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IMPERATIVES OF QUALITATIVE SKILLS ACQUISITION IN OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Imperatives of qualitative skills acquisition in office technology and management for national development is an opinion paper which reflected on the extent to which office technology and management education programme and implementation processes have been qualitative enough to address the challenges of national development. The objectives of technology education were outlined in the national policy on education and in conjunction with the current realities of information and communication technology (ICT) expected to embrace quality, standard and effective performance in the overall implementation process. It is also expected to be measured in terms of extent or level or degree to which it is able to address the philosophical concepts, aims and objectives set for a given nation (Nigeria). It is the opinion of this paper that the above issues and concerns have not been properly observed, harmonised and simultaneously integrated in the implementation of technology education leading to poor graduate output who may not properly fit into the quest for national development. Suggestion were made on what constitutes qualitative skills acquisition for national development which includes, among others, emphasis on ICT in core application like word processing, spreadsheets, and data base management.

Key Words: Office Technology, Qualitative Skills, National Development.

Introduction

Education is defined as an essential part of the society process employed to train the human beings to be functional and adopt the outlined behavioural pattern by the same society (Akinwale, 2015). It is a systematic activity which leads to enduring change in the behaviour of a learner for the purpose of self-actualization of the learner and wellbeing of others and the society. Its purpose is to broaden understanding that will enable individual make the use of their innate abilities and potentials towards their individual and national development (Enemali, 2010).

Accordingly, conscious efforts are made to develop formal learning structure or programme of academic activities for the purpose of general education, training and development of the learners and such document refers to curriculum development.

Curriculum does not have one generally accepted definition, but is viewed differently by some educators, educationalist, students and lay persons. All the definitions are tailored towards things they expect from social cum academic institutions which are called schools. They therefore, think of why school should be established, things the learner is exposed to learn and model of exposure, the efficiency and effectiveness of the exposures, the relevance to educational programmes, to the need and interest of not only the learner, but also the society (Nnenna, Obih, Okoro and Ukaegbu, 2021). Curriculum therefore, refers to as organized educational experiences which are planned sequentially and administered to the learner by the school for the benefit of not only the learner, but also the development of the society at large (Okoro, Emenyeonu and Akaraonye, 2012).

Curriculum contains knowledge, attitudes, skills, values, beliefs, among others, otherwise called content that help in all round development of the learner. It can also be seen as a working tool that gives a sense of direction to what to do and how to do it for the

purpose of realizing any educational goals (Uwatt, 2009). Curriculum structure is always seen to be drawn based on the goals and philosophies of the affected nation or society, such as Nigeria (Maduka, Njoku and Chikezie, 2019). This is so because philosophy is a set of definite guiding principles regulating human conduct and human values. Therefore, the philosophy of any educational programme generally expresses the general believe, attitudes, feelings, norms and ideas underlining the establishment of the programme. Its formulation is usually the first essential step in the development of any educational programme. This is so because the programme's philosophy provides the guiding spirit for implementing vocational and technology education programmes.

Accordingly, the National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) outlined the philosophy and goals of education in Nigeria as a government way of realizing that part of the national goals which can be achieved using education as a tool because no policy on education however, can be formulated without first identifying the overall philosophy and goals of the nation. This is so because education is an essential part of the society process employed to train the human beings to be functional and to adopt the outlined behavioural pattern by the same society (Akinwale, 2015).

The five national goals of Nigeria which have been endorsed as the necessary foundation for the National policy on education are building:

a) a free and democratic society.
b) a just and egalitarian society.
c) a united strong and self reliant nation.
d) a great and dynamic economy.
e) a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens.

For the philosophy to be in harmony with Nigeria's national goals, education has to be geared towards self-realization and reliance, better human relationship, individual and national effectiveness and efficiency of citizenship, national consciousness, national unity as well as towards social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological progress (National Policy on Education, 2004).

To actualize these goals, the National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) anchored their realization to definite innovations which include the introduction of vocational and technology education for self-reliance and entrepreneurship intentions. This paper therefore intends to highlight the imperatives of qualitative skills acquisition in Office Technology and Management (OTM) as one aspect of Technology Education for National Development. The paper first examines the standard of the present OTM programme vis-à-vis the quality of implementation.

Quality and Standards in Office Technology and Management Education

Standards of Office Technology and Management Education Programme (OTM) are not achieved through the education process, but formulated and stipulated in form of policies, laws, rules and regulations which are prescribed for the functioning and operations of the system or programme. Such measures may be stipulated in form of policies, rules, regulations, tools, methods and strategies for test and measurements in respect of educational inputs, process and output, specifications, limits and tolerance prescribed and requirements in respect of the inputs, processes and out-put of an educational system or programme. Prescriptions with regards to the contents of the curriculum of an education system and of course, guidelines and requirements for establishing and running of an institution of learning (Lidani, 1995).

Establishment or formulation of educational standards can be said to be at three different stages of programme or system development in education. First is the planning stage, second is the implementation stage, third is the output stage at which standards are stipulated or prescribed in the form of descriptive or quantitative indices relative to the end results of an educational system or programme. Standards at this stage are stipulated or prescribed for the purpose of scoring and grading of academic performance of students in

order to determine the specific class of certificate to be awarded to graduating students (Lidani, 1995).

Educational standards or standard of education in the real sense of their functions therefore, are fixed indices which are designed to be applied at various stages of an educational programme in order to ensure that the output of these system or programme have certain degree of uniformity and acceptability both locally and internationally (Nnadi, 1996). Standards are also applied to control quality of output marketability of the end product. Educational standards are fixed and always required to be applied as stipulated. Standards cannot fall or decline but can be reviewed. Standards prescribed for a particular system or programme are the same wherever the system or programme is practiced. For example, standards for running N.C.E., H.N.D., or Degree for particular courses as prepared and regulated by NCCE, NBTE and NUC (Nnadi, 1996).

In his contribution to the question of quality education, Beeby (1996) identified the following three levels at which the quality of education may be measured:

i. The classroom conception of quality education which takes into consideration the qualities of education relative to cognitive, affective and psychomotor developments of the learner. Teachers and inspectorate departments are mostly concerned with this level.
ii. The second level is the market place conception of quality education where quality of education is measured by its productivities. By extension, the economist who is more concerned with quality in terms of INPUT and OUTPUT of the education systems as a measure of their immediate productivity and efficiency would be regarded as a professional at this level.
iii. The third level is where quality education is judged by broader social criteria. At this level, it can simply be said that, everyone can claim to be an expert or a professional in education and each person judges each level of education system in terms of the final goals and values we set for the learner, the society, the communities, the market place and the country at large (Lidani,1996).

A very careful and indepth studies of each of the above three levels at which quality education is judged, will reveal the fact that quality education is generally measured in terms of the extent/level/degree to which the education system is able to achieve the philosophical concepts, aims, objectives, goals and values set for a given people, society or community or country (Nnadi, 1996). Therefore, it is both misleading and dangerous to think of quality education only in terms of system of the control of education system or the type of curriculum in operation or supply and distribution of educational resources or the ability of the education system to produce certificated people as opposed to educated people (Nnadi, 1996). Performance in education refers to the extent to which standard and qualitative education have been achieved such that the products of such education system perform creditably thereby achieving the philosophical concepts, aims, goals and objectives set for a given society (Nigeria) in terms of academic excellence and self-employment generation, among others. Therefore, performance in education(generally) and effective performance of end product (graduate) (in particular) in the area of academic excellence and self employment generation and technical breakthrough are critical elements in the assessment of the extent to which educational goals are achieved.

According to Nnadi (1996) when a product or output of a system fails to attain the highest limit of prescribed standards, it does not mean that the standards of the system is low or average or poor but that the quality of the operations and operators of the system can be said to be low, average or poor hence the poor performance of end product relative to prescribed standard. The differences between standards and quality or performances emanates from the fact that standards do not fall, are relatively fixed and valid over a long time period, and provide a framework for uniform practice in a system as well as overall acceptability and marketability of the product of a particular programme. While quality and

performance on the other hand can fluctuate downwards easily on account of socio-economic, political and other social upheavals thereby affecting performances of end products (graduates) (Njoku, 2023).

This was why Ulinfun (1990) lamented the poor quality of technology education in Nigeria. In his paper titled "Training and Development of Technical Teachers in Nigeria, he stated that "the technical teacher lacks the usable skills for generating self employment. "From observation, it is obvious that the current technical teacher education services are insufficient, hence the skills acquired by a technical teacher trainee is paltry. Trainers tend to pay more attention to methods (pedagogy) than is paid to matter (skill and knowledge) which is why the technical teacher knows more methods than the skills he is supposed to impart" (Ulinfun, 1990).

According to Nnadi (1996), specific manifestation of the inimical effects of poor quality technology education in Nigeria takes the form of certificate racketeering, qualification inflation, and the existence of a crop of technologically knowledgeable but indisciplined diplomats and graduates; hence the urgent and desperate need for qualitative technology education, among others, for sustainable national development. The question at this juncture remains as to what constitutes qualitative education generally and technology education in particular for sustainable national development. The answer to this question is imperative.

Qualitative Technology Education and Skills Acquisition for national Development

The measurement in respect of quality education and value judgment relative to education confirm in positive terms that:

i. Education generally, and technology education in particular are directly related and relevant to the basic needs of the communities, the individual citizens and the country at large.
ii. Through education and technology education, every individual is able to contribute in the social, political and economic development of his or her society.
iii. Manpower plans and technology plans are unique such that human and economic resources wastages are minimized.
iv. Technology education systems' INPUT – OUTPUT measures is able to give rise to productivities and efficiency in all sectors of the economy and the society.
v. Education is able to give the nation a status of self-reliance.
vi. The consumers of educational system see Diplomas, Certificates and Degrees awarded by official authorities and institutions to have same values and significance.

Moreso, educational efficiency and effectiveness (Njoku, 2023) in terms of policy formulation and implementation process must embrace standard, quality and performance simultaneously and generally measured in terms of the extent/level/degree to which the education system is able to address and achieve the philosophical concepts, aims, objectives, goals and values set for a given people, society, community or country. In terms of Nigerian education, generally and technology education in particular, these philosophical concepts, aims, objectives and goals are encapsulated in the National Policy on education and Decree No 16 of 1985, among others. It is the opinion of this paper that quality, standard and performance in technology education have not been embraced holistically and simultaneously, among others, to achieve a sustainable national development. Using the field of Office Technology and Management (OTM) as a case in this article, we will now focus on the importance of qualitative skills acquisition in National development.

Office technology and management is one of the programmes offered by the Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education under the supervision of National Universities Commission (NUC), National Board for technical Education (NBTE) and National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE). These agencies (John and Yahaya, 2020), have the responsibilities of ensuring quality and high standards of academic programmes. Oyinkoya and Oluwalola cited in Ovbiagele and Mgbonyebi (2018) stated that

Office Technology and Management is a new nomenclature that emerged to replace the former secretarial studies programme and was introduced by the NBTE in 2004. Similarly, Esene and Ovbiagele (2014) noted that UNESCO held a workshop between 17th to 26th, 2004 for the review of business and management curricular for polytechnics aimed at producing OTM graduates who could be effective in both their management roles as well as practical skills in current OTM practices. This efforts brought the convergence of computer, telecommunication, the internet and micro electronics and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) skills that were lacking before.

The programme (John and Yahaya, 2020), is therefore an educational programme meant for acquisition of knowledge, skills, office ethics, work habits and competences needed to prepare the individual to enter gainful employment and self employment generation in specific business and office technology occupations. OTM education focuses on combination of office information and technical skills with adequate and relevant business knowledge in solving organizational and national problems. The target is to produce hybrid administrative professionals who can respond to demand of a dynamic and intensely computerized workplace. This position is maintained when considering the fact that a number of ICT courses have been introduced into the new OTM curriculum; which is in line with the provision of the national policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004) which outlined the goals of technical and polytechnic Education to include the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities, and competencies both mental and physical as equipment for individual to live in and contribute to National development.

National Development

Development is a dialectical concept seen as the use of human resources to quantitatively change man's physical and biological environments to his benefits or seen as involving the introduction of new ideas into the social structure and causing changes on the pattern of organizations and the social structure, (Ezeuwa,2009), Aziika (2009), states that development is increasing the production system of a nation population, reducing poverty, creating employment and. creating equality of opportunities and increasing the welfare of its citizens. On the other hand, Ohakwe as cited in Fzeani and Falde (2018), described development as:

a. event causing change; an incident that cause a situation to change or progress.
b. process of change: the process of changing and becoming larger, stronger or more impressive, successful or advanced or of causing something to change.
c. a specified stage of growth or advancement.
d. a new product or idea.
e. an event constituting a new stage in a change situation.

However, development is an improved efficiency in making changes or adaptation of individuals in becoming successful or in achieving success in the society. National development can be seen as a situation where a country increase in value by possessing all that it takes to make life better. Ifeanyichukwu and Amaechi in Dikeocha and others (2018), noted that national development means development of every man and woman, of the whole man and woman, not just things which are merely means but development geared to the satisfaction of needs beginning with the basic needs, of the poor which constitute the world's majority and at the same time development to ensure the humanization of man by satisfaction of their needs of expression and deciding their own destiny. Ogbondah,- as cited in Ogonu and Okejim (2018), stressed that national development is primarily the total of a nation's growth vis-a-vis growth in the national income and the material well-being of the people.

Edi and Nlem (2010), asserts that national development has to do with those approaches, plans and theories adopted by nations of the world to attain a level of advancement in all structures and sub-Structures of the economy such as educational,

technological, political, economic, social and cultural domains and above all, social freedom and relative peace. National development is the process of improving the quality of all human lives by raising people's level in terms of incomes and consumption levels of food, available and accessible medical services, and education, through relevant economic growth process (Gude in Uzowuifxe, Dike and Oporanoizc 2013). National development entails the complete . modernization of a society, the conversion of a peasant society into an industrial one, and it means a change in the whole way of life, in expectations and motivations and even the physical environment and daily life itself.

Implicit in these definitions is advancement, a nation moving from the lower level to a higher one. National development is a continuous exercise embarked upon by every nation of the world so as to attain its level of aspiration. It includes creating conditions-conducive to the growth of people's self-esteem through the establishment of social, political and economic systems and institutions, which promote human dignity and respects, as well as increasing people's freedom to choose by enlarging the range of their choice variables for example increasing variables of consumer goods and services.

Office Technology and Management Skills Acquisition and National Development

With reference to my earlier assertion on this paper that

a. Educational standards are fixed and always required to be applied as stipulated, but can be reviewed in line with current realities.
b. quality education is measured in terms of the extent/level/degree to which the education system is able to achieve the philosophical concepts, aims, objectives and values set for a given people (Nigeria)
c. performance in education reflects the extent to which standards and quality education have been achieved such that the products of such education system perform creditably thereby achieving the philosophical concepts, goals and objectives set for a given society (Nigeria) in terms of academic excellence, national productivity and development as well as self employment generation, one can discover that quality and performance in technology education in Nigeria have not achieved the desired result, hence the need for qualitative OTM education and skills acquisition (Njoku, 2023).

The role of Office Technology and Management to national development cannot be overemphasized. OTM programme has the capacity to develop the nation's economy. It prepares students with multi-skills necessary to function effectively in the technological era. Esene in Agbogiasede (2014), outlined the following skills and office competencies needed of OTM graduates to include, ability to use ICT equipment for communication, manage information at the right time, recognize and utilize office automation, communicate effectively using oral and written skills, ability to acquire management and supervisory skills, knowledge of law and ability to recognize trends such as technological trends, ability to use soft-ware such as word processor, spreadsheet and data-base management, among others.

Office technology and management is a potential economic energizer that helps to keep the economy afloat. It is an efficient, effective, productive and functional education which leads students/graduate to be self-reliant, self-employed, paid employment and consequently self actualization (Okoro and Amago, in Oyedele and Grace (2018). Baba and Akarahu (2012) noted that office technology and management is imperative in the economic development by providing practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life.

OTM plays important role in the economic and overall national development by providing knowledge and skills to the learners to enable them adequately impart knowledge into others and handle sophisticated office technologies and information systems. It helps to address unemployment and its attendant vices, increases productivity and accelerate the development of the nation (John and Yahaya, 2020). However, standard, quality and performance have not been adequately observed and strictly followed simultaneously (Njoku, 2023) in the implementation of educational programmes generally and OTM in particular,

this has created a vacuum or gap leading to poor quality of OTM graduates, among others, hence the need for qualitative OTM programme.

Imperatives of Qualitative Skills Acquisition in OTM Programme for National Development

For qualitative OTM programme and skills acquisition for national development to be realized, there is the urgent need to address and harmonize the standard, quality and performance in OTM education (Njoku, 2024). Standards refer to the standardized prescribed NBTE curriculum or programme for OTM which is always reviewed and regulated by NBTE in line with current realities. Quality refers to the nature of implementation of the programme, including the extent of provision of human and material resources, while performance refers to the quality and competence of the programme outcome (graduates and students of the programme) (Njoku, 2024).

To achieve qualitative skills acquisition in OTM for national development, there is need to address the poor quality of implementation of OTM programme to enhance the production of competent graduates. There is need to address the challenges of OTM in achieving national development. Such challenges include: shortage of qualified OTM teachers, poor funding of OTM programme, poor and inadequate provision of teaching and learning facilities and infrastructure, poor remuneration and motivation of teachers, poor public image of OTM programme, large class/carrying capacity, epileptic power supply, among others. (John and Yahaya, 2020).

Specifically also, imperatives of qualitative skills acquisition in OTM refers to the essential qualities and competences a modern students or graduates should possess to enable them contribute significantly to national development. These essential qualities and competencies include

1. Emphasis on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in core applications like word processing, spreadsheets, presentation softwares, database management systems, cloud computing, project management softwares and collaboration (Sterling, 2010, Jones 2016, Cortina, Ghobadian and Burgess 2019).
2. Emphasis on soft skills development. Technical skills are important, but so are soft skills like communication, team work, critical thinking, problem solving and time management (Goleman, 2011)
3. Focus on adaptability and lifelong learning such as ability to learn new technologies quickly and adapt to changing environment.
4. Integration of business and management principles such as project management, business communication and office workflow optimization.
5. Industry collaboration and internship opportunities which makes learning stays relevant and reflect current workplace needs (MCEwan, 2019)
6. Data analysis and information management which includes the ability to apply spreadsheets and business intelligence softwares as well as information management skills to ensure data are analysed and accessible.

Some of the strategies for qualitative skills acquisition include:

a. Starting small activities that develop specific qualitative skills.
b. Project-based learning which provides opportunities for students to apply qualitative skills in real world context.
c. reflective activities such as reflecting on students' learning experiences through group discussions and presentations that help students develop critical thinking and communication skills.
d. Technology integration such as students using online platforms to conduct surveys, analyze data from interviews and share their findings with others; among others.

Conclusion

This paper examined the imperatives of qualitative skills acquisition in office technology and management for national development ; specifically targeting the issue of quality, standard and performances in the overall implementation process of office technology and management education. While standards in technology education may be stable based on regular curricular review, the quality of implementation and consequently, the graduate output have not measured up to expectation, hence their contribution to national development may be lacking.

Therefore, it is both misleading and dangerous to think of quality education only in terms of system of control or supply and distribution of educational resources or the ability of the education system to produce certificated graduates as against all round skilled and educated graduates. Qualitative technology education and skills acquisition for national development implies the following: technology educations are directly related and relevant to the basic needs of the society and individual citizens of the country. Through technology education, every individual is able to contribute in social, political and economic development of the nation. Technology education systems INPUT – OUTPUT measures is able to give rise to productivities and efficiency in all sectors of the economy and so on.

Recommendations

Based on the information and observations inherent in this paper, the following recommendations are made:

Quality technology education or education relevant to the needs of the affected or concerned society is generally measured in terms of the extent/level/degree to which the education system is able to achieve the philosophical concepts, aims, objectives and values set for a concerned people or nation. This assertion is lacking in Nigeria educational system. Therefore there is the need to:

1. observe standard, quality and performance harmoniously and simultaneously in the process of implementation of technology (OTM) education.
2. eliminate bad governance and corruption in the system to allow for provision of needed material and human resources for proper execution of technology education programmes.
3. maintain teacher students ratio of 1:30 for quality delivery of practical courses.
4. shift emphasis from mere technical skills to qualitative skills in OTM education such as communication skills, critical thinking and problem solving, team work and collaboration, adaptability and lifelong learning.
5. move from traditional teaching method to effective pedagogies for qualitative skills development such as case study and simulations, project-based learning and technology assisted learning.
6. emphasize on ICT, soft skills development, adaptability and life-long learning, among others.

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