QUALITY ASSURANCE AND SKILL ACQUISITION IN OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract
The important role of Office Technology and Management (OTM) in the production of skilled and competent workforce for sustainable national development will be a mirage if quality and effective teaching and learning is not maintained. It is against this backdrop that the paper examined quality assurance and skill acquisition in OTM for sustainable national development. It discussed the meaning of quality assurance, skill acquisition, objectives of OTM, strategies for qualitative OTM programme, sustainable national development, OTM and national development and factors militating against quality assurance in OTM for sustainable national development. The paper concluded that the non-sustainability of the Nigerian economy is as a result of government’s neglect of Vocational and Technical education to which Office Technology and Management is a viable option. The paper recommended that management of polytechnics and departments of OTM should avoid window dressing for accreditation and set up monitoring teams to monitor and supervise the teaching process to ensure quality teaching.

Keywords: Quality Assurance; Skill Acquisition; Office Technology and Management; Sustainable National Development.

Introduction
Quality has been the major focus of institutions and governments in the education sector. Most countries, including Nigeria, have established systems and procedures of quality assurance (QA) in institutions of learning. These procedures are aimed at achieving functional education for the sustainable development of the countries. Highlighting the need for QA in the educational sector, Koffi and Etukudo (2016) reported that, there are concerns for a potential decline in academic standards against the background of increase in students’ population. In the view of Amesi (2016), quality in tertiary education is important because tertiary institutions are accountable to society, to employers, to students, and to each other.

Notwithstanding the QA systems put in place by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the Polytechnics for effective skill acquisition in OTM, little evidence exists to show that the QA practices in OTM is meeting its expectation and therefore associated with many challenges. Ezeani (2014) observed that the Office Technology and Management (OTM) programme is a productive and functional form of education which leads itself to self-employment, self-reliance and consequently self-actualization. The OTM programme is therefore a vital instrument for nation building and for achieving government developmental objectives, especially the quest for sustainable national development. The OTM programme is structured to equip its recipients with the necessary knowledge, attitude and skills to be self-reliant economically. Unfortunately, lapses and inadequacies have plagued the process of skill acquisition in the OTM programme in Nigeria, so that the desired quality in OTM graduates is not achieved. The present OTM programme has failed to equip its recipients with the needed knowledge, attitude and skills to be able to live in and contribute to the development of the nation due to decay in the system brought about by inadequate functional equipment, inadequate infrastructure, dearth of qualified staff, inadequate textbooks, inadequate funding and so on.
Despite policy measures for quality assurance such as minimum standards, accreditation, carrying capacity, visitation, impact assessment, research and development, structures, infrastructures, utilities and so on, these problems tend to defy solutions and keep re-occurring. The concern of this paper is how OTM graduates can acquire the necessary skills to become self-reliant and contribute to sustainable development of the country.

The Meaning of Quality Assurance

The term quality assurance refers to mechanisms and processes used to lead to the maintenance and improvement of quality assurance. It also has come to mean a guarantee or certification that particular standards are being met. Onyesom and Ashibogwu (2013) opined that quality assurance (QA) refers to performance measures designed by the authorities for assessing the performance of educational institutions with a view to ensuring that the learning outcomes meet the needs of each society. Bewaran, Moris and Sokyes (2014) viewed quality assurance as a planned and systematic process of assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, and improving the programme of an institution to determine whether acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being met and maintained. From another viewpoint, QA refers to established procedures, processes and standard systems that support and ensure effective delivery of educational services (Kontio, 2012).

From the foregoing therefore, quality assurance can be seen as the mechanism put in place to ensure effectiveness, efficiency and maintain the degree of excellence of the educational programme and products or services in relation to their context, mission and stated objectives.

Quality assurance mechanisms can be categorized in to two, viz: External quality assurance mechanism and internal quality assurance mechanism.

i. External QA is a situation whereby there is a review by an external agency (e.g. the National Board for Technical Education or any professional body) which evaluates the operations of an institution or its programmes to find out the level of compliance within the set standards (Okae-Adjei, 2016). It is carried out through the instrumentality of accreditation which involves a self-study or self-evaluation, peer reviews by panel of experts and reporting system. In this case the NBTE accreditation.

ii. Internal (institutional) QA is the internal policies and mechanisms of an institution or programme which ensures that the institution is fulfilling its purposes and is in conformance with the standards that apply to higher education in general or to the profession or discipline in particular (Okae-Adjei, 2016). Both external and internal approaches to quality assurance are important in relative proportions for a successful QA in the OTM programme. While internal QA may lead to continuous quality improvement, external QA system plays a supportive and facilitative role to the internal practices.

Skill Acquisition

A skill can be defined as the ability to do something which is acquired by training, while acquisition is the gaining of something for one self. Skill according to Bolt-Lee and Foster (2003) in Ezeani (2012) is the art of possessing the ability to power, authority, or competency etc. to do the task required of an individual on the job. Inalegwu, (2016) viewed skill as “expertness, aptitude and competences appropriate for a particular job. It has to do with expert knowledge and creative reasoning to a level of mastery”. In order to acquire these skills, the individual needs to acquire basic training or knowledge levels related to the task to be performed whether through formal, informal or combination of the two.

Okoro and Ursula (2012) opined that two fundamental issues are used when a skill is to be acquired.

i. The first is the conditions which promote acquisition of the skill, and

ii. The second is the change that will occur when the skill is acquired.

Skill acquisition therefore is the ability that an individual acquires through training, education or experience, which enables the individual to effectively carry out a function for the benefit of self and mankind.

There are many processes of acquisition and development of skills. Okoro and Ursula (2012) outlined the four main stages of skill acquisition to include:

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i. Analyze and identify the current and foreseeable skill needs of the individual and relative importance of these.

ii. Identify the individual’s own personal goals, objectives and analyze and evaluate his/her own skills and resources in relation to these.

iii. Produce a realistic personal development plan for the individual

iv. Monitor on-going performance on follow-up of the individual.

It should be noted that when an individual set out to learn a new skill, he usually starts with a communicable programme of instruction. Good learners do not jump into an operation without first receiving the necessary verbal instruction. Thus the instruction given in bits, units modules in stages, perhaps must be fused together to form a skilled performance.

**Objectives of Office Technology and Management**

Office Technology and Management (OTM) is an aspect of Vocational and Technical education which among other things emphasizes job competencies, career preparation and work adjustment. The expected quality delivery standards and objectives of OTM as specified in the Curriculum and Course Specification for both ND and HND in Office Technology and Management include:

1. Acquisition of Secretarial skills
2. Acquisition by ability to write shorthand for three minutes in varied materials at 1.3 syllabic intensity dictated at 80 WAM and 1.4 syllabic intensity of 100 WAM and transcribe on the computer with a minimum of 95% accuracy for both ND and HND respectively.
3. Typing effectively various office jobs and acquiring a copying rate of 40 WAM and 50 WAM for ND and HND respectively on passages not below 1.3 syllabic intensity with 98% accuracy.
4. Acquisition of general education.
5. Laying the foundation for advanced studies (NBTE, 2004).

**Strategies for Qualitative Office Technology and Management Programme**

To meet the policy goal of the National Policy on Education (2013) and the challenges facing OTM programme, the following strategies must be adhered to:

- OTM institutions must institute a flexible, workable and adaptable programme through curriculum innovation that will effectively become a driving factor for the implementation of socio-economic development strategies.
- Ensure high quality and appropriate skilled OTM professionals through the use of qualified educationist/teachers in the implementation of its programme
- Ensure the promotion and proper coordination of education, industry and work environment through effective professionalization.
- Encourage continuing business education from primary to tertiary institutions (Koffi&Etukudo, 2016)

It is in view of the above that Adegbesan (2011) observed that ensuring qualitative OTM programme will serve the following benefits:

i. To serve as indispensable component of quality control strategy,

ii. To ensure and maintain higher standard,

iii. To assist in monitoring and supervision,

iv. To determine the quality of the teacher input,

v. To determine the number of classrooms needed based on the average class size to ensure quality control,

vi. To determine the level of adequacy of the facilities available for quality control and

vii. To ensure that the financial resources available could be prudently and judiciously utilized.

**Sustainable National Development**

The veritable concept of development is based on the fact that economic, social, political and physical environment, all combine to characterize the structure of economy and the entire social system, as well as the capabilities of the people and their aspirations for better life.Umezulike and
Okoye (2013) saw sustainable development as the state of having well balanced, steady and effective use of human, material and capital resources for total economic independence of a nation without compromising the future. Abubakar, (2014) saw sustainable development as a process of improving on the range of opportunities that will enable individual humans and communities to achieve their aspirations and full potentials over a sustainable period of time while maintaining the resilience of the economic, social and environmental system. Sustainable development therefore is where there are good road networks, enough and adequate hospitals and health facilities, equal access to functional education opportunities, adequate security of lives and properties/environment, job creation and industries as well as social security support for the vulnerable citizens.

**Office Technology and Management (OTM) and National Development**

The role of OTM towards sustainable national development cannot be over-emphasized. Generally, OTM has improved economic growth and development through the development of small, medium and sometimes large scale businesses based on creativity and innovation. Some of the areas in which OTM programme has contributed to national development include:

- **Job creation and provision of employment**: OTM helps tremendously in the creation of jobs and employment opportunities for the unemployed (Oladunjoye, 2016). This has assisted in reducing social ills and menaces such as youth restiveness, armed robbery, prostitution, rituals, violent conflicts and so on, among the teeming Nigerian youths.

- **Technological Development through Office Technology**: Office Technology facilities are playing a vital role in developing and transforming the economy and also strengthening government and private sector collaboration for the attainment of sustainable national development through increase in the capability, flexibility and efficiency of channels of communication (Kelegbe, 2016).

- **Developing entrepreneurial capacity and stimulating indigenous entrepreneurs**: OTM help develop in individuals the skills to be self-employed. Being engaged in self-employment over a period of time develops the individual’s capacity and experience in the business. This in turn helps in stimulating and attracting other indigenous entrepreneurs in to such business (Duruaku & Njoku, 2013).

- **Improves the standard of living**: Being self-employed serves as a major source of income to the individual, which leads to continuous increase in income and standard of living. There are many intelligent, creative and motivated self-employed individuals who made it in business and are now more comfortable than many civil servants.

- **Reduces urban drift and enhances social status of the citizenry**: There is no doubts that increase business activities in the rural areas reduces rural-urban migration and enhances the social status and confidence of the citizenry (Bello, 2015).

- **Source of government revenue**: OTM practitioners involved in self-employment or paid employment pay government revenue in the form of tax permit, licenses or personal income tax. These will be used by government to provide different social services and amenities to the society.

- **Industrial development**: OTM leads to gradual but smooth transition from traditional to a modern industrial economy through its information and communication technology component.
Factors Militating against Quality Assurance and Skill Acquisition in OTM for Sustainable National Development

- **Window dressing for accreditation**: A situation where some institutions and in particular departments of OTM hire ad-hoc staff and equipment just for accreditation or re-accreditation exercises is unacceptable. What this means is that these hired staff and equipment are returned to their original owners immediately after the exercise, thereby compromising on the set standards by the regulating body and forcing the department back to its poor quality level before the accreditation.

- **Lack of adequate supervision**: There is no structure on ground in most Polytechnics, to adequately monitor or supervise teachers in order to ensure quality teaching. It is observed that once a business teacher is employed, he/she is assigned courses to teach and nobody monitors or supervises what he/she does. If such a teacher is inexperienced and not supervised, the students are at risk of learning things that may not lead to the desired knowledge, skills and competencies (Amoor, 2010).

- **Inadequate and unqualified personnel**: The staff strength in most of the departments of OTM in Nigerian Polytechnics is undesirable and inadequate to maintain standard. The qualification a teacher has and the years of experience matters a lot in the field of academics, especially in OTM programmes (Bupo, 2016). An inexperienced teacher finds it difficult to carry the students along and this constitutes poor teacher quality.

- **Inadequate physical facilities**: The state of physical facilities in many of the Nigerian Polytechnic is very deplorable. The shortage of equipment and facilities can affect quality teaching and learning. Quality diminishes when the facilities are inadequate or at times not available (Akpomudjere, 2014).

- **Ineffective evaluation and assessment system**: Effective evaluation and assessment enables teachers to determine whether or not learning has taken place and whether the objectives of the programme are being achieved (Amesi, 2016). A situation where students are not adequately and effectively evaluated affects the quality of products. Formative evaluation (continuous assessment) should provide feedback for both students and teachers. True evaluation of students for certification should not be compromised.

- **Inadequate funding**: Most of the problems of the educational system in Nigeria are tied to inadequate funding (Bewaran, Moris&Sokyes, 2014). Inadequate funding of the OTM programme has been a problem in the implementation of quality teaching and learning in the programme and it continues to dominate discussion on the state of OTM in Nigeria. The situation has been further worsened by the current economic recession in the country and the state owned institutions are the most hit by this development.

- **Corruption and Mismanagement of funds**: Shuaibu, Ameh and Oshiogwe (2014) observed that corruption has become a common characteristic of the Nigerian state. A situation where the funds meant for the development of infrastructure and other teaching and learning facilities are channeled in to private pockets is uncalled for. No country can forge ahead in a situation where bribery and corruption have been institutionalized. In some other situations, school administrators and others responsible for managing educational funds mismanage these funds at the detriment of the students. These affect the provision of quality education and consequently the products of the system.

**Conclusion**

The non-sustainability of the Nigerian economy is as a result of government’s neglect of Vocational and Technical education to which Office Technology and Management is a viable option. Though the OTM programme is plagued with myriads of challenges, adherence to quality in its delivery will no doubt equip its recipients with functional and valuable skills, knowledge, culture and abilities which will enable them to be self-reliant and contribute their quota to sustainable development of Nigeria.
Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for quality assurance in OTM programme to be ensured.

1. Departments of OTM should be sincere and committed to ensuring quality in their programmes by avoiding window dressing for accreditation. They should equally ensure adequate provision and preparation for accreditation exercises. This is because the exercise creates room for quality standards and improvement, since the scrutinizing agency is empowered to accredit or deny accreditation to unfit programmes.

2. Management of the Polytechnics should set up a monitoring team to monitor and supervise teachers to ensure quality teaching. Newly recruited teachers should be attached with already experienced teachers until high level of theory and strong operational ability is ensued.

3. There is need for the recruitment of adequate and qualified personnel for OTM programmes. Mechanisms for updating the competence of these personnel to imbibe current knowledge and experiences should be formulated and adhered to, since the development of a competent, skilled workforce is recognized as vital to quality assurance system.

4. To teach in the OTM programme, there must be adequate provision of facilities in terms of space, equipment to ensure quality teaching. The training environment should be like the work environment. Teaching with real materials and real situation can help to encourage the students to learn and enhance quality.

5. There is need for the formulation of policy guidelines for achieving uniformity in evaluation and assessment for OTM programmes, while making allowance for local adoption. Departments of OTM should equally provide for capacity building in evaluation and assessment for all teachers and effort should be directed towards developing teachers’ capacity to assess students’ learning and use of feedback for improvement.

6. Proprietors (in most cases government) should be committed towards improving funding for the Polytechnics. Management and Departments of OTM in particular should look beyond funding from government and engage in revenue generation through training, research and development, partnership with private organizations, alumni associations other stakeholders in OTM and public spirited individuals.

7. Government should be sincere and more committed to its anti-corruption campaign by strengthening the anti-corruption agencies in the country. The anti-corruption agencies should equally beam their search light on management of schools, school administrators, teachers and even students who are engaged in corrupt practices as this will help reduce the menace and improve the quality of education.

References


