

TOWARDS ACHIEVING QUALITY ASSURANCE IN OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME IN DELTA STATE POLYTECHNICS

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ABSTRACT: *The study examined achieving quality assurance in Office Technology and Management Programme in Delta State Polytechnics. Recent findings in the educational sector, revealed that some programmes in most polytechnics, universities and other similar tertiary institutions, do not observe religiously, the specified guidelines and course specification in order to ensure standards. Its resultant effects are that most of their graduates lacked the requisite skills, knowledge and competencies necessary to fit into the world of work. It is on this note that the programme of Office Technology and Management in Delta State Polytechnics is being examined to see how quality assurance would be achieved, maintained and sustained. The study revealed that OTM is a programme of study meant to help its entrant to acquire the relevant knowledge in office skills and competencies for self actualization and sustainability and that quality assurance is a planned and systematic review process carried out by organizations or institutions to determine if standards are being met as this is the only panacea that help in ensuring confidence, standards, acceptable norms and practices for maximum academic excellence and achievement in OTM programmes as well as other educational programmes.*

KEYWORDS: Quality, Quality Assurance, OTM.

INTRODUCTION

The role of quality education as an instrument of change and meaningful development cannot be over-emphasized for it is recognized as a tool for the economic and social development of any nation. Section 1 (one) of the Nigeria National policy of education (FGN, 2004) states the need for functional education to be relevant, practical and build towards the acquisition of skills for the development of the entire society. This implies that learning in our institutions, especially Polytechnics and Colleges of Technologies have to be geared towards inculcating values, acquisition of skills and competencies necessary for social, cultural, economic and technological development. This is where quality assurance in Office Technology and Management programmes in Nigeria polytechnics comes in. In any field of human endeavour, quality is of utmost importance. This paper therefore highlights the needs for quality assurance in Office Technology and Management to enable graduates of the programme to compete favourably in the world of work.

The Meaning of Quality and Quality Assurance

The term quality has been variously defined by many people. Hornby (2001), defined quality as the standard of something when it is compared to other things like it, how good or bad something is. Ijaya (2001), viewed quality as something everyone considers good and would

want to have". Bisong (2000) described quality as relating to standard and that standards constitute the essential yardstick for the assessment of values and comparability, interpretability and harmonization. According to Utoware and Kren-Ikidi (2013), quality forms an intricate part of education which focuses on the ability to conform to certain acceptable and institutional basis with respect to time periods, practices and locations. Thus quality in Nigeria Polytechnic education is a multidimensional concept which should embrace all its functions and activities; teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, facilities, equipment, service to the community and academic environment (UNESCO, 1998). Quality in education, implies the ability or degree with which an educational system conforms to the established standard and appropriateness of the input available for the delivery of the system (Fadipe, 1999).

Quality assurance on the other hand, is about consistently meeting product specification. It is the ability of educational institutions to meet the need of the users of manpower in regulation to the quality of skills acquired by their products, that is, students. Okebukola (2007), sees quality assurance in Nigeria Universities as a process of continuous improvement in the quality of teaching and learning activities which will be achieved by via - pathways of employing mechanisms, internal and external to the universities. It is ensuring that at least the provision of the minimum academic standard are attained, maintained and enhanced. To Ajayi and Akindutire (2007), Quality Assurance in the educational sector implies the ability of educational institutions to meet the expectations of users of manpower in relation to quality of skills acquired by their outputs. In respect to office Technology and management, Nnorom, Gaius Oke (2013) sees Quality Assurance as the ability of the polytechnics to meet criteria relating to academic matters, staff - students ratio, staff mix by rank, staff development, physical facilities, funding and adequate library facilities. Again, Utoware and Kren-Ikidi (2013) defined quality assurance as a designed systematic measurement approach which an entity follows so that quality requirement of a product or service will be achieved.

In summary, quality assurance is viewed as a planned and systematic review processes carried out by organization, institution or programme to determine if acceptable standards are being met, maintained and enhanced. It guarantees confidence in a program of study given by an institution that standards and quality are being maintained and enhanced (UNESO, 2009).

The concept of Office Technology and Management Programme.

Office Technology and Management is a component of the umbrella business education. Business education, in the view of Popham, Stray and Blockhouse (2005), is education that prepares students for entry into and advancement in Jobs within business, handling their own business affairs and to function intelligently as consumers and citizens in a business economy. The Commission on Research and Publications of the America Vocational Association (2002), defined OTM (Secretarial studies), as education designed to develop skills, abilities, understanding, attitudes, work habits, and appreciates encompassing knowledge and information needed by workers to enter and make progress in employment on a useful and productive basis. Amagoh (2008) describe OTM as an efficient, effective, productive and functional education which lead to self-employment, self-reliance, paid-employment and consequently self-actualization, Esene (2013) describe OTM programme as a type of education deliberately designed for the development of skills and knowledge which can be useful for both the individual concerned, the immediate family and the entire nation. According to Oyinkoye and Oluwalola (2010) Office Technology and Management is a new

nomenclature that emerged to replace the former secretarial studies programme in Nigeria Polytechnics and was introduced by the National Board for Technical Education in 2004. According to the due, the replacement was meant to make the programme and its recipients fit into the world of work appropriately, especially in this modern age of globalization, where new equipment and machines are emerging daily. Komloafe and Agani (2010), sees OTM as a work oriented educational programme that aims at skill acquisition which are useful and employable in the labour market. They further buttressed that the programme is designed to develop participants skills, abilities, understanding, attitudes work habits and appreciations of encompassing knowledge and information needed by individual in order to enter and progress on employment on a useful and productive basis. Therefore Office Technology and Management programme is aimed towards the acquisition and development of skills, competencies, attitudes and attributes to be able to function effectively and adequately in the millennium office.

Quality Assurance in Office Technology and Management Programme

Quality Assurance in Office Technology and Management means the relevance and appropriateness of the programme to the needs of modern office for which it is provided. Uteh and Iheukwumere (2013) asserted that quality assurance in OTM means bringing together such variables as general pedagogical knowledge, subjects matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of student, knowledge of strategies to sustain learning and knowledge to use technology to produce a competent graduate. They emphasize that quality assurance in OTM could be defined also as effective response by OTM programmes to the challenges posed by Global, local and technology related forces in producing OTM graduates.

Objectives of OTM Programme in Nigeria Polytechnics

According to Uteh and Iheukwumere (2013), the National Board for Technical Education (2004) Office Technology and Management programme is structured to achieve the following grand objectives:

- Equip individuals with office secretarial skills,
- Provide students with general education,
- To create general entrepreneurship awareness in the student with a view to inculcating in them knowledge for productive purposes.

Ahukannah (2008) further added that owing to the development in Information and Communication Technology and Information Technology, teachers in OTM education are expected to equip students with the following competencies to assure quality in OTM and produce graduates that can:

- Produce office documents and reports using word processing.
- Produce numerical information using spreadsheet
- Produce office information in graphic form
- Manipulate access and retrieve information from computer based system
- Access a wealth of information in internet through the knowledge of web pages e.t.c.

The Need for Quality Assurance in Office Technology and Management Programme in Delta State Polytechnics

Quality assurance is very important in order to ensure qualitative teaching and learning in Office Technology and Management programmes. Adegbe Sam in Idih and Umunnah (2013) outlined the following major relevance of quality assurance in Office Technology and Management programmes.

1. To serve as indispensable component of quality control strategy in office education.
2. To ensure and maintain high standards of education at all levels.
3. To assist in monitoring and supervision of office education at all levels.
4. To determine the quality of teacher input.
5. To determine the number of classroom needed based on the average control of office education.
6. To determine the level of adequacy of the facilities available for quality control of office education and;
7. To determine how the final resources available for quality education could be prudently and judiciously utilized.

Strategies for the establishment of quality assurance in OTM programmes in Nigeria polytechnics.

According to Ejeka and Nwosu (2013) making quality assurance a discourse as it relates to effective Office Technology and Management education in particular and the polytechnic education in general focus would have to be sustaining effectiveness in the operations of the ND and HND programmes of the polytechnics in tandem with national aspirations for that stratum of the polytechnic education system and the secretarial profession. Others include, help teachers to adapt into the social life of the society and further their commitment to national aspirations, and so on. To properly appraise the situation, it is apt to restate that at the moment, external and internal measures are employed to assure quality the polytechnic system. The internal measures include moderation of examinations questions and results by competent academic in relevant field outside the staff list of the polytechnic (Senior Lecturer and above). Departmental and Schools' moderation of examination questions and results; and academic board perusal, moderation and confirmation of examination results.

However, external quality assurance measure is the exclusive preserve of National Board for Technical Education (NBTE). This Board does this in two ways apart from setting out a uniform minimum academic standard that all polytechnic are expected to meet and be guided by. The minimum academic standard contains programme of studies (courses) approved for the ND and HND programmes, staff (academic and non-academic) entry requirement and mobility guidelines and basic plants required for effective operations of studies leading to the award of both ND and HND certificates among other things.

The NBTE systems of measuring quality therefore are:

- i. Routine re-accreditation of programmes; and
- ii. Accreditation of new programmes.

The routine re-accreditation of programmes has five year duration. A programme accreditation would enjoy that clearance until the fifth year when such programme would be re-accredited. In the same vein, a programme given interim accreditation would have to be

fully accredited after the first year. However, a programme denied accreditation would not admit new students.

The new programme accreditation of NBTE on polytechnic is done when polytechnics desire to mount a new academic programme. A resources visit is carried out to assess available human and material resources for the academic programme. Consequent upon this visit, students are admitted and in the second year of study by the students, full accreditation is carried out to generally evaluate the extent of compliance to specifications in the minimum academic standard with regards to staff, materials and plants.

An appraisal of the process of ensuring quality and effectiveness at the ND and HND levels with relation to both internal and external bodies is that they should inspire and effect positive changes and sustain standards. Such processes, it is a process through which changes are initiated within existing forms.

Challenges in OTM Curriculum Implementation

According to Mkandawire (2010) in Oludele and Dosunmu (2013), curriculum implementation is a network of varying activities involved in translating curriculum design into classroom activities and changing people's attitudes to accept and participate in these activities. In OTM programme, almost all the professional courses at the National Diploma (ND) and Higher National Diploma (HND) are computer based carrying high practical units. Consequently implementing the OTM curriculum posed the following challenges as adduced by Oludele and Dosunmu;

1. **Epileptic power supply:** The new OTM curriculum is heavy with computer based courses. These require 60% practical. Almost all the training facilities for acquiring the professional skills specified in the curriculum are electrically driven. The erratic power supply situation of the nation therefore poses a major challenge to effective implementation of the new ICT based OTM curriculum. The high cost of installing and maintaining high capacity power generating set makes the alternative source of power out of reach. This invariably has negative effects on the practical exposure necessary for ensuring required standards and quality of products of the programme.
2. **Inadequate funding:** The fundamental challenge of funding is the Mother of many other challenges confronting effective implementation of OTM curriculum. Inadequate funding accounts for inadequate supply of training facilities. It also makes maintenance of the existing ones difficult. It is very difficult to implement curriculum successfully if education system has limited funding capacity. Since manpower in the education sector has increased, the bulk of money allocated to education is absorbed by salaries leaving very little for the provision of training facilities, teaching resources and for recurring expenses like servicing and fueling of power generating set. Moreso, where printers are provided for computer laboratories, fund for consistent provision of toner/ink and stationery may not be available.
3. **Inadequate supply of ICT equipment and other office machine equipment:** The cost of equipment is enormous in a country like Nigeria with a crippled economy and terribly devalued currency. Huge financial requirement for the procurement and installation of hardware and software as well as other equipment necessary for implementation of the ICT-based OTM curriculum pose a great challenge. The result

is overstretched training facilities. Again, the unavailability of internet connections for training makes achievements of learning objectives in courses like web-page Design and computer based communication technologies in ICT office Application very difficult.

4. **Paucity of qualified ICT personnel:** Most higher institutions have very few qualified ICT personnel and experts needed for effective implementation of the ICT-based OTM curriculum. "Most instructors and lecturers currently in the business of training professional secretaries were trained with the old secretarial studies curriculum "some lecturers have phobia for change which affects the much-needed enthusiasm and commitment required for effective implementation of the OTM curriculum. Again, there are scarcities of efficient technicians for repairing damaged facilities. Where they exist, maintenance and repairs are very costly.
5. **Teacher Overwork:** Implementing the OTM curriculum pose the challenge of teacher overwork as the ICT-based courses attract heavy credit hours and close monitoring of students' practical work by lecturers. The consequence is that the few available lecturers are overstretched and loaded with work, resulting in much stress and over-labour.
6. **Dearth of Textbooks:** Iweajunwa and Lekwa in Oludele and Dosunmu (2013), observed lack of textbooks and other teaching materials as major constraints to successful implementation of the OTM curriculum. The new courses introduced by the OTM curriculum render many existing textbooks in the discipline obsolete.
7. **Enrolment explosion:** Nnorom and Gaius-Oke (2013) averred that in virtually every polytechnic in Nigeria and especially, those owned by state governments, students population is very high. Consequently, most facilities on ground are over-stretched. This is so because of the non-challant attitude of state education administration in funding state polytechnics. In order to make ends meet the Rectors of such polytechnics resort to over enrolment.

CONCLUSION

The paper made an incisive x-ray of Office Technology and Management programmes, with a view to examining how quality assurance in the programme can be obtained, maintained and sustained. The study revealed that Office Technology and Management in Nigeria Polytechnics is a new name for the former secretarial studies and this was approved in 2004 by National Board for Technical Education, the supervisory body for Polytechnic in Nigeria. The objectives, theoretical and practical contents of the Office Technology and Management curriculum are geared towards integrating graduates of Office Technology and Management programmes into the evolution of technology. Consequently, Office Technology and Management programmes is designed to develop in students; skills, abilities, understandings, work habits, competencies and appreciations of encompassing knowledge needed by workers to enter and make progress in employment on a useful and productive bases. The paper is of the opinion that quality assurance in Office Technology and Management programme is achievable through constant monitoring of the programme, programme evaluation, supervision, inspection, quality control and reporting, provision of adequate number of

academically qualified lecturers, provision of adequate infrastructural facilities, use of functional instructional methods, fund provision and admission of only qualified candidates into the programme. All these put together would make the programme a huge success in virtually all polytechnics in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are put forward to ensure quality assurance in OTM programme in Delta State Polytechnics as well as other higher institutions in Nigeria.

1. Federal and state governments in Nigeria should give adequate funds to Federal and state polytechnics to procure teaching and learning facilities for meaningful learning.
2. There is the need for continuous and effective supervision of the educational activities of OTM department by both internal and external supervisory bodies for efficient academic delivery.
3. Admission of students above the carrying capacity recommended by National board for technical Education should stop, to avoid over-stretching the available facilities.
4. A review of NBTE operational strategies. The NBTE should evolve such internal checking mechanism that would make its assignments on polytechnics devoid of any nepotism and corrupt tendencies. Since the verdict of NBTE is taken as sacred as to what institution is qualified to run ND and HND programs, compromise of any form is a great disservice to the nation because of the implications of half-baked graduates. NBTE should device means that would make its accreditations thorough, fair and impartial. Its verdict should truly be reflective of what abounds in government owned and especially privately owned polytechnics in the country.
5. There is the need for constant retraining of lecturers and instructors in order to imbibe current Knowledge and experience in ICT and other relevant fields which was recently introduced in the programme.
6. Alternative source of power generation should be provided to supply light where there is failure in the national grid.

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