

Preparation for Career among Office Technology and Management (OTM) Students of College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti, Nigeria

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Abstract. This research investigated preparation for career among Office Technology and Management students in College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive design of the case study type. The population for the year studied was made up of all 39 graduating students offering Office Technology and Management in College of Education, Ikere Ekiti. The population was manageable, hence, the entire population was studied as the sample. A structured questionnaire, validated by experts and subjected to a reliability test with a coefficient of 0.87 using Crombach alpha method, was used for data collection. Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation for research questions and t-test statistics for testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed that students have adequate knowledge of office career skills and also possess the required skills for the world of work. Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that knowledge of essential career skills and possessing the skills are vital index for preparing for career as lack or inadequate preparation will lead to unemployability. It was recommended, among others, that institution-industry collaboration should be enhanced in order to fix up well-informed and equipped students for employment after graduation; students should be encouraged and motivated to develop positive attitude towards self-employment rather than waiting for the non-existent while collar jobs.

Keywords: Career, Preparation, Knowledge, OTM, Self-reliance

Introduction

Career/vocation is important to life. It is a means of livelihood. There is the need to be knowledgeable about the skills required in the workplace in order to prepare for its acquisition for personal and societal sustenance in the future. Edokpolor and Enokeran (2017), citing Leong (2012) and Lovšin (2017), define career as an individual's lifelong progression in work, in education and training, and life in general. It is a sequence of attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies that broadly prepare students for a successful transition into the world of work (Abston & Soter, 2020) in Ezechukwu, et al. (2021).

Preparing for career is not just a mere waste of time. The usual saying that 'whoever fails to plan plans to fail' is a timely phrase in this context. Students must be well knowledgeable and well equipped for their vocations/career before going into the labour market. Career Development Institute (2017) emphasizes that career development or preparation is not just a decision that takes place at the entry point to a job; it is a lifetime process, which entails different roles and responsibilities that one engages in throughout one's working adulthood into retirement, including one's education, family, leisure activities, paid or volunteer work, and so on.

The office technology and management (OTM) programme is subsumed under Business Education programme within the vocational education programme. The essence of it is to be able to fix graduates into office career positions at the end of the programme in order to enable them to be self-reliant or possess skills to earn careers in any establishment or organization of any type. Inability to possess the required skills for the world of work means that graduates are not career ready and this implies contributing to unemployment in the

society. Olawole (2013) in Omoniyi and Elemure (2014) remarked that vocational education philosophy was built on the production of graduates who will be equipped with all necessary skills and knowledge that will, not only enable them fit into already existing job opportunity in the society, but will also empower them with skills that will enable them establish their own business, and if possible, create job opportunities for others. Career Development Institute in Ezechukwu, et al. (2021) emphasized that career relates to helping individuals in making the most of work opportunities which include the impacts on and relationships between work roles and wider life roles.

OTM is a practical oriented course where students gain practical experience as needed in the workplace. This will make them relevant in today's office. Omoniyi and Elemure (2014) see OTM as an activity-based educational programme aimed at equipping students with office, technological and managerial skills, attitudes, competencies, and work habits that are required for success in occupations that have to do with secretarial and office management. Esene (2017) in Ezechukwu, et al. (2021) averred that OTM is an educational programme designed to develop individuals' abilities, skills, work ethics, and attitudes, as well as to impart the necessary knowledge required for effective entry and steady progress in gainful employment both now and in the future. Iheukwumere, Uteh, and Nkoro (2019) established that Office Technology and Management is a practically oriented programme that is geared towards the development of skills, competencies and attributes that are necessary for efficiency of the economy. It is an educational programme that equips its recipients with knowledge and functional skills that empower them to contribute meaningfully in their respective areas in a business environment.

The two main reasons, as noted by Esene (2017) in Ezechukwu, et al. (2021), for designing the Office Technology and Management programme were, first, to address the needs of the conventional office environment which is dynamic, and, second, to enhance students' knowledge by equipping them with the requisite skills for today's modern office/work environment. Azih and Ejeka (2015) observed a great concern about the gap that exists between the school and the workplace and noted that graduates have much difficulty in transiting from academic life to work. They emphasized that the need for requisite skills for today's modern office led to a change in curriculum with more emphasis on information and communication technology (ICT), and managerial and entrepreneurial competencies and that the change from secretarial studies to OTM was as a result of the need for graduates of secretarial studies to build a career in their chosen vocation to avoid a mismatch between their self-identity upon graduation and that which is required for today's office professionals.

In emphasizing the relevance of OTM to the world of work, OTM students cannot afford to be out of place with the recent developments in ICT which is changing every facet of life and bringing innovations into the workplace. There is an urgent need for them to acquire the right skills for the office work. Udo (2014) opined that graduates who have high managerial competencies have become inevitable because of the growing demand for organizations to compete favourably in a global economy. Lack of such skills results in graduates being considered not suitable in today's workplace. Emeasoba and Ezenwafor (2014) observed that rapid advancement in ICT has made it possible for people in different parts of the world to communicate via satellite, video conferencing as well as transmit faxes embodying complex designs and drawings via regular telephone line. This, in addition to new innovations have created various business needs, wants, challenges and opened new opportunities like e-business, e-communication, e-purchasing, e-marketing, e-finance, e-learning and e-service, all of which make use of electronic devices to conduct businesses on-line.

Need for Career Preparation

The career requirements of the office professional is multifaceted. Ezechukwu, et al. (2021) highlighted some researchers who identified some skills needed by OTM graduates such as office skills which include typewriting, shorthand, bookkeeping, among others (Adam, 2015); managerial and entrepreneurial skills comprising planning, organizing, directing, decision making, problem solving, personal drive, creativity, self-reliance, and more (Suartha et al., 2017); ICT skills include web browsing, e-mail, database and spreadsheet management, and other computer and technology skills (Chepkonga, 2015); communication skills include reading, writing, speaking, and listening, which are involved in the process of receiving, generating, or transmitting messages (Suartha et al., 2017); while socio-psychological skills comprise inter-personal and intra-personal skills (Low et al., 2016). They intoned that possession of these skills indicates graduating OTM students' preparedness for the labour market, and, by implication, their employability. Furthermore, an office professional should be proficient in office management in terms of delegation of duties, listening to and respecting others' opinions in a team, being goal-oriented, able to work with people from varied backgrounds, and able to handle stress (Udo, 2014).

The ability to communicate is important as it makes for effective workflow in any organization. Iheukwumere, Uteh, and Nkoro (2019) noted that equipping OTM students with essential skills to compete in a global job market is important but more importantly, cultivating their abilities to effectively share ideas and communicate across cultures in appropriate and respectful ways is critical. Furthermore, Jackson (2018) in Ezechukwu, et al. (2021) maintained that the advent of technology and communication advancements have made preparing students for global competition a need rather than a luxury and more realizable than ever before as it entails global collaboration between and with people in different parts of the world through several channels like web chats, e-learning, video conferencing, international trade, e-banking as well as working for international organization that prefer employees linguist and also possess multiple skills and ability to interact with people from diverse cultures.

OTM graduates must be conversant and versed with the use of information technologies in order to be able to compete effectively in the business world. Nwosu and Okoro (2018) in Iheukwumere, et al. (2019) stressed that global competitiveness needs global competence, hence the information technologies that can enhance the growth of a business application tools, online security, cloud-based computing and various business transactions is a trend that has made and will continue to make a great positive impact. They emphasized that OTM students should be able to use the internet, web chats, video conferencing to have discussions, engage in dialogue and form friendship with other business organization across the globe. This implies that they should be equipped with specialized skills that will help them to be globally relevant professionally.

An OTM graduate must not be limited in knowledge in various areas that relate to the international world view but according to Russo and Osborne (2017) in Iheukwumere, et al. (2019), a globally competent student must have a diverse knowledge of the world view which informs the way he views the world's growing interconnectivity and of the necessity of his ability to function within it. Such a person must be able to comprehend international divergence of his major field of study, communicate effectively cross-culturally, exhibit cross-cultural sensitivity and adaptability; carry global competencies which equip him to contribute on both local and international scale.

The Role of Higher Education in Preparing Students

The role of higher education in effective training of OTM graduates for preparation for career is very important and cannot be overemphasized. Training given must follow a career

path which will make graduates fit into the particular office career. They should therefore ensure that students are well equipped through the appropriate and adequate general and specific career training given. Ezechukwu, et al. (2021) opined that career development requires specialized training in a particular direction or path, and this makes the role of education prominent in preparing for a career. They observed that the quality of higher education programmes in terms of graduate career readiness and employability has been the focus of much research in recent times; and in many cases, the lack of employability skills in higher education graduates was reported (Abayadeera & Watty, 2016; Low et al., 2016).

Suarta et al. (2017) emphasized the need for institutions of higher learning to design and implement educational programmes to produce graduates who, not only possess the technical skills associated with their discipline, but also interpersonal skills which meet the needs and expectations of employers. Citing Villares & Brigman (2018), they see career-readiness in terms of having the requisite cognitive, academic, work and social skills, knowledge or experiences, which enable the individual's transition from school into the workplace and make viable a career path in the present-day context. The Association for Career and Technical Education (2011) described career readiness as involving a blend of academic, technical, and employability skills.

Challenges

In spite of the laudable goals of the OTM programme, many challenges face the effective implementation of the OTM programme and achievement of its objectives. For instance, Omoniyi and Elemure's study examined challenges affecting the implementation of Office Technology and Management programme in achieving its main objectives in Ekiti State, Nigeria and found that the curriculum of Office Technology and Management is fraught with some challenges to both teachers and students which hinder the achievement of its general aims and objectives. The challenges are also evident in studies such as Adeola and Bolarinwa (2010) which pointed out that in majority of Nigerian institutions, there are inadequate classroom accommodation; poorly equipped libraries, laboratories and lecture rooms; insufficient fund; inadequate attention for curriculum innovation and sponsorship by the government due to lack of fund. Also, Ike (2008) posited that the new curriculum of Office Technology and Management made it more capital intensive and demanding that computers and other electronic gadgets which are basic to all teaching and learning activities involving teachers and students are just not there in the laboratories and classrooms, and where they exist, they are few in number. Eze and Ugwuanyi (2008) observed the lack of adequate functional laboratories, model offices and equipment in most institutions of higher learning; Oludele (2013) observed erratic power supply; enormous cost of equipment with a crippled economy and terribly devalued currency; among others, as major challenges to effective implementation of ICT-based OTM curriculum.

The computer and networking competencies possessed by OTM lecturers in tertiary institutions in Anambra and Enugu states was assessed by Emeasoba and Ezenwafor (2014), adopting the descriptive survey design. Population and sample consisted of 113 OTM lecturers. A validated questionnaire with reliability coefficients of 0.76 and 0.86 were used for data collection. Mean, standard deviation and z-test were used for analysis. Findings showed that the respondents possessed computer operation competencies to a high extent and networking competencies to a low extent. Gender and experience have no significant effect in the respondents mean ratings on their possessed computer operation and networking competencies. OTM lecturers in tertiary institutions in Anambra and Enugu states can produce graduates with computer operation competencies but can hardly produce graduates with networking competencies.

Career readiness of graduating Office Technology and Management (OTM) students of

polytechnics was assessed by Ezechukwu et al. (2021) in three states of South-East Nigeria. Career readiness was determined based on the extent to which the students possessed the attitudes and skills required for advancing on the OTM career path. The skills were aggregated into six clusters: office, managerial, entrepreneurial, ICT (information and communication technology), communication, and socio-psychological skills. 179 HND II students of OTM constituted the study population. Findings showed an average career readiness index of 3.06 for the graduating OTM students. The indicators showed that the students were lacking in office, managerial, entrepreneurial and communication skills, but rated very high in ICT and socio-psychological skills. Overall, the findings indicated an average career readiness index for the graduating OTM students. Given the observed low level of managerial and entrepreneurial competencies, the study concludes that the OTM programme of Nigerian polytechnics is not yet fully achieving its stated goals in adequately preparing OTM students to fit into their career path in the current world of work.

Statement of the Problem

There seems to be a wide gap in the training received by graduates and the workplace requirements. Graduates seem not well informed and equipped with employable career skills before graduation, hence, are not likely to be adequately fit for employment in today's workplace. This seems to be as a result of ineptitude on the part of students and inability to focus on the career skills while in school. The study sought to find out whether OTM graduating students of College of Education, Ikere Ekiti were, not only knowledgeable about office career skills, but also well equipped to perform in the world of work in terms of the knowledge, skills and training they have received before graduating from school. The study thus sought to determine students' knowledge and possession of the requisite skills that will make them career ready.

Purpose of the Study

This study determined students' knowledge of the required skills for the office and their preparation for career among Office Technology and Management students in College of Education, Ikere, Ekiti State. Specifically, the study:

1. identified OTM students' knowledge of the skills that could prepare them for career; and
2. determined students' possession of the required skills in readiness for career.

Research Questions

1. Will there be any difference in students' responses on their knowledge of office skills for preparation for career based on gender?
2. Will there be any difference in students' responses on their possession of office skills in preparation for career based on gender?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of students on their knowledge of the office skills that prepare them for career based on gender.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of students on their possession of the office skills that prepare them for career based on gender.

Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey design of the case study type. The population for this study was 39 – all graduating students offering Office Technology and Management, College of Education, Ikere Ekiti. Because of the manageable size of the population, the

entire population formed the sample, that is, 39. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The validity of the research instrument was ascertained by experts with a reliability coefficient of 0.87 obtained with Crombach alpha method. Mean greater than 2.50 was rated “agree” while any mean less than 2.50 was rated “disagree”. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for research questions and t-test statistics for testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Research Question 1: Do OTM students have knowledge of the office skills that prepare them for career?

Table 1: Knowledge of Office Skills that Prepare Students for Career

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	St.D	Remarks
1	Decision making	24 (61.5%)	15 (38.5%)	-	-	3.62	0.49	Agree
2	Problem solving	13 (33.3%)	24 (61.5%)	2 (5.1%)	-	3.28	0.55	Agree
3	Relevant modern office skills	24 (61.5%)	14 (35.9%)	1 (2.6%)	-	3.59	0.54	Agree
4	Strong work ethics and dedication to work	20 (51.3%)	16 (41%)	2 (5.1%)	1 (2.6%)	3.41	0.71	Agree
5	Effective communication skills	20 (51.3%)	16 (41%)	3 (7.7%)	-	3.43	0.64	Agree
6	Responsibilities with less supervision	22 (56.4%)	13 (33.3%)	4 (10.3%)	-	3.46	0.68	Agree
7	Word Processing	16 (41%)	20 (51.3%)	2 (5.1%)	1 (2.6%)	3.31	0.69	Agree
8	ICT compliance	18 (46.2%)	18 (46.2%)	2 (5.1%)	1 (2.6%)	3.36	3.70	Agree
9	Risk taking	21 (53.8%)	17 (43.6%)	1 (2.6%)	-	3.51	0.55	Agree
10	Innovative ability	17 (43.6%)	19 (48.7%)	3 (7.7%)	-	3.35	0.63	Agree

Note: Mean greater than 2.50 “agree” otherwise “disagree”

Table 1 reveals that all respondents (100%) agreed that they possess the knowledge of all the skills that prepare OTM students ready for career after graduation. This result shows that students possess the knowledge of the skills required in the world of work. The mean values of respondents in the table are greater than 2.50. This further confirmed the level of agreement of the respondents with the skills.

Research Question 2: Do OTM students possess the required skills in readiness for career?

Table 2: OTM Students’ Possession of Required Skills in Preparation for Career

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	St.D	Remarks
1	Collaborative skills	25 (64.1%)	13 (33.3%)	1 (2.6%)	-	3.62	0.54	Agree
2	Team spirit	18 (46.2%)	18 (46.2%)	3 (7.7%)	-	3.38	0.63	Agree
3	ICT compliance	19 (48.7%)	20 (51.3%)	-	-	3.49	0.51	Agree
4	Decision making skills	20 (51.3%)	17 (43.6%)	2 (5.1%)	-	3.46	0.60	Agree
5	Problem solving skills	20 (51.3%)	18 (46.2%)	1 (2.6%)	-	3.49	0.56	Agree
6	Relevant modern office skills	14 (35.9%)	19 (48.7%)	5 (12.8%)	1 (2.6%)	3.18	0.76	Agree
7	Commitments and strong work ethics	17 (43.6%)	21 (53.8%)	-	1 (2.6%)	3.38	0.63	Agree
8	Effective communication skills.	17 (43.6%)	18 (46.2%)	3 (7.7%)	1 (2.6%)	3.31	0.73	Agree
9	Responsibilities	15 (38.5%)	19 (48.7%)	4 (10%)	1 (2.6%)	3.23	0.74	Agree
10	Word processing	22 (56.4%)	16 (41%)	-	1 (2.6%)	3.51	0.64	Agree
11	Using technologies to influence productivity in the modern office.	12 (30%)	23 (59%)	3 (7.7%)	1 (2.6%)	3.18	0.68	Agree
12	Planning	19 (48.7%)	18 (46.2%)	1 (2.6%)	1 (2.6%)	3.41	0.68	Agree
13	Initiative	19 (48.7%)	15 (38.5%)	5 (12.8%)	-	3.36	0.71	Agree

Note: Mean greater than 2.50 “agree” otherwise “disagree”

Responses on OTM Students’ possession of required skills in preparation for Career is as presented in Table 2 which indicated that all the respondents possessed the required skills and are career ready. This result shows that all the items in Table 2 are possessed by students. The mean values of respondents in the table are greater than 2.50. This further confirmed the level of agreement of the respondents to the possession of the required skills.

Hypotheses 1: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of students on their knowledge of office skill that prepare them for career based on gender.

Table 3: t-test statistics for the mean responses of students on their knowledge of the office skills that prepare them for career based on gender

Variables	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	t-cal	t-tab
Female	27	34.29	2.68	37	0.13	2.02
Male	12	34.41	2.90			

Note: $P > 0.05$ (Significant)

The result of analysis in Table 3 revealed that t-cal (0.13) was less than t-tab (2.02) at $df = 37$, 0.05 level of significance. This makes null hypothesis 1 not to be rejected. Hence, there was no significant different in the mean responses of students on their knowledge of the factors that prepare them for career based on gender.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of students on their possession of the office skills that prepare them for career based on gender.

Table 4: t-test statistics for the mean responses of students on their possession of office skills for career based on gender

Variables	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	t-cal	t-tab
Female	27	36.96	3.71	37	0.69	2.02
Male	12	37.83	3.37			

Note: $P > 0.05$ (Significant)

The result of analysis in Table 4 revealed that t-cal (0.69) was less than t-tab (2.02) at $df = 37$, 0.05 level of significance. This makes null hypothesis 1 not to be rejected. Hence, there was no significant difference in the mean responses of students on their possession of required skills for career based on gender.

Discussion

Results from the study showed no significant difference in the mean responses of students on the knowledge of skills that prepare OTM students for career in College of Education based on gender. That is, the OTM students in the study are aware of the lot of skills that determine their career readiness. This is in line with the views of Ezechukwu, et al. (2021) who identified some skills needed by OTM graduates such as office skills, managerial and entrepreneurial skills, ICT skills, communication skills, socio-psychological skills and intoned that possession of these skills indicates graduating OTM students' preparedness for the labour market, and, by implication, their employability.

Furthermore, the result revealed no significant difference in the mean responses of students on students' possession of the required skills based on gender. The findings negate Emeasoba and Ezenwafor (2014) findings who investigated the computer and networking competencies possessed by OTM lecturers in tertiary institutions in Anambra and Enugu states found that the respondents possessed computer operation competencies to a high extent and networking competencies to a low extent and concluded that institutions in Anambra and Enugu states can produce graduates with computer operation competencies but can hardly produce graduates with networking competencies. The findings also negate Ezechukwu et al. (2021) findings that an average career readiness index of 3.06 for the graduating OTM students in the polytechnics studied showed that the students were lacking in office, managerial, entrepreneurial and communication skills, but rated very high in ICT and socio-psychological skills.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that knowledge of essential career skills and possessing the skills are vital index for preparing for career. Lack or inadequate preparation for the world of work will lead to unemployability. Office technology and management programme is practical oriented programme that equips its recipients with practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life.

It was recommended that:

1. Institution-industry collaboration should be enhanced in order to fix up well-informed and equipped students for employment after graduation.
2. Students should be encouraged and motivated to develop positive attitude towards self-employment rather than waiting for the non-existent white collar jobs.

3. Candidates seeking for admission into the tertiary institutions should be encouraged to offer Office Technology and Management course in order to avoid being unemployed after graduation.
4. Institutions should be on the lookout for new training equipment and technological changes in order to adapt and adopt them.
5. OTM curriculum should be further enriched to cater for new changes that may come up in the ever changing society.
6. Handling of SIWES should be strengthened by institutions and industries to ensure that students gain relevant knowledge in their fields.

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