

IMPROVING THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT (OTM) IN NIGERIAN POLYTECHNICS

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Abstract

The paper critically examined the challenges facing the teaching and learning of Office Technology and Management (OTM) as a field of study. It specifically discussed the goals and objectives of OTM programme in Nigeria. Also the strategies for improving the teaching and learning of the programme in Nigerian Polytechnics were x-rayed. The study found that inadequate funding, shortage of manpower, epileptic power supply, illiteracy in Computer System among others are the pedagogical challenges facing the programme. It concluded that adequate attention should be paid to the OTM programme because of its immense contribution to the economy. It recommended among others that adequate provision of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities should be made available in all OTM departments in Polytechnics in Nigeria.

Key words: Office, mechanization, technology, management, ICT.

Introduction

Like every other educational programme that is equally undergoing changes in Nigeria; both in curriculum content and course specification, secretarial studies was in 2004 replaced with the nomenclature - "Office Technology and Management" (OTM) at the polytechnic level of Nigerian education to reflect the current changes in the emerging business environment. The changes in the nomenclature, the curriculum content and course specification of the secretarial studies were engendered by the advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), which has drastically changed the structures, methods, and roles of secretaries in a computer-based working environment.

According to Okoro, Ezoem and Chiedu (2012), the business offices in the recent time have changed considerably as a result of the advancement in technological innovation, rapid increase in computerization and changes in organizational structures, procedures and practice. Thus, the duties of secretaries have witnessed a drastic turnaround from the traditional methods of performing business activities such as taking note, typing, keeping diaries and records to more modern duties which include word processing, sourcing for information on the internet, use of micrographic, reprographic, and telecommunication materials.

Olise and Ihimekpen (2008) submit that ICT-competencies will help to enhance productivity, reduce the length of time required to complete a job, ensure accuracy and efficiency. They will enhance the quality, accuracy, speed and capacity of work done. Based on the benefits derivable from the use of ICT in education, the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) in 2004 deemed it necessary to integrate ICT skills and competencies that will make the graduates of this programme relevant in the work place. Subsequently, the nomenclature of the programme was changed from secretarial studies to Office Technology and Management (OTM). The change in nomenclature is a welcome

development as it has given the programme a new look that reflects the modern time.

Concept of Office Technology

The concept of OTM is used to reflect the technological innovation that has transformed the secretarial duties being performed by secretaries in modern business offices. Office technology refers to the application of scientific knowledge devices and systems to facilitate the information-driven activities of the office, (Agomuo, 2005). Simply put, the term refers to the scientific tools and systems that are designed to quicken the information processing activities of the office. To this end, all scientific devices and systems that can be applied to enhance office operations and efficient performance are technically referred to as office technology. This is why Baba (2009) defines office technology as the mechanisation of office work to enhance greater speed and accuracy.

The essence of adopting and applying technology to office activities is to enhance greater speed, accuracy and effectiveness in carrying out office routine. According to Zarowin (2000), office technology is an embodiment of varied computer machinery and courseware used to digitally create, store, collect, manipulate and relay office information required for accomplishing basic office tasks and goals. As such, raw data storage, electronic file transfer and the management of electronic business (e-business) information become the fundamental activities of an office technology system. It can therefore be concluded that the adoption and application of technology to the operations and activities of the modern offices, particularly on information-related issues are designed to modernise, simplify and speed up the processes to enhance effectiveness, productivity, eliminate delay in information creation, generation, storage and transmission of fundamental activities for which office technology is being used. Computer system thus becomes the heart of office technology.

Office Management

Office management encompasses four basic functions of planning, organising, implementing and controlling of activities and resources of an organisation towards the attainment of organisational goals and objectives in an effective and efficient manner, (Mitchel, 2008). The primary focus of office management is on how the office functions and resources can be utilised in the most efficient and economic way towards achieving organizational goals by planning, organizing, controlling and implementing of organisational policies, activities and resources.

ND/HND Programmes in (OTM)

The National Diploma (ND) and Higher National Diploma (HND) in Office Technology and Management programmes are designed to equip students with secretarial/office skills for employment in various fields of human endeavour. The recipients of this programme are exposed to courses in their special areas as well as courses in general education. In addition to the acquisition of vocational skills and competencies in OTM, the students are equipped with effective work-based competencies and socio-psychologically inclined skills, which are very essential in everyday interaction with the world.

The grand objectives of the OTM programme therefore are the acquisition of skills in office technology and management. At the ND and HND levels, the learners are specifically equipped with the skills of:

- Writing in shorthand for three minutes, varied materials of 1.3 syllabic intensity dictated at 80 words a minute (w.a.m.) and transcribed on the typewriter with a minimum of 95% accuracy
- Typing effectively, various office jobs and acquiring a coping rate of 40 w.a.m on a passage not below 1.30 syllabic intensity with 98% accuracy. At HND level;
- Writing in shorthand for three minutes, varied materials of 1.4 syllabic intensity dictated at 100 w.a.m and transcribe on the typewriter with a minimum of 95% accuracy.
- Typing effectively, various office jobs and acquiring a coping rate of 50 w.a.m on passage below 1.3 syllabic intensity with 98% accuracy.
- Performing professionally in a computerised organization.

Others are the acquisition of general education and foundation for advanced studies.

Challenges Facing Office Technology and Management in Nigeria

This study discovered that the importance of office technology and management to nation building cannot be over-emphasised because it has contributed largely in the training of skilled manpower (secretaries) for both public and private establishments. However, there are numerous challenges bedeviling the production of OTM graduates, especially in Nigerian polytechnics. The challenges include; funding, shortage of manpower, epileptic power supply, lack of adequate infrastructure and computer illiteracy.

Funding

Funding is the financial support rendered by the stakeholders. Inadequate funding has been the bane of Nigeria's educational system. OTM curriculum is ICT-based and it requires ICT facilities for the effective teaching and learning of the programme. The procurement of these facilities is capital-intensive. The governments at all levels, the proprietors, industries and all stakeholders in Nigerian educational system need to rise up to the responsibility of providing the much needed facilities for the schools. For the goals and objectives of OTM to be attained at the polytechnic level, all hands must be on deck to rescue and give Nigerian education a better shape it demands through adequate funding by all stakeholders.

Shortage of Manpower

The problem of manpower shortage has been a huge challenge facing the teaching of OTM in Nigeria. The issue of quality teachers with the right skills, attitudes, and technical-know-how has been a serious menace to the educational sector in Nigeria. Onojetah (2012) noted that there is shortage of manpower in the right quality, quantity and mix, with the right technical skills both for application and maintenance. To him, there is shortage of manpower both in numerical capacity and in value. In order to achieve the aim behind the design of OTM as a course, more trained teachers are needed and those already on the job should be retrained and properly developed to handle the course.

Epileptic Power Supply

Virtually all the equipment and facilities for teaching and learning OTM courses are electricity-driven. Our investigation revealed that the hardware, software, internet and other telecommunication technologies used as instructional materials require electric energy before they can function properly. Inadequate power supply has been a major setback in utilising ICT facilities for teaching and learning processes. Also, this situation has seriously caused a lot of damage to the available instructional facilities.

Lack of Adequate Infrastructure

Infrastructures are those facilities necessary for making proper teaching and learning attainable. They come in the form of classrooms, studios, language laboratories, vehicles, furniture and personal computers. The non-availability of these basic facilities in the polytechnics, where the OTM programme is offered has equally made the teaching and learning of the programme an uphill task.

Computer Literacy

Over the years, there has been a clarion call by all stakeholders in business education profession for the upgrade and redesign of the polytechnic secretarial studies curriculum contents and course specification by NBTE. Moreover, this demand led to the introduction of OTM programme which is ICT-dominated. According to Ikelegbe and Odede (2012), NBTE in reviewing the curriculum in 2004, enshrined many new courses including ICT-driven courses. Unfortunately, the inclusion of ICT component into the curriculum contents created a wide gap between the teachers who are not ICT-Compliant and the students who appear to be more knowledgeable in ICT-related issues. Moreso, the curriculum planners failed to make adequate provision for the training and retraining of the

implementer of the ICT-driven curriculum. So the challenge here is that most of the polytechnic OTM teachers are not exposed to ICT skills and competencies in their preparation stages; and this has been affecting the level of their productivity.

Based on this, they find it very difficult to teach most OTM courses that are ICT-based. This development has equally resulted to an unpalatable situation in some polytechnics where OTM coded courses are not taught by the departmental lecturers, rather they are ceded to the computer science department. The Association of Business Education of Nigeria in 2012, frowned at this arrangement by most polytechnic managements.

Strategies for Teaching and Learning OTM

For effective teaching of office technology and management as spelt out by NBTE in 2004, adequate funding, easy access to ICT, in-service training and retraining become imperative. Provision of these facilities and their optimum utilisation are the strategies needed to improve the programme in the polytechnic system. In the 21st century, the demand for technological driven economy has made it imperative for school proprietors (private, state and federal governments) and institution managers to work tirelessly to ensure adequate provision of funds to make the school system in Nigeria compete favourably with the educational system in the developed countries. It is obvious that the equipment and facilities needed to access information electronically anytime and anywhere in the world are very expensive. However, for OTM programme to achieve its stated goals and objectives, the system must be adequately funded to ensure that all the polytechnics in the country are well equipped and made ICT compliant.

For easy access to ICT facilities by teachers and students of OTM, there is the need for full implementation of the ICT 2010 Policies provided by National Policy on Information and Communication Technologies in Education. The 2010 ICT document provided an elaborate guideline and an easy-to-follow steps on how ICT can be adopted in Nigeria's educational system.

Training is the systematic process of teaching a person a skill through consistent practice and instruction. For the mission of OTM to be attained, there is the need for regular training and retraining of polytechnic OTM lecturers on instructional methodology, ICT related programme and other socio-psychological skills that will keep the lecturers abreast of the trends and technological changes in teaching profession.

Conclusion

In attaining the objectives of the OTM programme in the 21st Century at the Polytechnic level of Nigeria's educational system, this paper concludes by recommending the following:

- For effective implementation of the objectives of the programme, infrastructural and ICT facilities along with the devices needed for connectivity must be provided in OTM departments in all Nigerian polytechnics.
- Training and retraining of teachers of OTM on the use of latest instructional tools should be regular and consistent. .
- Adequate fund should be made available to OTM departments for the provision of OTM teaching and learning equipment. .
- Timely ICT policies should be encouraged in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The ICT blue print will help to project easy-to-follow strategies on how ICT can be fully adopted in Nigerian educational system.

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