

**BUSINESS EDUCATION SKILLS EXPECTED OF GRADUATES OF
OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT (OTM) PROGRAM FOR
ECONOMIC GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT.**

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Abstract

This paper examines the business education skills expected of graduate of Office Technology and Management programme for economic growth and development. It discusses business education as a skill based programme designed to equip students with the necessary tools to meet up with the demands of today's business world after graduation. It discusses what skills are all about. There is no aspect of the economy that does not feel the presence of business education skills. This paper therefore, elucidates on the various skills of business education that can prepare and help graduates of OTM to compete successfully in the labour market and contribute meaningfully to the economic growth and development. The concept of Office Technology and Management is also discussed. This paper also highlights the socio-economic contributions of graduates of Office Technology and Management (OTM) in organizations for national development. Conclusion is made that business skills are necessary for effective performance of OTM graduates in any business or work environment. This paper recommends that Office Technology and Management programme be encouraged by both government and public as it is a programme designed to equip its participants with requisite skills for employment or self-reliance. This paper also recommends that institutions offering the course should be well equipped with infrastructure and the right instructional materials for teaching and learning.

Introduction

Business Education is a comprehensive body of knowledge in the business that is taught at the tertiary institution level. Teaching of business education involves the imparting of various business skills in the learners in preparation for the world of work. These skills are what make the completeness of a business education graduate. The present world economic growth depends largely on the critical thinking and creativity through various skills of different endeavors. Business education skills play major role in equipping students with desirable office/business skills that are imperative for job opportunities and sustainability in the world economy today. The distribution chain cannot be complete without business skills. In the opinion of Agu and Kaduhur (2016) “a productive society is a skill-oriented society, a skill-oriented society required a huge investment on human capacity”. This means that business education should be invested on in other to achieve human capacity development through entrepreneurship and skills acquisition.

According to Esene and Mgbonyebi (2015), one of the national education goals is principally the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to leave in, and contribute to the development of the society. The National Policy on education (FRN, 2013) emphasizes the role of entrepreneurship development education in National Development by stating that education is the most important instrument for propelling change, as no fundamental change can occur in any society except through educational revolution that impart on the intellect. The system of education inherited from the colonial masters is a clear departure from the traditional or informal education where ethical principles, religious beliefs and various occupations were taught according to Ifemeje in Oduma (2012). Oduma posits that at independence, the country inherited a subservient type of education system meant only to provide and serve the needs of the colonial administration. Olu-obafemi and Onajinrin (2014) and Akhuemonkhan, Raimu and Sofoluwe (2013) asserts that the colonial education policy centered on the production of literate nationals who were required to occupy position which would strengthen the colonial administration. According to Esene and Mgbonyebi (2015), our educational institutions, few as they were, remained factories for producing clerks, interpreters, forest guards and sanitary inspectors as no special professional nor skills was envisaged in the educational system. Consequently, the dysfunctional education that is devoid of skill acquisition therefore laid foundations of militia agitation as unemployment dominates national discourse. Already, the rising unemployment rate in the last couple of years, particularly among graduates, is believed to be largely responsible for the rising violent crimes and widespread feeling of insecurity in the country. Today, kidnapping, advance fee fraud, otherwise called 419, armed robbery, prostitution, cultism, riots, protest, drug and child trafficking among others; have become the order of the day. Business

Education today is therefore enjoying a great deal of attention in various higher institutions in Nigeria. At the moment, in the department of Office technology and Management run by some institutions in Nigeria particularly polytechnics, Introduction to Business and Small-Scale Business management are taught. All these are aimed towards the acquisitions of practicable skills and office competencies for self-actualisation. Okolocha and Ile (2011) observed that the attempt of various governments in the past, to eradicate poverty and increase the standard of living of citizens through the establishment of Poverty Alleviation programmes have failed due to lack of business education skills by graduates of the education system. The authors prudently observed that millions of jobs are awaiting to be done because people with the right education and training cannot be found. This corroborates the result of a study carried out by the National University commission (NUC) as reported in Mebane (2006). The findings of the study revealed that tertiary institutions in Nigeria do not sufficiently and adequately prepare graduates to be self-reliant. It is therefore in view of the above that this study is being carried out to find out what Office Technology and Management programme is and to x-ray the skills expected of its graduates for useful employment and self-reliance upon graduation.

Business Education

Business education is a branch of vocational and technical education which has its foundation from the junior secondary school level. The highest point in business education is at the tertiary institution level where students are exposed to the various business education skills in preparation for the work environment. The main focus of business education is career development which will enable the students to acquire relevant skills that will enable them to compete successfully in the fast growing business world. The most important aspect of career development in business is skill acquisition which is embedded in business education programme. Many authors have written on the concept of business education. Oladunjoye (2016) citing Njoku (1990) and Ihekwoaba (2003) state that the earliest form of business education was the apprenticeship training. This is the form of training that an apprentice will learn a trade under a close supervision of a person who had the knowledge and the skill for that particular trade. Before the 1969 curriculum conference in Nigeria, business education was relegated to the background and given different names such as Commercial Studies, Secretarial education, Stenographic studies and so on. The colonial masters then did not place as much emphasis on business education as on liberal or general education which made business education to fall into the hands of private proprietors. Unfortunately, the efforts of these individuals were not enough to publicize the roles and benefits of business education to the entire public. But, the 1969 curriculum conference gave formal recognition of business studies as well as laid much emphasis on the training of clerical officers which were badly needed then. However, the concept

eventually gained more prominence and recognition in Nigerian educational system when emphasis was placed on acquisition of practical and applied skills for national self-reliance and development (Ekpenyong, 2008). The conference aimed at recommending the curricula that would provide within the shortest possible time, the training necessary to enable young men and women fit into the environment of work. With regard to this new development, the Federal Republic of Nigeria introduced the 6-3-3-4 system of education which stresses among other things self-reliance and the teaching of skilled subjects embedded in vocational and business education in both secondary and tertiary institutions. Since then, business education has continued to attract the attention of both low and high in the education industry as to what should be the definition and aims of business education. Business education is defined in so many ways by different people. Ihekweba (2017) defines it as the type of education that assists individuals to acquire skills which can be applied to solve problems in business occupations. It is a part and parcel of vocational/technical education which leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge. Edokpolor and Egbiri (2017) see business education as an educational process which has the primary aim of preparing people for roles in business enterprises as both employers and employees. Therefore, business education skills can be used to get paid employment or create employment. It emphasizes character training, acquisition of skills to live a useful, honest and transparent life, and to build mutual trust in Business transactions (Ntukidem, & Anyasador 2018).

Skills

A skill is a habit of doing a particular thing competently. It is the ability to do a task expertly. The Dictionary of Management by Daniel (2006), defines skill as learned responses, often as a result of specific training which afford someone the ability to perform a particular task and achieve a particular objective. Also Bleak in Uzor and Ike (2010) describes skill as ability to do something well, gained through training and experience. Uzor and Ike also defined skill as one's personal competencies in the performance of specific tasks acquired after a period of training or experience. Skill therefore is the rapidity, precision, expertise, dexterity and proficiency exhibited through mental and manual repetition of performance of an operation. Etonyeaku (2010) opines that skill is the capacity of a person to accomplish a task within desired precision and certainty. According to Bolt-Lee and Foster (2003), skill is the art of possessing the ability, power, authority or competency to do the task required of an individual on the job.

Skill involves a practical knowledge in combination with clearness, expertise, dexterity and ability to perform a function which could be acquired or learnt in the school or training centers through learning and experience. In the world of business those who possess relevant business skills and office competencies, coupled with

entrepreneurial zeal have better gainful employment opportunities and business success than those who are deficient in such skills.

On the other hand, skills acquisition is the ability to learn a skill. It is the practical way of developing and acquiring expertise knowledge, clear-cut competencies and technical knowhow in learners, which they would use to improve the economic frontiers of their immediate society. Practical skill acquisition is an important aspect of business education programme. Students are expected to acquire sufficient skills in teaching methodology, office technology and management, entrepreneurship, information and communication technology, Language skill, Managerial skill and accounting/computational skill. The acquisition of these skills stands to enable business education graduates to be self-reliant and contribute to national economic development. Office Technology and Management skill includes the following skills keyboarding skills, operational skills, observational skills, calligraphic skills, mental skills, penmanship skills, transcription skills, behavioural skills, managerial and public relation skills which will enable the graduate to function effectively in an office or any business environment.

Office Technology and Management Program

According to Oyuloye and Oluwalola (2010), Office Technology and Management is a new nomenclature that emerged to replace the former Secretarial Studies Programme and was introduced by the National Board for Technical education in 2004. They both emphasized that the change was meant to make the programme and its recipients more ICT compliant and to adequately fit into the world of work appropriately, especially in this modern age of globalization where equipment and new machines are emerging daily. The Committee on Research and Publications of the American Vocational Association in Esene (2013) define Office Technology and Management as education designed to develop skills, abilities, understandings, attitudes, work habits and encompassing knowledge and information needed by workers to enter and make progress in employment on a useful and productive basis. Nwabuona (2010) describes the OTM programme as focusing on combination of office information, technical skills with adequate and relevant business knowledge in solving organizational problems. He notes that the target is to produce hybrid administrative professionals to respond to the demands of a dynamic and intensely computerized work place. To Komolafe and Ajani (2010), Office Technology and Management is a work oriented educational programme that aims at skill acquisition, useful and employable in the labour market. Office Technology and Management programme therefore, is an educational programme meant for the acquisition of knowledge, skills office ethics and competencies needed to prepare the individuals to enter gainful employment in specific business and office occupation. It is a veritable programme of study which builds its participants and graduates to be able to contribute meaningfully to National Development. It is a component of business education and indeed vocational and

technical education. Graduates of the programme at the polytechnics in Nigeria are awarded National Diploma after two years of studies and a Higher National Diploma certificate at the advance level coupled with an Industrial Training experience in between the two programmes of studies. Graduates of the programme at the universities in Nigeria are awarded Bachelor of Education after four years of studies.

Business Education Skills Expected of Graduates of Office Technology and Management (OTM) Program for Economic Growth and Development

According to Asuguo in Esene and Mgbonyebi (2015) Business education and Office Technology and Management has been gradually accepted as unique courses now offered and taught among higher educational institutions in Nigeria aimed at equipping students with skills and competencies to make them self-reliant and employer of labour on graduation. According to Uteh and Ihueukwumere in Ovbiagele and Mgbonyebi (2018), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) 2004, OTM programme is structured to achieve the following grand objectives:

- Equipping individuals with office secretarial skills.
- Creating general entrepreneurship awareness in the students with a view to inculcating in them the right knowledge for productive purpose.
- Laying foundations for advance studies.

Office Technology and Management is a work oriented educational programme which aims at acquisition of skills, development of skills, competencies, attitudes and attributes to be able to function effectively in millennium offices. At the end of the programme, some entrepreneurship skills and office competencies must have been acquired or developed for effective and efficient job performances in the office. In the view of Alademere in Ihimekpen, Crossdale-Ovwido and Amaefula (2015), the following skills expected of graduates of Office Technology and Management (OTM) Programme for economic growth and development are personal skills, technical skills and Professional skills.

Personal Skills

The personal skills of the graduates of OTM programme includes:

1. Self-confidence: Graduates of Office Technology and Management (OTM) programmes that is prepared for the world of work should have self-confidence skill. This skill is needed to energize the graduates to do what he thinks is right and continue doing it without minding distractions from outsiders, until he succeeds. Self-confidence is the ability to trust one's efforts and that one succeed in a chosen adventure. It energises him to forge ahead in the midst of odds. This skill is built during the period of formal school system training or through apprenticeship.

2. **Motivational skill:** Motivation is what prompts people to do what they are doing with success zeal in them. It is the inner mind that energizes. Motivation makes businessmen work day and night without feeling tired. A person can build on motivated skills for himself or acquire skills through the encouragement of other people such as parents, teachers, supports, professional partners, age group amongst others.
3. **Communicative skill:** This involves meeting people and convincing them to buy business ideas, products or services. Communication skills involves visiting people, talking to people, writing business letters, telephoning, arranging for meetings and others. The graduate of OTM should have good command of English language, possess listening ability, possess intelligent perception and competent to make intelligent interpretations, be competent in use of body language, possession of friendly voice and ability to make intelligent selection of communication channels. These skills are learnt during period of apprenticeship, vocational or technical training, seminars, workshops and on-the-job-training.
4. **Planning skill:** Planning skill is about setting aside an amount from small income so that one can expand in the future. Anyone who cannot save from the little he/she has would not be able to save anything from thousands and millions of naira. This skill is learnt by initiating successful entrepreneurs, businessmen and women.
5. **Managerial skills:** The graduates of OTM programme needs to develop managerial skills in order to know how to take care of men and materials under his care. These men and materials are scarce or insufficient and need to be managed optimally. Some people regard human beings as machines but those who have managerial skills apply the principles of human relations in treating their workers.
6. **Human relations skill:** Human beings live and work together and they need some skills to encourage them to be highly productive. Human relations try to find out what behaviour and attitudes that encourage people to work and be productive. Nwosu (2002) affirmed that human relation is the interaction and integration of people into a work situation that motivates them to work together productively, co-operatively and with economic, psychological and social satisfaction. Human relations could be said to be the ability to get along with others. This skill is expected from OTM graduates and office managers

Technical Skills

The technical skills of the graduate of OTM programme includes:

Vocational skills: A vocation is an economic activity requiring the use of skills in an occupation or profession. The graduates of OTM must therefore be skilled and knowledgeable in the following areas of his vocation or profession.

1. Computer skills or professional software skills: Most employers demand computer literacy as a pre-requisite for employment on certain jobs. OTM graduates must therefore, be versatile with the use of the computer and information and communication technology. With the invention of computer and internet technology, the world has been reduced to a global village where people buy from the same market, the same computer language and travel on the same information (Ehirheme, 2014). The scopes of computer and information processing have widened technology with the introduction of electronic-business, e-payment, e-commerce, cashless society and paperless office among others. OTM graduates work typically centers around the office. It therefore behaves on them to be well skilled in the use of computer and information and communication technology. Arising from the above, it become pertinent for OTM graduates to be competent in the use of computer packages such as Microsoft word, Microsoft excel package, PowerPoint package, competent in desktop publishing, webpage design, data base management package, CorelDraw usage, internet browsing packages and competence in the use of other office technologies.
2. Basic professional competencies: According to Oduma (2010), the business education graduates of which OTM option is its components should have the following basic professional competencies; skill of taking shorthand notes and transcribing same using the typewriter or computer, possess skill and competencies in preparing accounting information effectively as accounting information and their uses are inevitable exercises in every establishment and organizations for monitoring financial transactions and analysis.
3. Record management skill: Oduma points that effective record management skill is another entrepreneurial skill needed by OTM graduates for optimal records keeping. He buttressed that records management is an inevitable activity in modern establishment that guarantees the safety of documents and their retrieval in times of need and that for now, there is no establishment or organization that outlaws the use of written documents. Office Technology and Management graduates must possess the competence in the management of essential official documents. Oduma concludes that it is equally important for OTM graduates to be competent in preparing official reports, coverage of official meetings by taking down minutes, be knowledgeable in law and practice of meetings, knowledgeable in office staff training and orientation methods, coupled with proficiency in form design.
4. Psychomotor skill: This is the ability to operate machines tools, machinery and also manipulate technical objects. This is one of the most important skill expected of OTM graduates for effective office operations. It involves the use of various office machines, including keyboarding machines and making use of various copiers and processors for reproduction of documents.

5. Analytical skill: Business needs critical analysis to separate successful businessmen from unsuccessful ones. An OTM graduate must possess the skill to analyze the business environment which is friendly in some regions, volatile in other ones and full of uncertainty in other areas. The analytical skill is developed during training and is applied to environment scanning, business appraisal and offer to bid.
6. Creative skills: This is one of the skills which OTM graduates must possess. The skill enables them to create ideas, services and products which he sells to people and as such, he is said to be creative. The skill helps him to generate business ideas, imagine new products, packages, services among others. Creative skills assist him to engage in imaginative thinking which can bring innovations in any sector of entrepreneurial activities.

Professional Skills

According to Ihimekpen, Crossdale-Ovwido, and Amaefula (2015), professional skills are competencies which assist a person to enroll, be acceptable and also practice in a profession. To be recognized by a professional body, an OTM graduate must be technically and educationally qualified and must possess the right ethics of the profession. When he is admitted into the profession, he can practice as a professional, having an obligation to protect the professional ethics and enjoy the privilege of this profession.

Socio-Economic Contribution of Graduates of Office Technology and Management (OTM) In Organizations for National Development

Graduates of OTM programmes are called Office Technology Managers, Professional Secretaries or Administrative Assistant Officer (Esene, 2014). With the possession of the skills listed above, the graduates are able to contribute meaningfully towards the success of virtually all organizations where they are engaged. Secretarial services are of great importance in any nation's economic development. It is therefore, not surprising to find that secretarial services are rendered in the army, air force, navy, the civil service, industries, universities, schools, hospitals, social welfare and a host of others. These bodies cannot function adequately without that key position of the secretary which is a link between the executives, board, panel or committee charged with a particular responsibility, their functions in various organizations range from information management, information processing, information storage and retrieval, office management and organization, information dissemination, resource management and control amongst others. Other areas according to Shyllon (2006) where graduate of OTM can contribute meaningfully to the socio-economic development of the nation is through self-employment and self-reliance which involves establishing and managing personal business centers, cyber cafes, secretarial/computer institutes, writing and publishing of books and articles in the discipline for other professionals. Others are organizing of workshops and seminars for office workers,

providing consulting services for organizations in the recruitment exercise, sales and distribution of GSM, computers and its accessories, office machines e.t.c. From the above, it is obvious that graduates of OTM programme with skills and competencies can immensely contribute towards the socio-economic development of the nation.

Conclusion

Office Technology and Management Programme is an educational study designed to develop skills, abilities, understandings, attitudes, work habits and appreciation encompassing knowledge and information needed by workers to centre and make progress in employment on a useful and productive basis. One of the grand objectives of the programme is to create general entrepreneurship awareness in the student with a view to inculcating in him, the spirit of self-reliance. This study revealed that some of the skills expected of graduates of OTM programmes includes; personal skills, technical skills and professional skills. These skills if put together would make OTM graduates better prepared to take up jobs in organizations and contribute meaningfully to its success or be self-employed by establishing small and medium businesses.

Recommendations

Having identified the various skills expected of OTM graduates, the following recommendations are advanced:

1. The study of Office Technology and Management Programmes should be encouraged by both the government and the public as it is geared towards skill acquisition, knowledge development and entrepreneurship.
2. Institutions where OTM courses are offered should be well equipped with adequate infrastructure and adequate lecturers and instructors employed, while the right instructional methods and materials should be used in the teaching and learning processes.
3. Adequate infrastructural facilities should be made available in the society to encourage OTM graduates who would become potential entrepreneurs to invest their resources.
4. The government should accord adequate attention to entrepreneurial/entrepreneurship development in the country through the provision of good economic environment to encourage individuals particularly OTM graduates with entrepreneurial skills to engage in entrepreneurial ventures and live fulfilled lives.
5. Government and various stakeholders in education should ensure that up-to-date new technologies and other technological equipment are adequately provided for OTM programme and there should be provision of standby generators to minimize the problems associated with power outage for adequate training of students.

6. There should be adequate funding and maintenance of equipment, and other electronic devices in OTM programme.
7. The curriculum of OTM programmes should be regularly revised in order to improve it due to the rapid global technological changes.

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