

SKILL ACQUISITION IN OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT: A PREREQUISITE FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This study examined skill acquisition in office technology and management and its importance for sustainable national development. To achieve this, the concept of skill, skill acquisition, office technology and management, and sustainable national development were examined. The paper identified the importance of skill acquisition, office technology and management objectives, and the challenges to skill acquisition in office technology and management. The paper concluded that skill acquisition in office technology and management prepares learners to acquire skills and knowledge that will make them functional in their various endeavors and

contribute immensely to sustainable national development. It recommended that set objectives in our institutions should be achieved as it will help in improving learning, knowledge and skill acquisition. Also, the government should make efforts in ensuring that facilities for modern methods and techniques in teaching and learning are put in place in all tertiary institutions and that funds are adequately provided.

Keywords: Skill acquisition, Office technology and management (OTM), National development

Introduction

Education in general is an indisputable resource for nation building and economic development. It is the desirable resource through which national development, growth of knowledge, and growth of human control over the natural environment, technological advancement and economic efficiency can be attained. By harnessing both human and natural resources, positive outcomes can be achieved (Nduka, 2006, in Buwah, Wannang, & Durtur, 2020).

Education globally is seen as the most effective instrument to achieving and sustaining national development. Education is the bedrock of socio-economic and technological development of any nation. No society can witness a robust socio-economic and political advancement without maintaining its educational sector. It is through education that the needs and aspirations of a nation are met.

Skill acquisition is a practical way of developing knowledge, abilities and skills in learners in such a way that they can use such skills to sustain the development of their nation. Skill acquisition is the core of business education programme. It does not depend solely upon a person's fundamental, innate capabilities but must be developed through the training, practices and experience an individual acquires (Ezeani, 2012). Effective skill acquisition in education is an indispensable tool towards producing a self-reliant nation and dynamic economy. The acquisition of adequate skills and competencies is an important characteristic of business education in any level of tertiary education system of Nigeria.

Office Technology and Management according to Baba and Akarahu (2012) is the study of technologies and related science and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupation in various sectors of economic and social life. There is therefore a need for continuous assessment of technological needs of the country so that educational policies can be tailored towards meeting the emerging needs for sustainable national development. However, the challenges of poor funding, corruption, lack of political interest, unqualified staff, etc. have made skill acquisition not realizable.

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The acquisition of skills in office technology and management is important because it tends to promote personal and sustainable national development. Skill acquisition is of no small value to the development of a nation. Many of these industries are in daily need of trained personnel to carry out one job or the other. Thus, the acquisition of skills will prepare an individual to readily fit into employment in all sectors of the economy. Acquisition of the requisite skills for employment is a means of increasing the productive power of any nation. It is against this backdrop that the researchers examined the importance of skill acquisition for sustainable national development.

Conceptual Clarification

Skill

Skill is like a key used in opening the door of fortune. As water is very important to human life, so is skill needed in the life of every serious minded human being. A skill is the ability to do something well. Skill is the means by which a person adjusts to life. Ejeka and Mgbonyebi (2016) in Chundusu and Jwanpae (2017) describe skill as the ability to do something well, gained through training and experience. The skills content of vocational business equips the learners with the requirements for gainful employment. This in turn enables the government to sustain the fight against crime in the society.

Skill encompasses the knowledge, competencies and ability to perform operational tasks. Ezeani (2012) in Sokyese, Wetnwan and Bewaran (2017) defines skill as the art of possessing the power, authority, and competency, etc. to carry out a task required of an individual on the job. Inalegwu (2016) in Sokyese, Wetnwan and Bewaran (2017) viewed skill as the expertise, aptitude and competences appropriate for a particular type of job. It has to do with expert knowledge and creative reasoning to a level of mastery. For an individual to acquire the needed skill for a particular job, basic training and knowledge must be involved and this can be acquired through informal, formal or the combination of both formal and informal training. Sokyese et al. (2017) identify the fundamental issues that are needed when a skill is to be acquired:

- a) That which promotes acquisition of the skill.
- b) That which enables the individual to effectively

carry out a function for the benefits of self and mankind.

Skill Acquisition

Skill acquisition is the ability to be trained in a particular task or function and the person who is trained can now learn and become an expert (Chindusu, & Jwanpae, 2017). Similarly, Tajudeen (2014) posits that skill acquisition is a special exercise that enables a person to be able to do things well. This is acquired through learning and having undergone a particular training exercise. Skill acquisition is very important because it tends to promote personal and national economy as well as makes sustainable national development possible. Acquiring and mastering practical skills will enable the recipient of business education to impact society positively and to boost sustainable national development. Skill acquisition is the ability to learn a skill, which can be intellectual such as learning to listen, speak, read and write or manual such as learning to build or make something. Skill acquisition as opined by Kren-Ikide and Emmanuel (2017) is the process and the means of releasing human energy. They add that it avails people the opportunity to make maximum contribution to their own development and that of their communities. Dafinone in Kren-Ikide and Emmanuel (2017) states that skill acquisition aims at transforming the human person so as to bring about the realization of his or her potential and make him or her a leader who will inspire and empower others to excel and articulate meaningful vision in the society.

Skill acquisition is one of the policies embarked upon in Nigeria to reduce poverty, youth restiveness, sophisticated crime and corruption, unemployment and many other social vices (NPE, 2013).

Sustainable National Development

Development as a concept can be described according to Gboyaga (2003) in Igboke and Akandu (2017) as an improvement in the material well-being of all citizens in a sustaining way such that today consumption does not imperil the future. The author believes that poverty and inequality of access to the good things of life is removed or

drastically reduced through national development and that development seeks to improve personal, physical security and livelihood and expansion of life opportunities for economic advancements. Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Adebola in Umeh and Oguejifor (2017) stresses that sustainable national development is a kind of development that can be initiated and managed properly in such a way as to give attention to continuity and preservation as people explore explicit available resources for the enlargement of their existence.

National Development

National development entails the whole level of efficiency attained in a nation's production process as it affects output, real incomes and standard of living. Umezulike (2015) groups the facts of national development as economic system, education/technology state, legal/ political and socio cultural settings.

Sustainable National Development

Sustainable National Development is based on the fact that what makes up a sustainable national development has to do with the economic, social, political and physical environment as well as the capabilities of the people and their aspirations for good living conditions. Umezulike and Okoye in Sokyets et al. see sustainable national development as the state of having well balanced, steady and effective use of human, material and capital resources for total economic independence of a nation without compromising the future. Abubakar in Sokyets et al. (2017) stated that sustainable national development is the state of having well balanced, steady and effective use of human, material and capital resources for total economic independence of a nation without compromising the opportunities that will enable individual humans and communities to achieve their aspirations and full potential over a long period of time while maintaining the resilience of the economic, social and environmental system.

United Nations (2014) states that sustainable national development is the organizing of principle

for meeting human development goals while at the same time sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depend. This simply means according to the United Nations that it incorporates both issues associated with land development and broadens issues of human development such as education, public health and standard of living. Mbata (2009) in David (2017) writes that sustainable national development means all round development of an individual.

Similarly, Nwaigburu and Eneogwe (2013) in Umeh and Ojuejifor (2017) define sustainable national development as all round development of individuals. It has to do with not only personal development but it involves nation building which is above mere construction of buildings and roads but includes the provision of other social amenities. No wonder Ezechi (2013) notes that to be able to sustain national development a holistic approach is required on environmental issues because if holistic measures are not seriously handled, environmental resources will be further depleted because of reckless use and in the long run humans will suffer.

Oguejiofor and Ezeabasili (2014) note that in order to achieve sustainable national development, the following tools must be taken seriously:

- Providing training for both private and public sectors.
- Improving the quality of basic education.
- Re-orienting existing educational programmes to address sustainable development.
- Developing public awareness.

Features of Sustainable National Development

Umeh and Oguejifor (2017) outline the following as features of sustainable national development:

- Respect and care for life
- Improve quality of human life
- Protection against pollution
- Wise use of resources
- Enabling communities to care for their own environment
- Conserve the earth vitality and diversity
- Minimize the depletion of natural resources
- Change of personal attitude and practice towards the environment

Concept of office Technology and Management

Office Technology and management is the new name for secretarial studies which was approved in the year 2004 by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), which is the body responsible for supervising polytechnic education in Nigeria. This is followed by a new curriculum geared towards revolutionizing the office technology and managing students/graduates into technologies. Peerreault and MaCarthy (1996) observe that with the development of new technologies, we are moving from industrial society to information society. It is therefore evident that office technology and management has to meet the new and emerging technologies in order to fit into the 21st century.

Office Technology and Management according to Baba and Akarahu (2012) is the study of technologies and related science and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupation in various sectors of economic and social life.

Office Technology and Management Objectives;

According to the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE, 2004) the objectives are as follows:

- Acquisition of secretarial skills.
- Ability to write shorthand for 3 minutes in varied materials at 1.3 syllabic intensity dictated at 80 words per minute (wpm) and 1.4 syllabic intensity of 100 words per minute and transcribed on the computer with a minimum of 95% accuracy for both National Diploma and Higher National Diploma respectively.
- Typing effectively various office jobs and acquiring a copying rate of 40 words per minute and 50 words per minute for National Diploma and Higher National Diploma respectively on passages not below 1.3 syllabic intensity with 98% accuracy.
- Acquisition of general education.
- Laying of foundation for advanced studies.

Importance of Skill Acquisition

A man without skill and is not employed cannot determine to earn a living, whereas a man with skill works and gets paid. The importance of skill acquisition as observed by Amesi (2017) includes self-employment, diverse job prospects, employ-

ment generation, operative function, crime reduction, etc.

- **Self-employment:** Most successful men and women whose names are heard in many parts of the world are self-employed with skills. A self-employed person can never go hungry because the skills he or she acquired provide food for him or her on daily basis. Skilled men or women can achieve a lot, but one who lacks skill will find it difficult to be self-employed because he or she has nothing to offer. As such, everyone who acquires knowledge or skill in business education will certainly be self-employed in one way or the other. Business education graduates or students are and will be self-employed due to the skills they acquired during the course of their study.
- **Diverse job prospects:** Many skills acquired by students of office technology and management make them to be classified as those who are up and doing. The students who have skills stand the chance of being employed by many establishments. These students are being sought after by many establishments and so, with skill acquisition, they won't suffer searching for work as they would be readily employed.
- **Employment generation:** Public and private organizations are still finding it difficult to provide jobs for the citizens and graduates because when the opportunities call, many applicants lack the requisite skills to gain employment, whereas office technology and management students and business education students grab these opportunities as advantage. This is the reason why it is necessary to have the national executive council of the association of business educators of Nigeria who oversee the affairs of business education programme to ensure that students of business education acquire necessary skills that will guarantee them job placement before graduating as the skills acquired will enable them gain employment and be self-employers.
- **Crime reduction:** Skill acquisition reduces the crime rate in many nations. Individuals begin to think of many dirty activities they will do to

make money when they do not have anything to call job of their own or acquired skill, but student of office technology and management who have acquired skills will work and make money. This makes the graduates comfortable in life. Students without viable knowledge of the skill courses is like a beautifully designed house without a roof, as skill acquisition is a talent or ability that comes with training or practice.

- **Operative functions:** Organizations that employ office technology and management graduates as skillful workers to assist in their organizational duties lose nothing at all because they will always perform operative functions. This is because the graduates have acquired the necessary knowledge needed to perform the work as desired by the organization. There is a great difference between studying a particular course in the university and going for training. Training gives the graduates the advantage of acquiring specific skills that helps them to function effectively in establishments. With skill acquisition, operative functions, combined with the knowledge of business education, are offered to the organization or establishment a graduate is employed to work in.

Challenges to Skill Acquisition in Office Technology and Management

There are a number of challenges to skill acquisition in office technology and management. These include:

Lack of political will and interest towards investment in vocational and technical education: The government of Nigeria has not shown serious political will towards investing in vocational and technical education in which office technology and management is a part. Asonibare (2016) in Zakka, Bewaran, Wetnwan (2017) observes that vocational and technical education is not well established in Nigeria as a result of poor infrastructure and government support in terms of finance. This affects skill acquisition in office technology and management.

Inadequate Funding: Inadequate funding of the office technology and management programme

has been a problem in the implementation of teaching and learning in the programme. The strict implementation of this type of education will remain elusive without adequate provision of equipment and facilities. The situation has been further worsened by the current economic problems in the country.

Corruption and Management of Funds: Corruption has become a common characteristic of the Nigerian State. Eze 2013 in Zakka et al. (2017) observes that the key reason why society is unable to fund the provision of public goods such as the office technology and Management programme is that public funds are looted heavily by corrupt officials. Similarly, school administrators and others responsible for managing educational funds mismanage these funds at the detriment of the students. Allocation to schools is often diverted for social activities and political reasons rather than educational purposes.

Inadequate and unqualified personnel: The office technology and management programme in most polytechnics is bedeviled by inadequate and unqualified staff. The staff strength in most departments of office technology and management in Nigerian polytechnics is undesirable and inadequate to maintain standard. The qualification a teacher has and the number of years of experience matter a lot in the field of academics, especially in office technology and management programme (Bupo, 2016 in Zakka et al. 2017). Many experienced teachers who have no business in academics find it difficult to deliver lectures in class thereby making it difficult for students to be carried along. Hence, this affects skill acquisition.

Inadequate facilities and equipment for skill acquisition: The state of physical facilities in many of the Nigerian polytechnics is very deplorable. The shortage of equipment and facilities can affect skill acquisition.

Inadequate electricity supply: Inadequate electricity supply is also a great challenge to skill acquisition in office technology and management. When there is power outage, it becomes difficult to effectively impact skill to students as the frequent power outage will cause the equipment to go off and may even cause damage to the equipment. The issue of electricity supply has become a national emergency that needs to be addressed. Most of the

computer laboratories and information and communication technology Centres in office technology and management have been relying on generating plants to sustain the programme. As a result, the overhead cost is too enormous to be sustained by the department.

Conclusion

Skill acquisition in office technology and management prepares learners to acquire skills and knowledge that will make them functional in their various endeavours and contribute immensely to sustainable national development. The need to achieve these objectives in our institutions is recommended as it will help in improving learning, knowledge and skill acquisition. However, skill acquisition can be achieved in Nigeria if the government can meet up with the challenges of the students and the schools for sustainable national development.

Recommendation

Based on the preceding discourse on skill acquisition in office technology and management: a prerequisite for sustainable National Development, the following recommendations are made:

- The government must ensure that adequate funds are released to educational institutions to meet the expectations of the changing world for sustainable national development.
- The government should make efforts to see that facilities for modern methods and techniques in classrooms are put in place in all tertiary institutions.
- There is the need for the government to make available power generation for steady electricity supply in all schools and the nation at large.
- Business education students should be willing to cultivate keen interest in the skills and competences inherent in the programme.
- Business educators should be subjected to training and re-training within a reasonable period of time.

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