Zheng, (2006) showed that addiction to technological gargets had increased the rate of road accidents. Another study by Bianchi and Philips (2005) reported that young drivers with mobile phone use addiction featured prominently in automobile accidents, this study supports community concerns about mobile phone use, and identified groups that should be targeted in any intervention campaigns. Health and safety education is necessary in reducing the rate of health problems and accidents associated to digital addiction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As we transit from a fully wired society to a wireless one, people especially children and youths deserve adequate safeguards and protections against the attendant risks of the digital technological revolution. Health and safety education is recommended to provide age and gender sensitive education on the good of digital technology use and the bad of digital addiction. For example, education should emphasize on the health effect of getting addicted to digital technology.

Cassidy (2014) recommends firstly that a definition of internet addiction that is both validated and applicable to children, adolescents and adults alike should be developed. Secondly, that a better scientific understanding of which types of usage posed the greatest risk of addiction. For example, virtual reality games in particular, where participants assume other identities or collaborate with team members all over the globe, may pose the greatest risk of addiction, since frequent and continuous online presence is both vital and expected; moreover, going offline can have penalties associated with it. The profit margin of these new, subscription-based games is based entirely on keeping people playing and therefore paying. Purveyors of these products therefore have a perverse incentive to develop addictive games. Thirdly, effective primary prevention strategies need to be developed, tested and implemented. Limits on screen time of all types are important for all children, but in the advent of ubiquitous access these are increasingly difficult to enforce. Providers, parents and teachers require approaches that are proven effective and that allow for necessary and even healthy internet usage. Fourthly, a targeted prevention approach, identifying children at greatest risk for addiction, is also important. Children with preexisting psychological morbidities may be at greatest risk, and their internet usage should be more explicitly monitored and regulated by guardians and protectors.

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