



GAPS IN TRAINING AND PRACTICE: OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT (OTM) STUDENTS IN PERSPECTIVE

¹ACHARU FAITH TONY-OKEME, Ph.D

acharu4real@gmail.com

³MARY OIZA JACOB

divinemiracle83@gmail.com

Department of Office Technology and Management,
Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja.

²OFULUE JUSTINA IFEANYI

justinaieofulue@gmail.com

Department of Office Technology and Management,
Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku.

Abstract

The existing gap between educational institutions and the workplace has become a source of concern in view of the rising unemployment issue among graduates of tertiary institutions. The main purpose of the study was to ascertain the extent to which office technology and management students are trained in the use of modern office technologies and to find out the extent to which the training acquired by Office Technology and Management students has impacted on their ICT competencies. Two research questions were raised to guide the study. The descriptive research design was used. Two sets of questionnaires were used in collecting data for the study. Twenty managers of private business organizations and twenty supervisors in government agencies in Kogi State were randomly selected for the study. On the other hand, the entire twenty-two lecturers and One hundred and seven final year students of the Department of Office Technology and Management in the two Polytechnics in Kogi State constituted the population for the study out of which 33 students were purposively sampled. Findings showed that respondents indicated that there was a gap between training acquired in school and the actual practice of the profession in the world of work. More so, the study highlighted that adequate funding, steady power supply and availability of competent educators amongst others were key factors to the achievement of the programme objectives. Finally, it was recommended among others things that lecturers should be offered periodic training and retraining to gain competencies in ICT skills in order to impart it effectively to the students.

(Keywords: gaps, training, Practice, OTM)

Introduction

There is a great concern on the gap that exists between the educational institutions and the workplace. Graduates have so much difficulty making transition from academic life to work even though the educational institutions are supposed to provide the experiences and trainings which will help an individual make intelligent occupational choices that will advance him/her in his/her career path (Ifejika, 2015). Previous studies have revealed that the level of skill



possessed by job seekers do not match the needs and demands of employers (Oduwole, 2015). Soludo (2012), describing the Nigerian situation said, unemployment is not a problem in Nigeria rather Nigerian graduates are not employable and they are misfit for today's workplace. It is however pertinent to know that, the adequacy and worth of the educational programmes of study is measured not only in terms of how far it can assist graduates to secure employment but also to the extent that it can enable them perform effectively and efficiently on the job.

The modern business office is rapidly changing as a result of new technologies which have brought about new methods in carrying out functions performed by employees in organizations and at the centre of these new trends in organizations are office managers (secretaries). Olise (2014) observed that secretaries in organizations of yester-years were dealing with papers, worked with manual machines, relied on postal services for external communication and kept records in files placed in cabinets. Today an office manager does not deal with paper or carry out office duties manually because virtually all office tasks are handled with electronic and telecommunication gadgets.

Training involves providing employees with directed experience that enables them to be more effective in performing the various tasks that constitute their jobs (Olufunwa, 2010). When training is adequate, the experiences gained result in changes in employee's attitudes, work habits, and performance. It is crucial to bear in mind that Office Technology and Management, like any other technology based programme thrives on quality of relevance and usefulness. What is important is the extent to which the training provided assists students to enter and succeed in the work place.

Office Technology and Management Programme is an office oriented field designed to train professional secretaries/office managers to function efficiently in the world of work. Many offices have gone through several changes since establishments. These include changes in equipment, task procedures and processes basically resulting from technological developments. These changes have indeed been quite dramatic in the last two decades such that within the space of a decade several computer applications and office technologies have become outdated. In view of this trend, it has become necessary for office managers to keep abreast of new technologies in order to enhance about competence in their professional practice. Similarly, the curriculum developers and implementer are expected to be prompt in responding to these changes. To this end, Office Technology and Management programme has a responsibility to train students with the skills and competencies required to make them saleable so that diplomate of the programme do not graduate into the world of work with obsolete and irrelevant skills.

A professional secretary should be acquainted with all the competencies required in modern offices and be able to apply such knowledge in the performance of office duties (Iro, 2016). The duties of secretaries are no longer limited to typing, taking shorthand dictations, answering of telephone calls and processing of mails, but are now required to be skilled in usage of more sophisticated modern office technologies that make work easier.

It is however disheartening to know that in spite of its lofty objectives, OTM is still bedeviled by several challenges like inadequate funding; this has always been a major issue in OTM programme. The quantity and quality of equipment and machines like computers, scanners, printers among others needed for effective implementation of the programme is affected by inadequate funding (Fadare, 2014; Akarahu, 2010). Large class size is another issue bedeviling the programme. Laboratories and classes in many public polytechnics in Nigeria are overcrowded with too many students. This makes it impossible for teachers to give students individual attention needed in teaching and learning process. The high student-teacher ratio affects quality delivery of practical courses like Microsoft office applications (Agboola, 2015).

Lack of prompt review of the curriculum. Today's office is an evolving place, thus, students who are being prepared to work in offices should be adequately trained to effectively use



the emerging modern office technologies. Unfortunately, in this part of the world, curriculum are hardly promptly reviewed and even when they are eventually reviewed it takes a considerable long time for institutions to adopt them for used. Consequently, graduates are churned into the labour market grossly unprepared and unfit for the modern workplace. Lack of constant electricity supply is another problem confronting the Programme in the country. Electricity is required to power office technologies, unfortunately it is hardly available and where it is, it is epileptic in nature. Thus, the theoretical content of the curriculum is often taught leaving out the practical aspect, a situation that leave students half-baked diplomates (Nwaokolo, 2014).

Inadequate competent educators is another issue militating against the programme. It is often said that no one can give what he does not have. According to Ugoji, in Akpotohwo (2018), most of the OTM lecturers in the polytechnics were trained without modern office equipment and facilities. He opined that they were trained over twenty years ago with rickety manual typewriters as the best equipment they had access to. Unfortunately, some of these lecturers have neither been trained nor retrained with modern ICT facilities. In view of that, Onyesom and Ashibgwu (2018) asserted that no matter how properly designed an educational programme is, it cannot succeed without an adequate crop of teachers (Folorunso and Taiwo 2018).

Going by these observable scenario in most public polytechnics in Nigeria, it can be justifiably said that, students are still being trained for the office of yesteryears as contemporary modern office technologies such as; projector, scanner, computer, printer, facsimile machine, flash drive, recorder, modem, multimedia projector, paper shredder, dictating machine among others which are stipulated in the curriculum are lacking in most institutions and where these are available, they are grossly inadequate (Bongotons & Onyenwe, 2010).

The efficiency of Office Technology and Management programme could be measured and determined by the adequacy of qualitative, competence and job performance of the diplomates of the programme. It is on this note that this study attempts to assess the gap between the training of OTM students and their practice in the world of work with the view to proffering solutions to it.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study;

- i. To what extent are office technology and management students trained in the use of modern office technologies?
- ii. How much has the training acquired by Office Technology and Management students impacted on their ICT competencies?

Methodology

A descriptive survey design was used for the study. It was considered appropriate because according to Otache (2016), descriptive studies are undertaken to describe the elements or subjects being studied. The population of the study was 95 respondents comprising of 9 HND II students of Federal Polytechnic, Idah, 24 HND II students of Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja, 12 lecturers in Federal Polytechnic, Idah, 10 Lecturers in the Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja, 20 private business managers and 20 supervisors in government agencies namely; National Inland Waterways Authority, Kogi State Board of Internal Revenue, National social Insurance Trust Fund, Kogi State Environmental Protection Board, Kogi State Civil Service Commission and Kogi State Radio Corporation.

The researcher purposively sampled only 33 final year students in the two institutions. This was necessary because the study was targeted at students with experiences in the world of work and only 33 of them were on in-service training.

Ninety-five (95) copies of the questionnaire were administered by the researcher and two trained research assistants. All the copies of the questionnaire were duly completed and



retrieved. The data for the study was collected using a structured questionnaire titled: Questionnaire in Divergence in Training and Practice of Office Technology and Management (OTM) Students (QDPTOTMS). The questionnaire items were structured in a five point Likert rating scale of Very High Extent (5 points) High Extent (4 points) Moderate Extent (3 points). Low Extent (2 points) Very Low Extent (1 point). A mean score of 3.00 and above was considered as high while a mean score below it was considered as low.

The questionnaire items were validated by two experts who are Chief Lecturers in the School of Management, Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja. The instrument which contains thirty (30) and ten (10) questionnaire items respectively were designed from the relevant literature reviewed and used to collect data. With the use of Cronbach Alpha Reliability Test (CART), the reliability co-efficient calculated for the study was found to be 0.83 which indicated that the instrument for the study was reliable. The mean was used to analyse the research questions.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

This section presented and analysed the data generated in the study.

Research question one: To what extent are office technology and management students trained in the use of modern office technologies?

Table 1: Mean ratings on the opinions of students and lecturers on the extent to which office technology and management students are adequately trained on modern office technologies in Polytechnics in Kogi State.

S/NO	ITEMS	Students N=33		Lecturers N=22	
		X	Decision	X	Decision
1	Adequately trained on the effective operation of the Computer	4.12	High	4.82	High
2	Adequately trained on the effective operation of the Printer	3.33	High	4.32	High
3	Adequately trained on the effective operation of the Scanner	2.83	Low	2.86	Low
4	Adequately trained on the effective operation of the Facsimile machine	2.25	Low	1.45	Low
5	Adequately trained on the effective operation of the Photocopier	2.48	Low	3.48	High
6	Adequately trained on the effective use of the flash drive	4.43	High	3.82	High
7	Adequately trained on the effective operation of the Voice recorder	3.01	High	2.81	Low
8	Adequately trained on the effective use of the modem	2.52	Low	4.31	High
9	Adequately trained on the	2.13	Low	2.52	Low



10	effective operation of the multimedia projector Adequately trained on the effective operation of the paper shredder	3.94	High	4.87	High
11	Adequately trained on the effective operation of the dictation machine	3.21	High	2.86	Low
12	Adequately trained on the effective operation of the teleconferencing gadget	2.16	Low	2.67	Low
13	Adequately trained on the effective operation of video-conferencing gadgets	2.37	Low	2.84	Low
14	Adequately trained on the effective operation of the manual typewriter	4.82	Agree	5.00	High
15	Adequately trained on the effective operation of the electric typewriter	4.43	High	4.85	High
16	Adequately trained on the effective operation of the electronic typewriter	4.81	High	4.42	High
17	Adequately trained on the effective operation of the cassette recorder	4.64	High	4.97	High
18	Adequately trained on the effective operation of the Dictaphone	4.52	High	4.93	High
19	Adequately trained on the effective operation of the ink duplicating machine	2.41	Low	3.38	High
20	Adequately trained on the effective operation of the adding machine	4.87	High	5.00	High
21	Adequately trained on the effective operation of the punching machine	5.00	High	5.00	High
22	Adequately trained on the effective operation of the franking machine	2.33	Low	3.84	High
23	Adequately trained to utilise Word processing applications	3.83	High	4.24	High
24	Adequately trained to utilise Presentation applications	2.81	Low	3.83	High
25	Adequately trained to utilise Spreadsheet applications	2.62	Low	3.26	High
26	Adequately trained to utilise Database applications	2.83	Low	3.12	High



27	Adequately trained to utilise Publishing application	2.50	Low	3.27	High
28	Adequately trained to utilise Webpage design application	1.72	Low	2.85	Low
29	Adequately trained on how to send e-mails	3.76	High	4.43	High
30	Adequately trained on how to manage files and folders	3.32	High	3.94	High
N =55	Grand Mean	3.33		3.79	

Source: (Field Survey, 2021)

The result in Table 1: student-respondents indicated that they were not adequately trained in items: 3,4,5,8,9,12,13,19,22,24,25,26,27,28 with a maximum mean score of 5.00 and a grand mean score of 3.33 while the lecturer-respondents indicated “Low” in 3,4,7,9,11,12,13 and 28 with a minimum mean score of 1.45 grand mean of 3.79. From the above, it is clear that the students are not adequately trained in modern office technologies.

Research Question Two: How much has the training acquired by Office Technology and Management students impacted on their ICT competencies?

Table 2: Mean ratings on the opinions of employers on how the training received by Office Technology and Management students had impacted on their ICT competencies in Kogi state.

S/NO	ITEMS	X	Decision
1	Ability to use Microsoft word for word production and processing	3.98	High
2	Ability to prepare a slideshow using Microsoft Powerpoint	2.93	Low
3	Ability to use Microsoft Excel to analyse information, do basic calculations and view data . Microsoft Excel	2.81	Low
4	Ability to make simple design of flyers, memos etc on Microsoft Publisher	2.73	Low
5	Ability to organize data using Microsoft Access	2.76	Low
6	Ability to upload document on to the internet	2.23	Low
7	Ability to setup an online video conferencing using Skype, Google hangout, Yahoo messenger etc	1.72	Low
8	Ability to download material and save effectively on my computer or external storage device	3.22	High
9	Ability to use search engines to search gather information	3.86	High
10	Ability to manipulate computer peripherals like printer and scanners etc	2.34	Low
N= 40	GRAND MEAN	2.85	Low

Source: (Field Survey, 2021)



The result in Table 2: Employer-respondents indicated “high” only to items 1, 8 and 9 with a maximum mean score of 3.98 while they indicated “low” in the rest 4 items with a minimum mean score of 1.72 and a grand mean of 2.85. From the above, it shows that the respondents disagree on the ability of OTM diplomates to adequately use modern office technologies.

Discussion of findings

Table 1 showed a grand mean of 3.33 signifying that students were not adequately trained on the use of the modern office technologies. Out of the 21 listed modern office technologies, student-respondents indicated that they were not adequately trained in 12. The findings is in line with Ugwuanyi (2012), who observed that most graduates of OTM could not secure paid employment because they were not taught with new technologies and therefore lack the necessary skills and competencies needed for today’s E-office. In the same vein, Utoware, Kren-Ikidi and Apreala (2016), found out that new office technology equipment were lacking in polytechnics and that more theoretical concepts were being taught than practical work in emerging office technologies.

The data presented in table 2 revealed that employers opined that graduates of the programme lacked the ability to manipulate the listed modern office technologies. These findings are in line with Rasul and Mansor (2013), who reported that graduates of OTM programme who were employed have had to be retrained by their employers to fit adequately into modern work place. Similarly, Udo (2014) stated that most employers of labour in Nigeria consider the products of OTM as half-baked and unusable without further training.

Conclusion

The current Office Technology and Management curriculum is duly designed to take into cognizance the various technological changes that had taken place in the world of work over the years. However, findings have shown that students seem not to be adequately trained for contemporary professional practice. Rather, they are still being trained for the office of yesteryears as they are more proficient in the use of outdated office machines than they are in modern office technologies. This situation can be attributed to challenges like; poor funding of the programme, epileptic power supply, inadequately trained lecturers and students over population amongst others. It is therefore expedient for stakeholders to take urgent steps to address these problems in order to make them attractive in the modern workplace.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Periodic workshops, training and regular retraining should be organized for OTM educators to gain competence in current ICT skills in order to impart it effectively on the students.
2. OTM departments should admit students into the programme based on what the available facilities can accommodate effectively to ensure effective teaching and learning.



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