

REPOSITIONING OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT LECTURERS FOR EFFECTIVE DELIVERY IN A DIGITAL ERA

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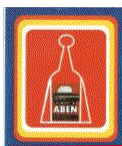
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Abstract

The technological advancements of the 21st Century saw to the birthing of Office Technology and Management (OTM) programme with its ICT oriented courses. This has, in turn, placed ICT proficiency demand on OTM teachers, which many are yet to meet. The paper examined the contents of some key ICT courses offered in OTM to ensure they are congruent with the general objectives of business education (OTM) and that the need for lecturers' proficiency in ICT skills is justified. The paper also x-rayed strategies like staff reorientation, development and increased funding as potential measures to encouraging/challenging conservative lecturers of OTM to a positive disposition on ICT proficiency for themselves. The paper concluded that OTM teachers are pivotal to the successful implementation of the programme's curriculum and as such, proficiency at ICT skills is a sine qua non for them. Among other things, the paper recommended that institutions should religiously pursue the training and retraining of OTM teachers so as to keep them abreast of the ever-evolving world of technology. It also recommended that government should prioritise education, increase its funding, using at least the UNESCO benchmark of 15-20% of the annual budget, so as to foster functional education system in Nigeria.

Introduction

The world, as we know it today, has historically transitioned from the pre-historical era (comprising of the Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age) to the modern era where it is today. Each era had its own peculiarities with its inherent challenges that one way or another detected and affected how people lived. The 21st Century, an integral part of the contemporary era, that has been variously referred to as computer age, information age and digital age, has witnessed technological boom like none other before it with its resultant impacts. The technological advances of this age define the everyday social, economic and political life of the people of this era. Take the computer, for example, the computer has had unbelievable positive impacts on the various aspects of societal life. Sutton (2013) asserted that the computer has taken the shift towards technology and precedents set by the industrial revolution of the 1800s to a new level. Sutton maintained that the growth of the personal computer and the use of the internet have forced a shift in society that will never look back. The advancement of the computer has positively affected the medical profession, entertainment industry, business and education sectors, and our mode of social interactions, to mention but a few. Even the corporate world is not spared. The language and methodologies of the corporate world have drastically changed in response to the technological changes/advancements of the digital age. Terms and concepts which were hitherto unknown and unheard of are gradually becoming regularised and the dictionaries keep changing on daily basis to accommodate more of



such. Concepts such as e-banking, e-business, e-learning, apps, webinar, surfing, and so on, are becoming popularised and developers are constantly developing apps to help entrench these concepts and make indulging them more worthwhile. Glance (2015) emphasised that many conversations people have today would mean little to someone from 2005 due to the increased pace of changes in technology, which have resulted in equally rapid change in people's language and with it, their thoughts.

These changes were not limited to vocabulary and diction, but around the globe, the ways or methods of goods production and service delivery have greatly changed. Sutton (2013) noted that over the last few decades, ICT technologies such as cellular devices, iPads, iPods, computers, and most importantly the internet, have completely overhauled the way people interact in society and the way educators work in schools. Sutton affirmed that technological advancements have made it imperative that teachers of the 21st Century adjust to the technological revolution and prepare both themselves and their students for the technological controlled real world. Business education programme and its teachers cannot be left out this technological trend, if the programme must remain relevant in a digital age.

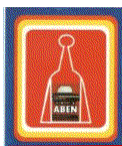
The Business Education (Office Technology & Management) programme

Education has long gone beyond being literate. In fact, the word illiteracy has been variously redefined to mean more than mere inability to read and write. In the tech world, illiteracy is defined as inability to use the computer and its associated technologies. UNESCO (2021) stated that, beyond its conventional concept as a set of reading, writing and counting skills, literacy is now defined as a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, creation, and communication in an increasingly digital, text-mediated, information-rich and fast changing world. This goes to show that ability to simply read and write does not just suffice. Rather, a deliberate, well planned and responsive education programme is essential for effective functioning in a digital age. Indeed, the future socio-economic success of any nation, as alluded to by Oyebade, Oladipo and Adetoro (2008), will depend largely on the ability of its people to deal with a global environment that is knowledge and technology driven.

Business education programme is a deliberate, well planned programme, which is flexible to the point that it reflects the ever evolving technological driven societal change from time to time. This is particularly obvious in Office Technology and Management (OTM) programme, which metamorphosed from Secretarial Studies to a more technology responsive form. OTM, a subset of business education, is an aspect of Vocational and Technical Education (VTE), which among other things emphasises job competencies, career preparation and work adjustment.

In the year 2006, the regulatory body for polytechnic education in Nigeria, National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) reviewed the then Secretarial Studies programme in view of the changing trends in the business world, modern business offices and labour market in general, occasioned by technological advancement. This review gave birth to an almost new programme – Office Technology and Management (OTM). The change was not only in nomenclature but also reflected in the courses offered under the programme and their contents. Amiaya (2013) asserted that the new name, Office Technology and Management, is a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of educational process involving general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life.

Nwaiwu and Ama (2014) observed that the courses being offered under OTM programme are more ICT oriented, and are of practical, demonstrable nature that apply to the psychomotive and cognitive domains. Assenting to this, Jamiu in Nwaiwu and Nwokorie (2019) emphasised that the current OTM programme lays much emphasis on computer and computer related courses and they are divided into special area, ICT applications, and general education relating to contemporary

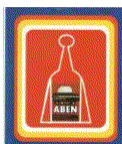


problems usually called general studies. A look at NBTE/UNESCO (2004) curriculum showed the courses offered at HND level of OTM to include ICT Office Application I & II, Database Management Systems (DBMS), Advanced Desktop Publication, Management Information Systems (MIS), Advanced Webpage Design, Oral Communication Skills, Entrepreneurship Development, among others. A critical analysis of these courses will reveal a deliberate move towards the attainment of the direct aims of OTM and the broader aim of Business Education. According to Sokyese, Wetnwan and Beweran (2018), OTM, an offshoot of Business Education, is an aspect of Vocational and Technical Education (VTE), that, among other things emphasises job competencies, career preparation and work adjustment. On the other hand, Adebayo (2019) stressed that the ultimate aim of business education, as an integral part of technical and vocational education and training programme (TVET) is to provide graduates with the appropriate skills that will enable them to be versatile in their business endeavours to meet the economic needs through engagement in the world of work as employees as well as self-employed. Put in another way, business education is an aspect of the educational programme designed to provide an individual with the needed business and vocational attitudes, understanding, knowledge and skills as an active player in the world of work. Okoli (2010) opined that business education is an important part of the general education which emphasises competencies and skills acquisition for use in offices and business related occupations.

From these submissions, the common emphasis on acquisition of relevant practical skills and knowledge for the modern world of work is not questionable. OTM programme completely aligns with this. The specific aims/objectives of some of the ICT courses according to NBTE (2004) curriculum are shown below:

1. Database Management Systems - This course is intended to enable the students acquire in-depth knowledge of office information system with particular emphasis to file creation, storage, management and manipulation; generate management reports using modern computer software application system; understand key database (DTB) concepts and applications in modern office
2. Advanced Desktop Publishing -This module is designed to enable students develop their skills in using desktop publication software.
3. Management Information Systems - This course is intended to enable students acquire the knowledge of data and information processing techniques and communication to all levels of Management; understand systems analysis and design in a modern office.
4. Advanced Webpage Design - This module is designed to enable students understand the importance of designing web pages for modern offices; have a full command of web design software application to improve business online performance; and understand the impact of using the internet for business and commerce in the modern economy. Objectively, the course is designed to help students to understand the principles of Web Page Design and their impact on businesses, understand the importance of the internet in business practice, e-business and e-commerce and develop skills in designing successful web pages for businesses.

There is no doubt that, from their aims/objectives, many of these ICT courses introduced to OTM are quite responsive to and reflective of technological changes of the digital age. Many of the courses are eight credit hour courses, the highest for any course in the Department. Their assessment criteria were distributed between practical and theory in the ratio of 75:25 percents, respectively. This underscores the importance attached to these courses and their lofty objectives by the designers of the curriculum. To attain these objectives, therefore, requires well positioned, mobilised and prepared resource persons, who in this case are OTM lecturers.



Strategies for repositioning OTM lecturers for effective delivery

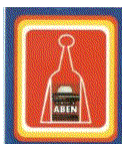
Teaching learners with an effective strategy that will arouse their interest in the course will not only help them master the subject matter but also enable them apply the knowledge so acquired in various life situation. This, therefore, places a legitimate demand on teachers to develop themselves to the point of mastery (practical/applicable knowledge) of their courses, as this will help them identify more demonstrable/effective method of communicating them to the learners (Nwaiwu & Ama, 2014). Accomplishing the objectives of OTM programme, with particular reference to their ICT courses, will remain an uphill task, if not near impossible without a well prepared and positioned team of lecturers. It has, therefore, become of paramount importance to reposition OTM lecturers so they can deliver the objectives of the course effectively. The following strategies are hereby suggested for effective repositioning of OTM lecturers for 21st Century relevance:

Reorientation on need for technology integrated pedagogy

The introduction of ICT favoured courses to OTM has posed a challenge of shortfall in resources (both human and material) and hence the need for constant strategy reviews. Adebayo (2019) opined that one core challenge to effective implementation of OTM curriculum is that most of the lecturers, who, understandably transitioned from Secretarial Studies, were trained in the traditional learning environment with the use of manual typewriters, carbon papers, correcting fluid, typing erasers, stencils and all the likes, including the rigors of calculations and setting involved in tabulation works. However, advancement has overtaken these operational systems, paving way for more convenient and productive technological systems. The more difficult challenge, incidentally, is that some of these lecturers have not deemed it important to congruently update their knowledge and skills in the course.

Amiaya (2015) asserted that part of the challenges to the introduction of ICT tools in the teaching and learning in OTM is resistance to change from traditional pedagogical methods of teaching secretarial education/office management to more innovative and technology-based teaching and learning method demanded by OTM. The statement that the illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn, credited to Toffler (2022), succinctly portrays the situation. Olajide, Afolabi, Abidoye and Olojo in Ogiagah and Ofulue (2014) submitted that some teachers adopt hard conservative stance and resist changes. According to them, these set of teachers insist that it is the responsibility of their institutions to send (sponsor) them for further studies/training of all kinds (including that on ICT) and as such their deficiency in ICT skills due to lack of training, should be blamed solely on their institutions. This is definitely a faulty line of thought. It could be agreeable that staff development is part of the fringe benefits expected when working in an academic institution but the fact is that it is not a right to be claimed or enforced. In many public institutions, poor funding has inhibited staff sponsorship to development courses. Even with the intervention of Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND), it is still not possible to take all interested parties. Majority of academics in Nigeria today are attaining the highest level of education (PhD) and undertaking several enrichment courses through self efforts without any input from their institutions. It simply boils down to a mindset and orientation.

Shyamal in Amiaya (2015) buttressed that preparing teachers to face the challenges of an ICT enriched teaching and learning environment is crucial. Shyamal maintained that efforts must be oriented towards changing the teachers' mindset to developing positive attitudes towards ICT applications in teaching and learning. A deliberate reorientation of OTM teachers, particularly the "conservatives" who are not very positively disposed to acquiring the relevant ICT skills required in the field, will be of great assistance towards this all important change of mindsets. Once there is a will, there will always be a way.



Provision of adequate ICT facilities and other resources

The need for adequate provision of the required ICT facilities and other relevant resources for effective delivery of OTM curriculum cannot be undermined. Amiaya (2015) asserted that it is impossible to talk about effective utilisation without first ensuring adequate provision of the facilities and infrastructure. Teaching and learning in the 21st Century demands that modern facilities are adequately provided because their availability will motivate teachers into using them in demonstrating the operation process and enhance skills transfer among their students. The saying “what I hear, I may forget, what I see, I may remember but what I do, I become” aptly applies here. Ojo and Akhademe (2016) agreed with this view as they suggested that new technologies should be effectively utilised in training OTM students with a view to equipping them with the required skills, attitude and knowledge needed for modern office management and also matching graduates with the current demands of modern organisation. The duo insisted that different modern office technology facilities should be used to teach OTM students so as to effectively bridge the gap between what is being taught in various institutions and what is in use in the world of work.

The provision of adequate ICT facilities and other infrastructure for teaching and learning in OTM, as already established, will in no little way aid the attainment of the goals/objectives of the programme. It will also motivate and aid the teachers to sharpen and or acquire relevant ICT skills for very robust and interactive class sessions. Running a tech driven/ICT oriented course like OTM without the requisite or, at least, the basic ICT facilities is simply a mockery of education.

Training and retraining of OTM lecturers

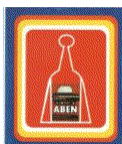
The need for lecturers to be adequately equipped for effective utilisation of ICT and its related technologies for a successful implementation of OTM curriculum, cannot be overemphasised. HNDII is the last lap of the OTM programme in the polytechnics. At this level, a student is about to be turned to a graduate and released to the labour market without a confident level of proficiency at the expected skills all because the lecturers themselves lacked adequate training on ICT skills. One can only imagine the lot of the graduates out there in the world of work.

Eneasoba (2014) posited that OTM lecturers must acquire and demonstrate competency in modern ICT skills in order to deliver the new methods of communication and reform their instructional delivery system. Adebayo (2019) affirmed that obsolescence has caught us with old technologies (such as manual typewriting and stencil cutting), thus paving way for new technologies, which need to be learnt by business educators for improved knowledge and skills that will match today's business environments. Further to that, Amiaya (2015) emphasised that OTM lecturers need to be adequately trained and regularly retrained to acquire the competencies and skills required for effective utilisation of ICT in instructional delivery such that students with the appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes for employment in modern offices and organizations will be the indisputable evidence.

The success or otherwise of the curriculum implementation depends to a great extent on the level of preparedness of the lecturers, who are the key implementers. It, therefore, suffices to say that the training and retraining of OTM lecturers, in response to the ever evolving world of technology, will greatly reposition them for the serious business of preparing graduates and making them ready for the modern world of work.

Improved funding

The education system of Nigeria is battered from many fronts but at the core of it all is the challenge of poor funding. Alaba and Ibrahim (2019) lamented that Nigerian government had incessantly neglected the education sector in its yearly budgetary allocation, despite the fact that education is a huge capital investment enterprise. Over the last ten years, budgetary allocations for education in Nigeria have been on the decline with 2021 witnessing the worst allocation in the last



ten years. A quick check of the budgetary allocations over the period under review is as follows: 2011 – 9.3%, 2012 – 9.86%, 2013 – 10.1%, 2014 – 10.5%, 2015 – 10.7%, 2016 – 7.9%, 2017 – 7.4%, 2018 – 7.04%, 2019 – 7.05%, 2020 – 6.7% and 2021 – 5.6% (Olufemi, 2021). In the current fiscal year 2022, education was allocated a mere 7.9% percent of the national budget, falling below the international benchmark of 15 – 20% set by UNESCO convention, which Nigeria was “committed” to (Onyeji & Ileyemi, 2021). Looking at these budgetary allocations, especially in the last five years, it is not so surprising that the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) have been on strike over fund related issues since the 14th day of February 2022.

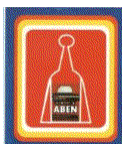
The Office Technology and Management programme, a subset of business education, is definitely not exempted from the malaise of poor funding hampering educational development in Nigeria as well as teachers’ professional development and welfare. Ogiagah and Ofulue (2014) decried the decrease in budgetary allocation to education sector and general funding of tertiary institutions both at the federal and states levels pointing out that the situation is a major constraint to the provision of ICT for effective teaching and learning of OTM. The duo observed that the ratio of students per computer and level of internet connectivity in Nigeria is very poor because government’s contribution to ICT for educational purposes is abysmally low. Oke in Eze cited in Kulo, Effah and Okudare (2015) highlighted reasons that justify the needed funding for business education in general. Some of the reasons, as it affects OTM, include but not limited to:

1. Provision of education facilities like well equipped laboratories, building and furniture;
2. Support for training and retraining of lecturers and staff;
3. Promoting specialisation of lecturers;
4. Regular review of lecturers’ salary and provision of hazard allowance; and
5. Continuous support of industrial students.

Though capital intensive, education remain the catalyst to any meaningful change in the society. It holds the key to revamping the fortunes of economies and therefore ought to be prioritised by any serious government. Proper funding of OTM programme will help stimulate lecturers’ interest and zeal in the discharge of their duties and by extension the effective implementation of the curriculum.

Conclusion

The 21st Century has witnessed an unprecedented technological change that drastically changed the general way of live, as it were. These changes are more pronounced in education, medical profession and business. As technology trend keeps changing, there is need for people and society to change and adapt to the changes or be left behind. Office Technology and Management programme was birthed in response to the technological demands of the world of business and work and boasts of an ICT favoured curriculum. If well implemented, the curriculum will see to the seamless production of graduates who are well equipped and confident to engage the business and work office of the digital age. This, however, is not without implications for lecturers who are pivotal to the successful implementation of the reviewed curriculum. The traditional “talk and chalk board” approach cannot do justice to the design and contents of the ICT courses under OTM programme today. A technology infused approach is certainly needed for execution of the contents of the curriculum. The readiness of the lecturers to embrace this “new” and more effective approach is in doubt, particularly as some of them are still indifferent to acquisition of ICT skills. This, therefore, underscores the need to painstakingly adopt strategies that will ensure that OTM lecturers are in the right technological (psychomotor and cognitive) frame to deliver the rich contents of OTM curriculum to beneficiaries of the programme.



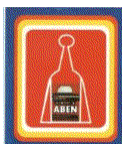
Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. Sponsored training and retraining of OTM lecturers, so as to keep them abreast of the ever evolving world of technology should be religiously pursued by Management of institutions where the programme is run.
2. Institutions should endeavour to equip OTM laboratories with the necessary ICT facilities and resources, as this is very vital to the success of the programme.
3. Schools should seek collaboration with the relevant business/corporate organisations with a view to helping tackle the challenges of funding in OTM.
4. OTM lecturers should understand that ICT skills proficiency is not an option but a mandatory requirement for them and therefore endeavour to acquire them even at personal financial cost.
5. Lecturers can form academic cooperative society that will solely concentrate on financing members' academic development courses.
6. Government at all levels should, by all means, demonstrably prioritise education in Nigeria by increasing its yearly budgetary allocation using, at least, the UNESCO benchmark of 15-20% of the annual budget. This will greatly help in fostering a functional education system in the country.
7. NBTE should strengthen its feedback mechanism with a view to ensuring that OTM curriculums are always reflective of the societal needs so as to avoid skills mismatch.

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