SKILLS IN OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME FOR GRADUATES’ ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study assessed skills in Office Technology and Management programme for graduates’ economic sustainability in Nigeria. The discourse focused on the concept of Office Technology and Management (OTM) and its aims; skills expected of Office Technology and Management students for effective management of enterprises towards economic sustainability; entrepreneurship; and entrepreneurial awareness. Parts of the identified skills in Office Technology and Management Programme (OTM) for graduates’ economic sustainability in the study are: management skills, risks management skills, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills, accounting skills, and so on. The paper further discussed probable areas of business enterprises where the identified skills could be useful to include: management consultant firm; small and medium scale enterprise; tutorial centre; cyber café; stationery store; and others. The study recommended, among others, that Office Technology and Management students must embrace the provided opportunity in the programme and acquire requisite entrepreneurial skills needed for self-reliance and economic sustainability.

Keywords: Skills Office and Managing Technology, Graduate, Economic Sustainability, Nigeria

Introduction
Office Technology and Management (OTM) is part of the total programme of Vocational Business Education in Nigeria. It prepares individuals for specialized occupation in day-to-day administrative running of a business organization and provides general knowledge about business enterprises. Office Technology and Management is a nomenclature that replaced Secretarial Studies programme in Nigerian polytechnics as introduced by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) in 2004. According to Amiaya (2014), the change in the nomenclature resulted from extensive reviews of Secretarial Studies curriculum which revealed the need to make OTM graduates Information and Communication Technology (ICT) compliant in order to fit into the world of work.

Office Technology and Management is a work oriented programme that aims at skill acquisition which are useful and saleable in the labour market. According to Komolafe and Ajani (2010), the programme is designed to develop its participants with skills, abilities, understandings, attitudes, work habits and appreciation of encompassing knowledge and information needed by individuals in order to enter and progress in employment on a useful and productive level. In essence, OTM is an educational programme meant for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, office ethics and competencies needed to prepare the individuals for gainful employment in specific business and office occupation.
Skills acquired in Office Technology and Management is a panacea for graduates’ economic sustainability in Nigeria, especially during this period when white collar job seems to be in the oblivion. A skill is the ability which can be developed, not necessarily inborn and which is manifested in performance, and not merely in potential. Skill is an established habit or attitude for performing a task in an acceptable way. According to Etonyeaku, Kamu, Ezeji and Chukwuma (2014), a skill is the ability to use one’s knowledge effectively and readily in performing an act or habit of doing a particular task competently. Ayeduso, in Abel ((2019), classified the skills that are necessary for successful managerial work into technical skill, human skill and conceptual skill. Skills acquired in any of the areas of Business Education programme, especially Office Technology and Management, promote training for entrepreneurial awareness for graduates’ economic sustainability.

Economic sustainability are the productive activities to provide for one’s own secure jobs over a lengthy period without interruption or weakening, and as such create material wealth. It can also be regarded as integrated practices that support long-term human and material growth. Economic sustainability means progressive, advancement, or qualitative changes that is evident in an individual over a period of time through orderly arrangement and management of an establishment kept up by production and consumption (Olanipekun & Rabiu, 2015). Mbata (2009) viewed it as all round development of individuals and concerns not only personality development, but also nation building. Oguejiofor and Ezebasili (2014) pointed out that the major tools for achieving sustainable economic development are improving the quality of education, re-orienting existing education programme to address skill gaps, developing public awareness and understanding, and providing training for all students to acquire functional skills required for nation building.

The entrepreneurship aspect of the OTM is structured to achieve the following objectives, according to Ossai and Nwalado (2012): offers functional education for the youth that will enable them to be self-employed and self-reliant; provides the youth with adequate training that will enable them to be creative and innovative in identifying novel business opportunities; serves as a catalyst for economic growth and development; offers tertiary graduates with adequate training in risk management; provides the young graduates with enough training and support that will enable them to establish a career in small and medium sized businesses; inculcates the spirit of perseverance in the youths and adults which will enable them to persist in any business venture they embark on; creates a smooth change from conventional to a present-day modern economy; provides both small and medium business enterprises with opportunity of recruiting graduates who are trained and tutored in the skills relevant to the management and operation of small businesses.

The entrepreneurship aspect of the OTM programme enables students to acquire adequate skills related to creativity, innovation, invention, time management, marketing, personal-reliability skills, persistence and perseverance and advertising. These skills are also known by several other names, such as key skills, core skills, life skills, essential skills, key competencies, necessary skills, entrepreneurial skills and transferable skills, which when acquired, lead to sustainable economic development in the society and the nation at large. The main goal of sustainable development is to satisfy human needs and aspirations. This is evident in the objectives of OTM as it is meant to promote desired economic development.

Therefore, in order to educate tertiary school leavers and the general public on the impact that OTM has in national development, this discourse highly becomes imperative. The study is necessitated by the need to arouse the curiosity of the populace to the importance of OTM and the richness of its curriculum to entrepreneurship and productivity. This is to ensure that school leavers, parents and guardians alike would see and tap the inherent opportunities in OTM towards graduates’ economic sustainability in Nigeria.
Skills in Office Technology and Management Programme (OTM) for Graduates' Economic Sustainability

The following are some notable inherent and saleable skills in Office Technology and Management programme for graduates' economic sustainability in Nigeria: Management Skills, Risks Management Skills, Information and Communication (ICT) Skills, Accounting Skills, Technical Skills, Communication Skills, Human Relations Skills and Marketing Skills.

Managerial Skills

Management is the art of getting things done through the effective and efficient harnessing of both human and material resources. Igheraharha (2013) defined management as the organizing, planning and controlling the total business activities and the leading of people so that the use of material, men and equipment results in the efficient achievement of planned objectives. Therefore, managerial skills refer to the ability of graduates to effectively achieve business goals through coordinated efforts of planning, organizing, staffing, directing and controlling. Igheraharha identified some important managerial skills required by the entrepreneur-business education graduates to successfully establish, run and manage a business enterprise to include the ability to: set appropriate business goals; plan effectively for goal attainment; organize resources (human and material) for goals attainment; implement plans for goal attainment; evaluate all activities/operations on the process of goal attainment; make appropriate use of feedback.

Managerial skills offered in OTM curriculum position graduates for success in entrepreneurship as they have the ability to, or the knowledge of: making long and short term planning; purchasing goods, tools and equipment; identifying factors involved in overhead control; inventory control and turnover; acquisition of managerial and supervisory skills; managing time and meeting job schedules; need for employees growth and development; identifying opportunities and generating ideas suitable to the opportunities; and confidence to make decision and act upon it. For example, an OTM graduate who wishes to set up a transport company knows the importance of a business plan. He first draws up his business plan so as to: (a) clarify direction (b) specify future vision (c) attract financing (d) attract team members (e) manage company. The primary purpose of business plan is to define what the business is, or what it intends to be over time.

The graduate can clarify the purpose and direction of his business as to what needs to be done for forward movement. Clarifying can consist of simple description of the business and its products or services, as well as a detailed description of the ideal customer. Inasmuch as businesses evolve and adapt over time, management skills acquired by the Office Technology and Management graduates enable them to factor future growth and direction into the business plan, so as to project an effective way to plan for changes in the market growing or slowing trends, and innovations or directions to take as the company grows. Clarifying direction in the business plan lets one know where he is starting, while future vision allows one to have goals to reach out for.

Risks Management Skills

Risk can be regarded as various uncertainties in financial markets, threats from project failures (at any phase in design, development, production or sustenance, life-cycles, legal liabilities, credits, accidents, natural causes and disaster, deliberate attack from an adversary or events of uncertainty or unpredictable root-cause). The two types of events of uncertainty are: negative events, which can be classified as risks; and positive events, which are classified as opportunities. Risk management is the identification, assessment and prioritization of risks. Ezeani, Ifeonyemetalu and Ezemoyih (2012) defined risk management as the effects of uncertainty on objectives followed by coordinated and economical application of resources to minimize, monitor and control the probability and/or impact of
misfortune events or to maximize the realization of opportunities. The essence of risk management is to ensure that uncertainty does not deflect the endeavour from the business goals.

The risk management skills acquired by OTM graduates can help them to envisage and manage risks, just as risk bearing is an attribute of entrepreneurship. Strategies that OTM graduates can use to manage threats, that is uncertainties with adverse consequences, include avoiding the threat, reducing the negative effect or probability of the threat, transfer all or part of the threat to another party. For example, an OTM graduate in transport/haulage business, is apt to use his knowledge of school instructions in Insurance to take comprehensive insurance policy for his fleet of vehicles to mitigate against losses in his highly accident prone business. This risks management skills enhance his (the business) economic sustainability in case he suffers motor accidents, which is a highly probable risk in such type of business.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Skills

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is the application of electric/electronic machines and improved procedure to the office functions so as to aid effectiveness. Ogiagah and Ofulue (2014) defined ICT as forms of technologies that are used to create, store, share, transmit, or exchange information, which concept includes such technologies as radio, television, video, DVD, telephone and network hardware and software as well as services associated with these technologies such as video-conferencing and electronic mail. So, ICT skills are the knowledge/technique, attitudes and abilities that would afford a person to use electric/electronic equipment to process information for effective business operations. ICT skills acquired by the prospective Office Technology and Management graduates would help them to progress in business endeavours because the skills are useful in virtually all areas of business life, be it production, transportation, marketing, human resources, etc.

Etonyeaku, Kamu, Ezeji and Chukwuma (2014) revealed the ICT skills requirements for successful business initiatives of Business Education (inclusive of Office Technology and Management) graduates to include: knowledge of computer operation; creation, saving and printing of documents; creation and operating a website; accessing the internet through the use of phone(s)/computers; sending bulk messages to customers; knowledge of using social media to promote goods or services; producing text documents and sending it electronically; browsing and downloading information from the internet; call/video conferencing for various meetings; accessing database for storage and administration of data; manipulating spreadsheet to manage budgets, prepare pay-rolls, etc.; knowledge of on-line product marketing; and knowledge of internet banking for payment and money transfers.

Armed with the above-mentioned ICT skills, OTM graduates can boost their chances of economic sustainability is the operation of a cyber-café/business centre. With good knowledge of theory of typewriting/keyboarding, office technology, office administration and management, OTM graduates operating cybercafe/business centres can produce, at competitive charges to numerous customers, mailable letters, memorandums, reports, minutes of meetings, tabular statements, pictorial and graphical documents, etc., with the aid of modern computer sets and assessories. The ICT skills can enable him to send the typed documents over wireless facilities such as the electronic mail (e-mail), worldwide website (internet), carry out scanning and photocopying of documents, etc.

Accounting Skills

Accounting is simply the systematic process of keeping financial transactions, which involves identifying, measuring, recording and communicating quantitative information about economic entities. According to Ezeani (2008), accounting is a set of themes, concepts
and techniques by which financial data are processed into meaningful information for reporting, planning, controlling and decision-making processes. OTM curriculum teaches accounting education that equips graduates with knowledge, attitudes, skills and abilities to identify, measure, record and communicate to interested parties for analysis and interpretations, financial calculations required for occupational competence and economic activities of an organization.

Accounting skills of OTM graduates would enable them as entrepreneurs, among other things, to: provide information useful for making decisions; yield an accurate and true picture of operating results; supply information useful in judging management’s ability to utilize enterprise goals; provide information useful to investors and evaluating potential cash flows to them in terms of amount, timing and related uncertainties; provide users with information for predicting, comparing and evaluating enterprise earning power; permit prompt filing of reports and tax collecting agencies; and reveal all possible employee frauds, wastes, theft and record keeping errors.

Technical Skills

These refer to the various specialized practical knowledge that the graduates acquire over time in the course of their training. The roles of Secretaries (now called Office Technologists/Managers) have evolved and transcended the traditional role of typing and answering phones, to high-value activities that were once reserved for professional and managerial staff such as selecting vendors, managing client relationships and drafting legal documents. Musa (2019) maintained that the specialized courses like: Information Technology, Advanced Office Administration, Office Management and Procedures, Professional Career Development, Business Law, among others, earn OTM graduates some such specialized technical skills as: word processing; spreadsheet operation; power point presentation; document/records management; time and billing; calendar and docketing; contemporary legal business environment, transcription from a shorthand system; video conferencing; etc., which placed them at a vantage position to secure and/or maintain and sustain jobs where others are in dire need of productive jobs for socio-economic advancement.

Technical skills acquired by OTM graduates by having run the pre-requisite Course contents can be useful to them in the establishment of businesses such as: desktop publishing outfits, establishment of tutorial centres, educational consults, travel agencies, insurance brokerage, clearing and forwarding, general merchandise, etc., in consonance with their legal requirements and obligations. The keyboarding skills like: speed and accuracy, effective proofreading techniques, adequate knowledge of printers’ correction signs, effective displays, letter writing, etc., are good assets to attract, service and retain clients for graduates of OTM, thus enhancing the economic sustainability of the graduates.

Communication Skills

Communication is commonly defined as the process of transmitting understandable messages from one person to another by way of writing, speaking or symbol, for effective decision-making. Communication is a critical administrative skill. Soyebi (2013) reiterated communication skills to be: oral/verbal, written and non-verbal; and that they are important for successful running of any enterprise. Acquisition of these skills can lead to high productivity and are necessary for effective performance of the entrepreneurs.

Definitely, Office Technologists/Managers often have to interact with employees, employers and clients, either in person or on the phone. They also may have to write/produce letters, memoranda and reports for companies’ websites or communicate with people via e-mail. OTM graduates as paid Secretaries in different business offices, or as owners of business enterprises, have as part of their administrative calling: receptions duties,
drafting and final production of mailable office documents, attending and taking minutes of meetings, making itinerary arrangements for the company, and so on. Possession of effective communication skills enable OTM graduates to speak clearly, write accurately and professionally, maintain positive tones, be good listeners and maintain the appropriate para-languages for effective business management to their ultimate economic sustainability.

**Human Relations Skills**

Human relations refer to the group or interpersonal interactions of people within an organization for amicable co-existence. Therefore, human relations skills refer to the ability to create good person-to-person and group relationship among employees. Abel (2019) opines that human relation skills are the leadership ability to work effectively as group members and to build cooperative effort within team. It is primarily concerned with working with people to achieve stated organizational goal, whereby manager and employees of an organization recognize the role of superiors, equals and subordinates as well as the outsiders that have dealings with the organization. OTM graduates acquire human relation skills through the curriculum offerings of Professional Ethics and Professional Career Development, while under the tutelage of their respective institutions, which invariably imbue them with ability to understand what others really mean by their words and behaviour, and to be able to communicate politely in both favourable and unfavourable situations.

Features of human relations skills that enable OTM graduates to create an atmosphere of approval and security in which businesses can strive for economic sustainability include: warm communication, empathy, stress management, conflict resolution, creation of good work atmosphere, friendliness and discipline, sensitivity to others, treating people fairly, listening intently, establishing rapport, tactfulness, cooperative team member, avoiding stereotyping people, feeling comfortable with different kinds of people, treating others as equal, helping clarify misunderstanding and creating an environment of social interaction.

In business the usual slogan is “the customer is always right.” Although the customer might not be right in certain cases but because his patronage is so much needed, he is made to feel so. By training, OTM graduates are required to possess the unique quality of perseverance and patience, to be able to calm down an irate or heated customer, an integral part of good human relations principles which adds to gimmicks to retain customers, to aid viability and economic sustainability of businesses and ultimately the worker (OTM graduates). Even in a transport/haulage business where there is high probability of contact with sometime irate and uncouth clients/customers, an OTM graduate deploying good human relations skills techniques keeps the business going for mutual benefit of the customers/clients and the company.

**Marketing Skills**

This is also an important skill which can aid the entrepreneurship drive of OTM graduates for economic sustainability. According to Osuala (2009), marketing is the process by which the productive potentials of the company is used to satisfy individual and social needs of all kinds. Ezeani (2008) viewed marketing as consisting of all profitable human activities undertaken in the firm towards the creation of goods and services; and that these skills will keep the entrepreneur informed, knowledgeable and confident as to determine the most efficient method of physical distribution of goods and services. Amongst the marketing skills Ezeani identified are: knowledge of seasonal fluctuation of goods; ability to determine the extent to which products will sell; familiarity with various aspects of sales and salesmanship; ability to budget and forecast; ability to determine current trends in sales of products; ability to determine what customers need and shortage of such goods; knowledge of advertising; ability to determine and interpret factors which indicate extent, and strength, of competition; and ability to determine availability of goods/raw materials for product and
shortage of finished goods. Abel (2019) asserted that sales and marketing skills collaborate to enable one make such vital business decisions as “getting the price right” which is an important factor for succeeding in business.

Marketing is a curriculum offering in Office Technology and Management. For example, an OTM graduate who is into a Books and Stationery business can utilize his knowledge of sales and salesmanship to determine the most efficient method of physical distribution of his goods and services, such as to specially stock his store with schools recommended textbooks few weeks to resumption of new academic session on the premise that his major and/or targeted customers are pupils who just secure school admission or just promoted to the next higher educational level. Also, the marketing skills acquired could propel the entrepreneur to confidently decide to collaborate with school management to make textbooks available to students at their school premises as an efficient method of physical distribution of books to school for easy accessibility.

Conclusion
This study unravels skills in Office Technology and Management (OTM) programme for graduates’ economic sustainability in Nigeria. It was triggered by evidences in literature and researcher’s observation that many OTM graduates still have little or no interest in establishing small and medium scale enterprises. Office Technology and Management programme equips it beneficiaries with saleable and practical skills which could make them not to focus mainly on paid job, but instead become self-employed as embedded in the goal of the programme, thereby resulting in requisite competencies and entrepreneurial awareness for running small and medium scale enterprises for economic sustainability of the graduates.

The study further identified skills needed by OTM graduates for economic sustainability, such as: risks management, managerial, accounting, marketing, human relations and information and communication technology (ICT) as inherent and components of Office Technology and Management programme. Possible areas of entrepreneurial awareness wherein OTM graduates could venture for economic sustainability were also revealed in the discourse.

Recommendations
Based on the related literature reviewed in this study, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. Tertiary institutions offering Office Technology and Management programme should strengthen the impartation of basic business skills during the implementation of the curriculum so as to ensure that graduates will possess requisite skills for business management.
2. Office Technology and Management undergraduates should strive toward acquisition of the basic business skills though literatures, attending seminars and conferences to acquaint themselves with the global needs for effective management of small and medium scale business enterprises management.
3. Office Technology and Management undergraduates should embrace the provided opportunities in the programme and understudy the identified areas of entrepreneurial awareness for possible venturing towards their social and economic sustainability.

References


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