

CURRENT ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN THE ACQUISITION OF OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT SKILLS

C. A. Ejeka and C. C. Ebenezer-NWOKEJI (Mrs)

Department of Office Technology and Management, Imo State Polytechnic Umuagwo – Ohaji, Imo State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT: *It is a well established fact that advances in technology has affected different professions with a view to meet global trends in higher productivity, speed, networking and excellent packaging. Accomplishing the routine tasks with machines is known as automation. Hence this paper accesses how secretaries have used as a panacea to accelerate their success in the workplace. Their basic activities affected includes: reprography, word processing, organization of meetings amongst others. The paper revealed certain products of automation like: printing, book keeping, payroll, forms management. It also highlighted major challenges of lack of funds, insecurity as having bedeviled office automation. Recommendations made included that secretaries and office technology managers should constantly be retrained to sharpen their equipment handling capacity. It was therefore concluded that it was inevitable for business concerns to continue these changes to enable their secretaries reshape their products to meet global standards.*

KEYWORDS: Office Technology, Management skills, Business, NBTE, ICT

INTRODUCTION

In the recent times, The National Board for Technical Education enhanced the objectives of the secretarial training. Hence the nomenclature changed to office Technology manager. This affected both the curriculum of Colleges of Education and Polytechnics. The Polytechnic curriculum composes of four main components for both National Diploma and Higher National Diploma hence, General Studies/Education Foundation courses, Professional courses, SIWES. The professional courses are courses which give the student the theory and practical skills he needs to practice as a secretary. This may account for between 60percent to 70percent of the contact hours of study.

According to Agboola (2014) greater prominence is given to ICT courses than shorthand and keyboarding; which had credit hours drastically reduced. The purpose is to actualize the demand for supply of manpower who have appropriate office skills and competences to manage office view technologies to profit the organization given the current wave of information communication technology.

The OTM career encourages employment creation given multifaceted skills embedded in it including: reprographics, word processing, micrographics, telecommunication, data processing and others.

Merraim Webster Dictionary (2013) explains skill as ability coming from one's knowledge practice or aptitude to do something well. Etonyeaku (2008) added that it involves practical knowledge in combination with cleverness, expertise, dexterity and ability to perform a function which could be acquired or learnt in school.

There are areas which require immediate attention as standing on the perception of Aina (2002) that business education inculcating OTM is concerned with development of individuals, person skills and attitudes, communication and occupational skills, technological literacy, employability skills, broad specific occupational skills and knowledge, Oladunjoye 2015 asserts that the products of a deficient curriculum cannot function effectively and efficiently in today's consistent change in the work environment.

Computer studies was first examined at SSCE level – WAEC in 2014 and has become optional in SSCE. The basic Education at JSS level is exclusive of shorthand but optional in Secondary School. The revised edition of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014) outlined that the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society. The objective of each level of education is to give the individual a climbing stone to a higher level. Where the secondary school curriculum is inadequate, it cannot prepare students for useful living and solid higher education.

Statement of the Problem:

Office Technology and Management is embedded with a conglomerate of courses inclined to development of skills and competencies. It has been observed that there certain criteria which must be met by teachers, students and policy makers in order to achieve the overall objectives of the programme in the polytechnic.

With the unprecedented rate of change in technology as requiring knowledgeable workers and creating entrepreneur opportunities, students need to be adequately prepared to make choices and acquire basic skills to enhance learning. Other critical issues requiring immediate attention include as follows: inadequate number of trained teachers, poor societal perceptions, retraining of teachers on e-teaching platform, poor industry/institutional collaboration, incessant strike actions and proper utilization of modern ICT.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is specifically.

1. Ascertain the extent basic skills in secondary education affect acquisition of OTM skills.
2. Determine the critical issues in the learning of OTM.
3. Identify measures that can ameliorate these challenges.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised for the study.

1. What are the basic skills in secondary education that affect the acquisition of OTM skills in the polytechnic.
2. What are the challenges faced in OTM skills acquisition?
3. What are the measures which can be adopted to improve OTM skills acquisition

The survey design was adopted for the study. The population of study was made up of 80 students from OTM in State and Federal Polytechnics in Imo State. Using random sampling technique, questionnaire was the major instrument used for the study and was validated by experts for both face structures. The questionnaire items were structured in a five point like rating scale of strongly agreed (5 points) Agree (4 points) Disagree (3 points) strongly disagree (2 points) Undecided (1 point). A mean score of 3.00 and above was considered as agreed while a mean score below it was considered as disagree.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the basic issues in secondary education that affect skill acquisition.

Table 1. Basic education factors that affect the acquisition of OTM skills

S/NO	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	U	X	SD	Decision
1	Students do not do practical keyboarding in secondary schools	36	35	6	2	1	4.29	0.81	Accepted
2	Keyboarding is theoretical in secondary schools	34	36	6	2	2	4.23	0.88	Accepted
3	Students do not do shorthand at JSS level	32	32	6	7	3	4.04	1.08	Accepted
4	Practical computer education is done in secondary school	32	33	9	4	2	4.11	0.96	Accepted
5	Most OTM students do not offer computer studies at SSCE	30	31	12	6	1	4.04	0.97	Accepted
6	Most students are not introduced to e-learning in secondary school. Scored 60% and above in practical courses in ND	38	34	3	3	2	4.29	0.90	Accepted
7	Many students are not able to retain shorthand speed for Advanced transcription course	35	31	4	5	5	4.08	1.14	Accepted
8	Many students did not have OTM as first choice course	28	36	10	2	4	4.03	1.01	Accepted
9	Many secondary students do not receive professional career counseling	37	32	8	1	2	4.26	0.88	Accepted
10	Many students do not score 60% and above in practical courses in ND	38	34	3	3	2	4.29	0.90	Accepted

From the analysis of data and the responses by the respondents, most of the respondents accepted that there are basic issues in secondary school education affecting OTM skills. All the respondents have a mean of not less than 3.00 in all items.

Research Question 2: Challenges faced in the acquisition of OTM skills in tertiary environment.

Table 2

S/NO	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	U	X	SD	Decision
1	Incessant strike actions	20	27	21	11	1	3.68	1.03	Accepted
2	Cult practices	13	21	29	14	3	3.34	1.05	Accepted
3	Poor supervision	27	26	19	7	1	3.89	1.01	Accepted
4	Poverty	14	25	27	12	2	3.46	1.02	Accepted
5	Corrupt practices	24	29	10	7	10	3.63	1.33	Accepted
6	Inadequate supply of ICT equipment and facilities	22	34	14	9	1	3.84	0.99	Accepted
7	Low institution and industry partnership	19	28	15	9	9	3.49	1.27	Accepted
8	Poor utilization of e-learning	21	26	22	6	5	3.65	1.13	Accepted
9	Poor career counseling	13	21	29	14	3	3.34	1.05	Accepted
10	Poor societal perception	27	26	19	7	1	3.89	1.01	Accepted
11	Inadequate classrooms and laboratories	19	28	15	9	9	3.49	1.27	Accepted
12	Poor access to school information	13	21	29	14	3	3.34	1.05	Accepted
13	Poor dress codes	22	34	14	9	1	3.84	0.99	Accepted

The data presented in Table 2 indicates that all the items raised pose threat to the acquisition of OTM skills because all the respondents gave a response with a mean of not less than 3.00 in all the items.

Research question 3. What are those measures that can improve OTM skills acquisition?

Table 3 Factors that can improve OTM skills acquisition

S/NO	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	U	X	SD	Decision
1	Add all aspects of OTM skill to secondary school curriculum	27	41	4	4	4	4.04	1.01	Accepted
2	Professional career counseling	32	27	11	8	2	3.99	1.08	Accepted
3	Systematic teacher training and retraining program	32	32	4	5	7	3.96	1.22	Accepted
4	Adequate supervision of students practicals	32	28	12	2	6	3.98	1.15	Accepted
5	Mass enlightenment by professionals on contribution entrepreneurial skills of OTM	26	31	13	5	5	3.85	1.13	Accepted
6	Provision of real work life learning environment	37	25	9	6	3	4.09	1.07	Accepted
7	Provision of constant energy supply for an ideal environment	31	33	10	5	1	4.10	0.93	Accepted

The data presented in Table 3 indicates that all the item revised would serve as means of managing the challenges in OTM skills acquisition. This can be seen from the response of the respondents with a mean of not less than 3.00 in all the items.

FINDINGS

The study examined the current issues and challenges faced in the acquisition of OTM skills. Some challenges have unprecedented effect on skills development. This view is supported by Ediagbonya and Oyadongha (2012) who agreed that business educators have low core skills. Eze (2008) further submitted that many institutions lack certain facilities specially designed to enhance teaching and learning of skills in OTM.

Business education at secondary school level is a bedrock to acquire OTM skills at a higher level or be prepared for work. The implication is that the curriculum should be beefed up to incorporate these aspects of study which are currently lacking in the curriculum, examples are: practical computer, e-learning, shorthand in junior basic education. The gap in leaving studying shorthand after first semester HND I and introducing advanced transcription in first semester HND II makes students loose skill. Also Oluwole (2011) posits that the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) should enrich the OTM curriculum with teaching of one graphic application & website designing to enhance their job/entrepreneurial.

Students do not encounter real work life environment during training. Azih (2011) maintained that innovations in Office Technology brought about the use of computers, internet, e-mail, video conferencing etc. it is observed that there is inadequate functional laboratories, model office and equipment. Ojeaga and Igbinedion (2012) explained that the use of e-learning in Nigerian educational system is still slow or even imaginary. This can be attributed to inadequate computer availability and internet accessibility. However, this problem should have been ameliorated had the collaboration of industries and institutions not have been low because of inability to fund properly.

In addition Oludele (2013) viewed that nearly all the training facilities for acquiring the professional skills specified in the curriculum are powered by electricity hence the erratic energy supply in the nation poses a threat. Field trips are not commonly done. Eze (2008) maintained that government should approve special funding for OTM because of the capital intensive nature of facilities required. This is quite relevant to realize the OTM program objectives of NBTE which is designed to produce graduates well equipped with secretarial office skills for employment in various fields of endeavor with effective work competences and socio-psychological work skills which are very essential in everyday interaction with others.

Furthermore, the study discovered that students in such a practically oriented course are poorly supervised. This may be attached to poor policies on retraining of teachers in the era of constantly changing office technologies. Adeola (2010) emphasized that teachers employed to teach OTM should be competent and qualified in terms of professional qualification, political skills and knowledge and should know both content and methodology of the subject to actualize effective learning.

In addition social vices ranging from cult practices to lack of ethics in modeling office dress affects the training of OTM graduates. This poor dressing code shows inadequacy in office skills. Njoku (2014) confirms that social vices has negatively impacted on the training of OTM graduates. It was observed that there are incessant strike actions that obstruct supervision which is an integral aspect of skill acquisition. There were also accepted strategies which can alleviate these issues which includes as follows: adding OTM skills to basic secondary education, mass enlightenment programmes by OTM professionals, provision of real work life laboratories, institution-industry collaboration.

CONCLUSION

Office Technology and Management inadvertently is major skilled area which is highly inclined to assist in achieving the demands of modern workplace and creating self employment. Various issues and challenges discovered in the study includes as follows: inadequate curriculum content from basic education, poor supervision, inadequate and proper use of ICT equipment, lack of provision for consistent retraining of teachers. The suggestions on the management of the situations included as follows: enriching basic education to incorporate OTM skills like e-learning, practical computer, shorthand professional career counselling. OTM professionals should take mass enlightenment on the career to secondary schools. Institutional industry collaboration should be strengthened.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings of this study and the conclusion drawn, the researcher hereby recommends that:

1. Policy makers including the National Board for technical education (NBTE) should advocate the enhancement of the vocational curriculum content of vocational and technical at basic education level.
2. Massive computer literacy should be embarked by the Nigerian government for teachers and learners at all levels.
3. There should be provision for re-training of teachers on as new technologies are introduced.
4. Institutions should device cheaper sources of alternate uninterrupted energy supply when the common government source fails for instance solar.
5. Institution/industry collaboration should span across students SIWES and industrial attachment to periodic interactions amongst their managers and encouragement of field trips, donations of facilities.
6. Teachers should found methodologies of assessing components of each of the skills including dress codes, operating skills.

REFERENCES

- Adeola K.L. and Bolarinwa K.O. (2010) strategies for promoting Entrepreneurship Education in Secondary School Curriculum. Association of Business Educators of Nigeria, *Book of Readings 1 (10)*.
- Aina (2002). Business Education, Technology and National Development. *Business Education Journal* 3(5), 1-8.
- Ehirheme, P.E. (2014) "Producing a Global worker through Business Education with Office technology and Management (OTM) in perspective" *Nigerian Journal of Business education* 2 (1).
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014). National Policy on Education. Lagos: Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council NERDC.
- Ike .M. (2008) A critique of the New Curriculum of Office technology and Management. *Business Education Journal* 1 (2)
- Merraim Webster Dictionary (2013). Merraim Webster Dictionary Incorporated. Accessed online on 4th July, 2016 on <http://www.merraimwebster.com/dictionary/workplace>
- NBTE (2004) Office Technology and Management Curriculum & course specifications.
- Njoku C.U. (2014) Critical incidents in Business Education. Lead Paper Presentation. National Conference of Association of Business Educators 2014.
- Ojeaga I.J. & Igbinedion, V.I (2012) Potentials of e-learning as a study tool in Business education in Nigerian school. *International education Studies* 5(5), 218 – 225
- Oladunjoye G. (2015) Optimizing business education for National Development. "Lead Paper Presentation" Association of Business educators of Nigeria Conference 2015.

Olatoke M.O. (2009) Panacea for youth restiveness. *The perspective of business education Journal of Business education vol.19 No.9*

Olawole S.A. and Abuya A.O. (2011) Measures for Effective Implementation of Office Technology and Management Programme in Tertiary Educational Institutions in Nigeria, *Journal for the advancement of Office Technology and Management* 5(1)