



Digital Civic Education as a Strategy for Promoting Human Capital Development among Youths in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State

Abstract

This study examined digital civic education as a strategy for promoting human capital development among youths in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised of youths residing in the study area, while data were collected using a researcher-developed Digital Civic Education and Human Capital Development Questionnaire (DCEHCDQ). The instrument was validated by three experts in Adult Education, Educational Technology, and Measurement and Evaluation, and a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.79 was obtained. Data were collected and analysed using frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation, with a criterion mean of 2.50 used for decision-making. The findings revealed that youths were exposed to digital civic education to a low extent, with a cluster mean of 1.62. The findings also showed that human capital was developed among the youths to a low extent, with a cluster mean of 1.88. The study concluded that youths in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area had limited exposure to digital civic education and reported a low extent of human capital development in areas such as digital competence, communication, collaboration, problem-solving, critical thinking, employability, entrepreneurship and innovation. The study recommended the strengthening of structured digital civic education and practical digital-skills programmes to enhance youths' digital competence, responsible civic participation, employability, entrepreneurship, critical thinking and lifelong learning.

Keywords: Digital civic education, human capital development, digital literacy, youths and adult education

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Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has transformed how youths acquire knowledge, communicate, learn, work and participate in society. Digital platforms provide opportunities for

information access, learning, collaboration and civic participation, but they also expose users to misinformation, privacy risks and irresponsible online behaviour. Consequently, digital citizenship education has become increasingly important in developing the

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knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required for responsible participation in digital society (Council of Europe, 2019; UNESCO, 2024). Digital civic education may therefore be understood as an educational process through which individuals acquire the competencies needed to access, evaluate and use digital information for civic awareness, communication, participation and responsible social interaction. It extends civic education into digital spaces by addressing digital rights and responsibilities, online communication, information evaluation, civic dialogue and ethical technology use (Ribble, 2015; Council of Europe, 2019).

The relevance of digital civic education is particularly evident among youths, who increasingly depend on digital technologies for education, communication, employment information and social participation. Nigerian literature has similarly highlighted the need to equip young people with competencies for safe, responsible and productive engagement with digital technologies (Nwachukwu & Vikoo, 2023; Apata et al., 2025). Such competencies include access to reliable civic information, participation in digital discussions, responsible online communication, understanding of digital rights and responsibilities, and critical evaluation of information (Council of Europe, 2019; Ribble, 2015). These competencies are important because meaningful digital participation requires

more than access to devices; it requires the ability to use information critically, communicate effectively and participate responsibly.

Human capital development refers to the acquisition of knowledge, skills and capabilities that enhance individuals' productivity and their capacity to contribute to economic and social development. For youths, it includes knowledge and skills development, digital competence, employability, entrepreneurship and innovation, critical thinking, problem-solving and social competencies (World Bank, 2024, 2026). Education remains a major means of developing these capabilities because it enables individuals to acquire and apply knowledge and skills relevant to employment, productivity, innovation and lifelong learning (World Bank, 2026). Digital civic education may therefore provide an avenue through which youths develop transferable competencies that have value beyond civic participation.

The present study focuses on digital civic information, online civic learning resources, digital civic discussions, responsible digital communication, digital rights and responsibilities, and evaluation of civic information as dimensions of digital civic education. Human capital development is examined through knowledge and skills development, digital competence, employability skills, entrepreneurship and innovation, critical thinking and

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problem-solving, and civic-social competence. These dimensions are consistent with digital citizenship frameworks that emphasise digital literacy, communication, active participation, rights and responsibilities, privacy and information evaluation (Ribble, 2015; Council of Europe, 2019). They also reflect the broader understanding of human capital as a combination of knowledge, skills and capabilities that can improve individual and societal productivity (World Bank, 2026).

The study is anchored on Ribble's Digital Citizenship framework and Human Capital Theory. Ribble (2015) emphasises responsible, appropriate and productive use of digital technologies through competencies relating to digital literacy, communication, rights and responsibilities, safety and participation. Human Capital Theory, on the other hand, provides a basis for understanding knowledge and skills acquired through education as productive capacities that can improve individual and societal outcomes (World Bank, 2026). Together, the perspectives provide a basis for examining digital civic education and human capital development among youths.

Empirical studies indicate growing attention to digital citizenship and youth digital competence in Nigeria. Nwachukwu and Vikoo (2023) highlighted the need for digital

citizenship education to prepare learners for responsible technology use, communication and collaboration, while Apata et al. (2025) identified digital literacy, ethical participation and institutional support as important elements of digital citizenship development. Ogunsola *et al.* (2026) further reported that digital access alone does not guarantee meaningful youth civic participation and emphasised the importance of digital skills and supportive institutional structures. However, these studies have not specifically examined the extent of digital civic education and human capital development among youths in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area. This geographical and empirical gap provides the basis for the present study.

Statement of the Problem

The increasing use of digital technologies among youths creates opportunities for learning, civic awareness, communication and skills development. However, access to digital platforms does not necessarily mean that young people possess the knowledge and competencies required to evaluate information, communicate responsibly, participate constructively in civic matters or convert digital experiences into productive skills.

In Nigeria, concerns about digital literacy, responsible online participation and institutional support continue to feature in the literature. At the same time, there is

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limited empirical evidence on the extent to which youths in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area are exposed to digital civic education and the extent of their human capital development.

The absence of such local evidence makes it difficult to determine the current situation and the areas requiring educational attention. The study therefore investigates the extent of digital civic education and human capital development among youths in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.

Purpose of the Study

The study investigated digital civic education as a strategy for promoting human capital development among youths in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the study sought to determine:

- i. the extent of digital civic education among youths in Ikot Ekpene L.GA
- ii. the extent of human capital development among the youths in Ikot Ekpene L.GA

Research Questions

- i. To what extent are youths exposed to digital civic education in Ikot Ekpene in Ikot Ekpene L.GA?

- ii. To what extent is human capital developed among the youths in Ikot Ekpene in Ikot Ekpene L.GA?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which was appropriate. The study was conducted in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, and the population comprised youths who met the specified age criteria and resided in the area. A sample 148 eligible youths was selected through multistage sampling, involving the selection of relevant communities and subsequently eligible youths from the selected communities. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire titled Digital Civic Education and Human Capital Development Questionnaire (DCEHCDQ).

The instrument comprised three sections: Section A for demographic information, Section B for digital civic education, and Section C for human capital development. Items on digital civic education covered digital civic information, online civic learning resources, digital civic discussions, responsible digital communication, digital rights and responsibilities, and evaluation of civic information, while human capital development covered knowledge and skills development, digital competence, employability skills, entrepreneurship and innovation, critical thinking and problem-solving, and civic-social

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competence. The instrument used a four-point scale of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The criterion mean was 2.50, calculated as $(4 + 3 + 2 + 1)/4$; hence, mean scores of 2.50 and above indicated a high extent, while scores below 2.50 indicated a low extent.

Three experts in Adult Education, Educational Technology, and Measurement and Evaluation validated the instrument for clarity, relevance and adequacy. Its reliability was established through a pilot study involving youths outside the study area, using Cronbach's alpha, and a reliability coefficient of 0.79 was obtained, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. The researcher,

assisted by three briefed research assistants, administered and retrieved the questionnaires after obtaining the required permission and informed consent, while confidentiality and voluntary participation were maintained. Data were analysed using frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. Frequency and percentage were used to summarise the respondents' demographic characteristics, while mean and standard deviation were used to answer the two research questions. Decisions were based on the 2.50 criterion mean. Since the study was descriptive, no inferential test of relationship or causal effect was applied.

Results

Research Question 1

To what extent are youths exposed to digital civic education in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area?

Table 1: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations on the Extent of Youths' Exposure to Digital Civic Education

S/N	Item Statement	Mean (x)	SD	Remark
1	I use digital platforms to obtain information about issues affecting my community.	1.12	.370	Low Extent
2	I access online materials to learn about my civic rights and responsibilities.	1.78	.428	Low Extent
3	I use social media and other digital platforms to discuss issues affecting my community.	1.58	.524	Low Extent
4	I participate in online discussions about public and community matters.	1.40	.502	Low Extent
5	I communicate respectfully with others when discussing civic issues online.	1.72	.483	Low Extent
6	I understand my rights and responsibilities when using digital platforms for civic activities.	1.89	.330	Low Extent
7	I take measures to protect my privacy when participating in online civic activities.	1.35	.508	Low Extent

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8	I check the reliability of civic information before sharing it online.	1.93	.310	Low Extent
	Digital platforms have increased my awareness of civic issues and community affairs.	1.81	.578	Low Extent
	Cluster Mean	1.62	.448	Low Extent

Note: Criterion mean = 2.50.

Table 1 shows that the mean scores for the eight items ranged from 1.12 to 1.93, with a cluster mean of 1.62. Since the cluster mean of 1.62 is below the criterion mean of 2.50, the result indicates that youths were exposed to digital civic education to a low extent in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area. The highest mean score was recorded for checking the reliability of civic information before sharing it online ($\bar{x}$ = 1.93), followed by understanding rights and responsibilities when using digital platforms for civic activities ($\bar{x}$ = 1.89). The lowest mean score was recorded for using digital platforms to obtain information about

issues affecting the community ($\bar{x}$ = 1.12). Other items, including accessing online materials on civic rights and responsibilities, participating in online civic discussions, communicating respectfully online and protecting privacy during online civic activities, also recorded mean scores below the criterion mean. The standard deviations ranged from 0.310 to 0.524, indicating relatively low to moderate variation in the respondents' responses. Therefore, the result indicates that youths in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area were exposed to digital civic education to a low extent.

Research Question 2

To what extent is human capital developed among the youths?

Table 2: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations on the Extent of Human Capital Development among Youths

S/N	Item Statement	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD	Remark
1	My knowledge and skills have improved through the use of digital learning resources.	2.07	1.013	Low Extent
2	I have developed skills for using digital technologies effectively.	1.69	.861	Low Extent
3	My ability to communicate and collaborate with others has improved through digital activities.	2.12	1.126	Low Extent
4	Digital learning has improved my ability to solve problems.	1.71	.879	Low Extent
5	I am better able to think critically about information obtained from digital sources.	1.80	.938	Low Extent
6	Digital learning has improved my ability to identify employment opportunities.	1.76	.872	Low Extent
7	I have acquired skills that can help me become self-employed or start a business.	2.03	1.079	Low Extent
8	Digital learning has improved my ability to generate and develop	1.82	.934	Low Extent

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new ideas.			
My use of digital resources has encouraged me to engage in lifelong learning.	1.90	1.149	Low Extent
Cluster Mean	1.88	.983	Low Extent

Note: Criterion mean = 2.50.

Table 2 shows that the mean scores for the eight items ranged from 1.69 to 2.12, with a cluster mean of 1.88. Since the cluster mean of 1.88 is below the criterion mean of 2.50, the result indicates that human capital was developed among the youths to a low extent. The highest mean score was recorded for improvement in the ability to communicate and collaborate through digital activities ($x = 2.12$), followed by improvement in knowledge and skills through digital learning resources ($x = 2.07$) and acquisition of skills that could support self-employment or starting a business ($x = 2.03$). The lowest mean score was recorded for the development of skills for using digital technologies effectively ($x = 1.69$). Other items relating to problem-solving, critical thinking, identification of employment opportunities and generation of new ideas also recorded mean scores below the criterion mean of 2.50. The standard deviations ranged from 0.861 to 1.126, indicating some variation in the respondents' responses. Therefore, the result indicates that human capital was developed among the youths in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area to a low extent.

Discussion

The finding of the study revealed that youths were exposed to digital civic education to a low extent in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, as indicated by the cluster mean of 1.62, which was below the criterion mean of 2.50. The result suggests limited exposure to digital platforms for obtaining civic information, learning about civic rights and responsibilities, participating in online civic discussions, communicating responsibly, protecting privacy and evaluating civic information. This finding contrasts with the emphasis of the Council of Europe (2019), which identified digital citizenship competencies such as responsible participation, appropriate communication, awareness of rights and responsibilities, and critical engagement with digital information as important for effective participation in digital society. Similarly, UNESCO (2024) emphasised the need for learners to develop competencies for evaluating information, communicating responsibly and participating constructively in digital environments. The low extent observed in the present study therefore suggests that these competencies may not yet be sufficiently developed among the youths in the study area.

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The finding also revealed that human capital was developed among the youths to a low extent, with a cluster mean of 1.88, which was below the criterion mean of 2.50. The result indicates limited development in areas such as knowledge and skills acquisition, digital competence, communication and collaboration, problem-solving, critical thinking, employment awareness, entrepreneurship and innovation. This finding is noteworthy in relation to the World Bank's (2024, 2026) position that knowledge, skills and capabilities constitute important dimensions of human capital and contribute to productivity, employability and lifelong development. Similarly, Apata et al. (2025) emphasised the importance of digital literacy and responsible digital engagement in preparing individuals for productive participation in contemporary society. The low extent of human capital development found in the study suggests a need for greater educational attention to the development of practical digital and productive competencies among youths.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concluded that youths in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area were exposed to digital civic education to a low extent. The youths reported limited engagement with digital platforms for civic information, online civic discussions, responsible digital communication, understanding of digital rights and

responsibilities, privacy protection and evaluation of civic information. The study also concluded that human capital was developed among the youths to a low extent, particularly in relation to digital competence, knowledge and skills, communication and collaboration, problem-solving, critical thinking, employment awareness, entrepreneurship and innovation. The findings therefore indicate the need for increased educational attention to digital civic competencies and human-capital-related skills among youths in the study area.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommended that:

- i. Adult education providers and community learning centres should strengthen digital civic education programmes for youths by providing structured learning opportunities on civic information, digital rights and responsibilities, responsible online communication, privacy protection and critical evaluation of digital information.
- ii. Government agencies and youth-development organisations should expand practical digital-skills programmes that focus on digital competence, employability, entrepreneurship, problem-solving, critical thinking and innovation.

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