

## Acquisition of Office Technology and Management Skills for Self-reliance: A Step towards Curbing Unemployment in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

*This article discussed acquisition of maximum office technology and management (OTM) skills for self-reliance as a step towards curbing unemployment among office technology graduates in Nigeria. At the introduction, the paper defined skill, office technology and management as well as unemployment. It went further to highlight types of skills and the importance of skills acquisition in Nigeria. The paper also explored factors that impeded office technology and management graduates from acquiring maximum level of skills for satisfactory job performances and personal fulfilment in the global labour market. It concludes by making recommendations on how such impediments can be reduced.*

**Keywords:** Acquisition, Office Technology and Management Skills, Self-reliance, and Unemployment

### INTRODUCTION

Acquisition of maximum office technology and management (OTM) skills is an important aspect of Vocational Business Education (VBE) programme at the various levels of the Nigerian education. In support of this, one of the National Educational Objectives states that the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies both mental and physical are important for all Nigerians to live and contribute to the development of their society (Federal Government of Nigeria - FGN 2004). Consequently, the National Educational Policy document (FGN 2004) states that the Nation's educational activity should be centred on the students in order for them to acquire sufficient skills acquisition for self-development and fulfilment in the labour market.

Unfortunately, due to certain impediments, the types of skills namely keys skills, generic skills and vocational skills acquired by most secretarial graduates, compared with the demands of the labour market and technological advancement, are nothing to brag about. According to (Cramp, 2004) key skills are skills of communication, application of number; problem solving, team working, information technology and improving own learning and performance while generic skills include the key skills but also covers more complex reasoning and management skills and personal values such as motivation, discipline, judgement, leadership and initiative. Cramp added that vocational skills are technical skills which are specific to a particular occupation or group of occupations. In this paper, the technical skills associated with OTM include all the skills listed above as well as cover others such as ICT skills, keyboarding skills, shorthand skills, management skills, etc., to mention just a few. It is common place that many secretarial graduates lack those skills. This explains why most employers of labour in this nation consider the products of office technology and management (OTM) as half-baked and unusable without further training (FGN, 2004). As a result of this, many graduates of OTM are found all over the nation without gainful employment. These graduates too cannot be self-employed because they are not able to put to

practise what they studied in their tertiary institutions. It is against this background that this paper is written to explore acquisition of maximum office technology and management skills for self-reliance as a step towards reducing unemployment among secretarial graduates in Nigeria and to recommend ways that the problems of poor OTM skills acquisition can be reduced.

### **MEANING OF SKILL, OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT (OTM) AND UNEMPLOYMENT**

A skill is defined by Ekpenyong (1988) as the ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily in execution of performance; technical expertness, a power or habit of doing any particular thing competently. He opined that this definition is stressing that a skill is based on using knowledge expertly; the objective of which is to bring that knowledge to maximum level of competency. Thus practical skills acquisition can be described in terms of learners' behaviour and their willingness towards learning a particular skill to maximum level expected of them for gainful employment in the global labour market. In the same way, office technology and management education is defined as that education that provides skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for effective employment in secretarial and management occupations.

Furthermore, Udo (2008) OTM is a comprehensive activity-based educational programme that is concerned with the acquisition of office technology and management skills, understandings, attitudes, work habits and competencies that are requisite to success in secretarial and office management occupations. Grant and Vidler (2003) defined unemployment as a situation where people are out of work but are willing and able to work. Indeed, many secretarial graduates in this nation suffer structural unemployment which is of two main kinds namely regional mismatches which can occur where unemployed secretarial graduates are resident in particular regions of the country while job vacancies exist elsewhere. The next kind of structural unemployment involves skills mismatches that are common with secretarial graduates who are looking for work but not possessing the necessary sufficient vocational skills to fill the jobs available. This explains the rationale behind this write-up but the purpose of it is about how the OTM graduates could acquire the level of vocational skills that would enable them to be self-reliant.

### **IMPORTANCE OF ACQUIRING VOCATIONAL SKILLS IN NIGERIA**

According to Okorie and Ezeji (1988) the acquisition of the requisite skills is a means of increasing the productive power of any nations. Consequently, they added that the Nigerian society should recognize the fact that every citizen should be equipped to contribute effectively to the welfare of the country. The acquisition of such practical skills is important because when efficient and skilful hands are employed in any fields of human endeavours, high productivity is usually achieved. Economically, therefore, maximum skills acquisition by OTM students and others will help to enrich the Nigerian society and in this way, tend to facilitate economic development. Okorie and Ezeji (1988) opined that a rich nation is one that is capable of meeting the economic, social, moral and political needs of the citizenry. Nigeria as a nation will enjoy economic stability if OTM students in particular and all other VBE students in general acquire maximum skills acquisition in their specialties. Furthermore, politically, practical skills acquisition tends to promote personal and national greatness. Okorie and Ezeji (1988) pointed out that the behaviour of an individual in a society or the behaviour of a nation in a community of nations may be influenced by the skills possessed by that individual or nation. Socially, the acquisition of maximum skills helps a person to

provide amusement, happiness, love, affection and enjoyment to other individuals as well as the entire nation at large. It also helps to reduce criminal activities such as armed robbery, kidnapping, and other social vices among the youths. To the OTM students, maximum skills acquisition helps them to be engaged in productive work either for themselves or for employers of labour. This enables OTM students to qualify for and hold productive employment as well as increases their productivity and earns more remuneration. Other importance of acquiring maximum skills and competencies in OTM skills includes: it reduces the drop-out rates among the Nigerian youths; it helps to make the youth intelligent users of the products of technology as well as the most reliable vehicle for economic prosperity and diplomatic supremacy of the Nigerian nation. These benefits of maximum skills acquisition are still there if OTM students will think twice and change their poor attitudes towards it and turn to develop themselves sufficiently in the skills and competencies inherent in OTM programme of their institutions. Indeed, when OTM Students give particular priority to acquiring maximum level of office technology and management skills, It is hoped that that will help to alleviate poverty, promote equity, especially in relation to gender; arrest the spread of HIV/AIDS pandemic; support youth in crisis as well as support the growth of their rural communities.

### **IMPEDIMENTS TO OTM SKILLS ACQUISITIONS**

Generally speaking unemployment is a very big problem in various disciplines the world over. This shows that unemployment is not limited to OTM graduates alone. However, many of the OTM students suffered unemployment today because they had very poor attitudes towards the skills and competencies inherent in the OTM courses. Because of such negative attitudes, the personal interest and willingness to concentrate and acquire maximum level of skills expected of them was not there. One of such negative attitudes is failure to sit down and make wise use of their time and energy in acquiring maximum skills for self-development and fulfilment. This is because time is a critical matter in everybody's lives. Consequently, the OTM students fail to find time to engage themselves in practical exercises in courses such as in typewriting, word-processing, and shorthand to mention just but a few. When assignments and home work are given in any of the subjects listed above, it is often discovered that about ninety percent of the OTM students in the class did not find time and/or take time to do it. Again, such students fail to take their studies seriously as they often come late to the lesson and even when they know that they are terribly late, yet they would be listening to pop music/other music or talking to people with their phones. A careful examination shows that they put more efforts in playing with their mobile phones and in making calls than they do with their studies. In fact, many of the business students often left practical subject lessons to stand outside to answer calls as well as make calls. A great majority of them does not consider the length of time spent outside the classroom for such calls neither do they consider that they have lost quite an important part of the lessons.

In view of the utilitarian nature of maximum skills acquisitions, OTM students should cultivate the habit of working hard, commitment and dedication to studies in order to achieve maximum skills acquisition needed by the employers of labour. Indeed many students who enrol for OTM programme do not show commitment and dedication to their studies because they are often attracted by very many unimportant issues during their studies. Such unimportant issues range from peer group pressure to friendship issues and joining the group of students popularly known as NFA – No future Ambition. The latter group can be said to be students who do not worry or who are not concerned about their poor performances at their Institutions of higher learning. All OTM students should regard hard work, commitment and

dedication to studies as the sole reason why they are in school. When they are driven by such forces, they will discover that they are breaking new grounds in their area of specialties and that they are acquiring maximum level of skills expected of them by labour market.

Furthermore, all OTM students should be determined to overcome the poor reading culture prevalent in the Nigerian society. In fact without a strong determination to overcome it, they will not be able to read their study materials and textbooks intensively and extensively. Also, they will not be able to tackle their practical squarely. Globally, very many Nigerians are often associated with poor reading culture. In fact, there is a dictum with the whites, that if you have something worth millions of dollars to be given to Nigerians, then hide that inside a textbook and give it to the Nigerians to read and discover it, they said they are sure the Nigerians will never read the textbook to discover that treasure. Poor reading culture has affected the fabrics of our society so much so that many Nigerian students are held captive to it. Intensive and extensive reading is very pertinent because it equips the readers with all the information and knowledge required for success in any given skills acquisition. However, many Nigerian students hate being given voluminous materials to be read and in this way miss out the knowledge, skills and competencies that go with such materials. Some of them will even nickname the lecturers trying to involve them in intensive and extensive reading exercises as a way of discouraging them. Such students forget that a well-read student is bound to do far better than a poorly read one in all facets of life.

Another issue that affects maximum skills acquisition among OTM students in particular is their refusal to use their pocket money to buy the textbooks, facilities and equipment that can enhance their skills acquisition. Indeed, most of them prefer to use their pocket money to buy expensive handsets and recharge cards to phone their parents, friends and relatives at the expense of their studies. They forget that there is no substitute for having the right textbooks, facilities and equipment when it comes to learning a skill to maximum level of it. The OTM students should remember that having a personal laptop nowadays can help them to obtain knowledge, skills and competencies in information, and communication technology which in turns will help them to secure a lucrative job in the labour market. In disregard of this, OTM students prefer to use their money to go for anything that does not help them to learn business subjects at all.

The other point about the poor attitude of OTM students is their unwillingness to change their thinking and behaviour positively. It is common place that one hundred (100%) percent of OTM students' success in life or in their studies is dependent on positive attitude to whatever they are taught. Indeed, the willingness to change positively their attitudes and behaviours could help the students to acquire maximum skills expected of them for the labour market. Unfortunately, many of the OTM students are often unwilling to change their negative attitudes. In fact, a majority of the business students in our schools and colleges are often unwilling to concentrate and study the skills content of OTM courses to maximum level. For example, in the teaching and learning of typewriting, many students only want to operate the typewriter or computer keyboards with two or three fingers instead of with their nine fingers. When any lecturing is stressing that students should use their nine fingers to type so that they could achieve maximum skills level, those who are used to operating the keyboard with two or three fingers would remain adamant and would be unwilling to change. Consequently, such students would not be able to achieve maximum skills level for the labour market.

The next issue to discuss here about the negative attitude of OTM students towards acquiring maximum level of skills for the labour market is not accepting to be hard-working enough in their chosen careers. It is quite unfortunate that many students choose to study office

technology and management as their career and yet they refuse to work hard enough to acquire enough skills expected of them. In fact often times, when OTM teachers want their students to become serious and be very hard-working in their studies; such teachers are often called nicknames by those lazy students. A majority of the OTM students would not appreciate the efforts of their teachers who want them to be hard working for wellbeing in the future; instead they looked at them as being wicked, cruel and not cooperating with them.

The last point to mention here is the negative attitudes of parents, private organisations and local communities towards investment in their children's education. Very many parents and others do not want to invest at all in the education of their children. They are not ready to buy those recommended textbooks and other equipment needed for practical assignments in their classes. Indeed the children of such parents often go from one class to another without properly learning what are expected of them. In the end, such children cannot do well in their studies in schools and colleges.

The other factors impeding maximum vocational skills acquisition in our schools and colleges include: lack of facilities and equipment, the large of number of students in one class, poor maintenance culture, lack of electricity and dishonest students and leaders. In the first place, our schools and colleges lack the necessary facilities and equipment needed for the teaching and learning of OTM skills and competencies. For example, there are inadequate number of manual and electric typewriters in almost all our secondary schools, colleges of education, polytechnics and universities. Also, there is inadequate number of computers for the teaching-learning of information and communication technology (ICT). However, this is not the case in schools and colleges in Britain, China, America and other countries abroad. In fact, in those countries, primary pupils play and learn with computers right from kindergarten. Here in our nation, kindergarten children study under shades of trees, sitting down on the fields, or blocks without seeing anything like a computer or a manual typewriter.

Furthermore, the OTM classrooms in Nigeria are loaded with too many students to be taught at a go. It is not surprising to see over two hundred and fifty OTM students in one small classroom. Many of them have no seat and no writing table and hence many of them will be standing. Even when there are tables and seats, too many students are squeezed into one seat. Consequently, they lack the comfort and conducive atmosphere needed for maximum skills acquisition.

In addition, there is poor maintenance culture in our schools and colleges. Consequently, the buildings in schools and colleges are dilapidated, and windows and doors are often broken down. The headmasters and principals are often not disturbed about the poor state of facilities and equipment in their learning institutions. The government in power does not release money for yearly maintenance culture. In fact, most of our schools and colleges are worse than piggery farms in abroad. There is also lack of electricity in our schools and colleges for practical work and we have many dishonest students and leaders are all out to steal and destroy whatever the government has made available in our schools and colleges.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is concluded that the problems were associated with negative attitudes of students, parents, private organisations and communities. Based on discussion and conclusion the following recommendations are made:

Office Technology and Management (OTM) students should be willing to change their negative attitudes towards skills-oriented courses of the programme. The students may



determine to be industrious and to appreciate teachers who make them to work harder. OTM students may learn to do away with poor reading culture and be prepared to read intensively and extensively. Both OTM students and their leaders may learn to do away with all forms of dishonesty. Provision of basic amenities for the teaching-learning of OTM courses should be made available. Proper investment should be made towards boosting the teaching and learning of OTM subjects in our schools and colleges. OTM students may be extremely committed and dedicated to their studies. This paper makes a passionate appeal to all and sundry to acquire maximum office technology and management skills for effective and efficient job performance in the global labour market.

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