

## INFLUENCE OF OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT CURRICULUM ON CAREER READINESS OF GRADUATING STUDENTS IN POLYTECHNICS

BY

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### Abstract

*The study was conducted to determine the influence of OTM curriculum on career readiness of graduating students in the polytechnics following the observation in the world of work that graduates are experiencing difficulty in transiting from academic life to work life. Two objectives, two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was used. Population of the study consists the whole 294 graduating students of the two public polytechnics offering OTM programme in Kwara state from which data was collected. A four-point modified Likert-type rating scale of 67 items questionnaire was designed and validated by three research experts. Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient calculated for the instrument was 0.99. Research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation. The hypotheses were tested using the independent samples *t*-test. The study established that the OTM curriculum has high extent of influence on career readiness of graduating students of the programme. The problem of skill gap or inability to transit from academic life to work life is therefore not the fault of the OTM curriculum. It was recommended that lecturers should employ all provisions in the curriculum such as role playing, discussion, excursion among others, to adequately prepare the students for the world of work.*

**Keywords:** Curriculum, Career readiness, Office Technology and Management and Influences

### Introduction

The purpose of education, which is transmission of knowledge, fostering of skills and character traits are achieved through the tertiary educational institutions, which are established and empowered to contribute to national development through high-level manpower training; provide accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the needs and interest of Nigerians; provide high-quality career counselling and lifelong learning opportunity that prepare students with knowledge and skills for self-reliance; reduce skills shortages through the production of relevant skilled workers; promote and encourage scholarship, entrepreneurship, and community service among others as specified in The Federal Government of Nigeria's National Policy on Education (FGN, 2013) Section 5, Subsection 80 – 85. Among the tertiary institutions are the University, Polytechnic and Colleges of Education.

The polytechnic, being a higher education institution established to focus on education concerning applied technology, is a talent engine fostering innovation and competence development. It is regarded as technological institutions producing technological manpower for technological advancement of a country and are known to produce skills and self-employable office/workshop workers. This level of education underscores personal development in the areas of teamwork, leadership, communication, practical problem-solving, critical thinking and analytical skills. The polytechnic education is designed to blend theory and practice in order to solve real-life problems for the benefit of the society (Mercer & Ponticell, 2012).

Among the numerous courses offered by the polytechnics in Nigeria is Office Technology and Management (OTM), a programme designed in (2004) by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) to replace Secretarial Studies programme is to equip the students with the knowledge, competencies and specific skills that will enable them to successfully hold positions as secretaries, managers and administrative assistants in both private and public sectors of the Nigerian economy; to expose students to industrial experiences thereby

affording them an opportunity to practicalize their skills; to develop in them occupational intelligence that will make them versatile and adaptable to the changing situation in the business world; and to develop their potentials for further academic and professional pursuits. According to Akasi and Adebayo (2014), Office Technology and Management is a course of study designed to develop skills, abilities, understanding, attitudes, work habits and appreciation of encompassing knowledge and information needed by individuals to enter and progress in employment (be it paid or self-employment) on a useful and productive basis. The employed individuals, according to Eneche and Audu (2014), have the responsibilities of planning, organizing, directing and controlling of office activities to ensure that various resources (human and materials) are put into optimal utilization so as to achieve the aim of the organization. In fact, the effective performance of office functions depends greatly on the quality of the Office Manager, who must possess all the skills and competencies needed to run the office for its optimal performance to achieve organization objectives.

Employers of labour in both the public and private sectors for many years have continued to express lack of confidence in the quality of Nigerian graduates from colleges of education, polytechnics and universities due to the problem of skill gaps. This has made career readiness of college graduates an important issue in higher education, in the labor market, and for the general public. For many years now in the business world, the problem of skill gaps, which is a fundamental mismatch between the skills that employers rely on in their employees, and the skills that job seekers possess, has made it difficult for both individuals to find jobs and employers to find skilled employees (Azih and Ejeka, 2015). It therefore behooves the tertiary institutions, where prospective employees are prepared, to ensure their graduates are career ready to meet the expectations of employers and at the same time position them well for on-the-job success and effectiveness.

According to National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE 2019:1), career readiness is “the attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies that broadly prepare college graduates for a successful transition into the workplace. Eight competences expected of graduates of institutions including Office Technology and Management graduates were presented by NACE, which are Professionalism/Work Ethic, Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, Teamwork/Collaboration, Oral/Written Communications, Leadership, Digital Technology - ICT, Career Management, and Global and Intercultural Fluency. For higher education, career readiness provides a framework for addressing career-related goals and outcomes of curricular and extracurricular activities. The NBTE’s designed OTM curriculum document states the core skills for which students are being prepared for a career in OTM (NBTE, 2004). These skills include office, managerial, entrepreneurial, ICT, and socio-psychological skills, which are embedded in the career readiness and competences expected to be possessed by graduates of institutions for a successful transition into the workplace. Curriculum functions as a determinant of educational direction. It determines the principles and procedures which help educators in selecting and arranging instructional programmes, and it concerns itself with the application of the chosen principles, determines and assesses what changes have been brought about with the next steps to be taken (Onwuka, 1985). It therefore follows that the Office Technology and Management curriculum is that which is planned to guide learning experiences to make the learner attain set goals and objectives, which may include the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences that will make them career ready for technological management of an office.

The Human Capital Theory and Works Adjustment Theory explain the significance of career readiness to the fitness of graduates of higher institutions to the demand of jobs in the world of work. Human capital stresses the significance of education and training as the key to participation in the new global economy and it refers to the skills, the knowledge and the experience that an individual possesses at the point at which they are recognized as having value to an employer (Richard, 2021). Human capital is usually assumed to incorporate both hard and soft skills and includes deploying subject knowledge, technical competencies and the broader abilities frequently identified by employers as being necessary generic skills. According to Prachi (2018), human capital is described as the collective stock of skills, attributes, knowledge and expertise which further play an integral role in increasing the productivity of an organization. No organization survives if there are no employees who can

contribute their quotas to its success and productivity. This was corroborated by Blair (2012) that the more knowledge, skill and ability possessed by an individual, the easier it is for him to get a better job. While the theory of Human Capital emphasizes the development of skills as an important factor in production activities and its ability to increase employees' chances of employment in the labor market, the theory of Work Adjustment as explained by Dawis in Dahling and Librizzi (2015) describes the correspondence between the knowledge and skills of the individual and the demands of the job. It explains that the more closely a person's abilities (skills, knowledge, experience, attitude, behaviours, among others) correspond with the requirements of the role of the organization, the more likely it is that he will perform the job well and be perceived as satisfactory by the employer.

The relevance of these theories is germane to this study as the knowledge, skills and abilities of employee position them better as career ready asset for their employers – organizations/industries. These competencies are acquired in educational institutions through well designed and implemented course curriculum, which is the course specifics to be learnt and practiced in the educational institutions in preparation for work life. In line with the general belief that a curriculum must be able to support students in their future employment opportunities while preparing them for the economic needs of society, Esene, (2017) presents the core skills which the OTM programme seeks to convey to students to prepare them for career in OTM as contained in the NBTE curriculum document for OTM, as office, managerial, entrepreneurial, ICT, communication, and socio-psychological skills. There is, however great concern about the gap that exists between the school and the workplace. As noted by Azih and Ejeka (2015), graduates are experiencing much difficulty making the transition from academic life to work, even though the school is supposed to provide the experiences and training to help individuals make intelligent occupational choices to advance their careers. Many researchers have expressed employers' statements that there is an existing gap between workforce demands and the skill of workers.

Based on Azih and Ejeka (2015) and employers' statements, and considering the goal of the OTM curriculum, the researcher seeks to find out the influence of the OTM curriculum on the career readiness of prospective graduates of the programme. If this research is not carried out, OTM students may be graduating with the assumption that they possess adequate skills that make them career ready. To the best of the knowledge of the present researcher of this study, it appears there has not been any study conducted on the influence of the Office Technology and Management (OTM) curriculum on career readiness of graduating students in polytechnics, especially in Kwara State; hence, this study is an attempt to fill the gap.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the study is to determine the influence of OTM curriculum on career readiness of graduating students in polytechnics. Specifically, the study aimed at examining

1. the influence of OTM curriculum on the office skills possessed by graduating students in polytechnics
2. the influence of OTM curriculum on the managerial skills possessed by graduating students in polytechnics

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the extent of the influence of the Office Technology and Management curriculum on office skills possessed by graduating students in polytechnics?
2. To what extent does the Office Technology and Management curriculum influence the managerial skills of graduating students in polytechnics?

### **Research Hypotheses**

- H<sub>0</sub>1. There is no significant difference between the mean perception scores of male and female Office Technology and Management students regarding the influence of OTM curriculum on office skills possessed by graduating students in polytechnics.

H<sub>02</sub>. There is no significant difference between the mean perception scores of ND II and HND II respondents regarding the influence of OTM curriculum on managerial skills possessed by graduating students in polytechnics.

**Methodology**

Descriptive survey research design was used for this study. The entire population of 294 graduating Office Technology and Management students at ND and HND levels (2021/2022 academic session) in the two public polytechnics in Kwara State offering the OTM programme (Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin and The Federal Polytechnic Offa) participated in the study. The population was considered sizeable for the researcher to handle therefore, there was no sample. For data collection, a questionnaire containing 67 items on influence of OTM curriculum on career readiness of graduating students in polytechnic was designed on the basis of research questions on a four-point modified Likert-type rating as follows:

Very High Extent VHE		4
High Extent	HE	3
Low Extent	LE	2
Very Low Extent VLE		1

The instrument was validated by three research experts in the Department of Business and Entrepreneurship Education, Kwara State University, Malete. The reliability coefficient calculated for the 67 items instrument was 0.99. Frequency and percentage were employed as statistical tools to analyse the data obtained for demographic purposes, while mean and standard deviation were utilised to analyse the data collected to address the research objectives. The independent samples t-test was used to evaluate the hypotheses with a 0.05 level of significance. For the test of hypothesis of no significant difference or influence, if the observed probability value is less than the fixed probability value of 0.05 (p<0.05), the hypothesis was rejected, but if the observed probability value is greater than the fixed probability value (0.>0.05), then the hypothesis was not rejected.

**Results**

**Research Question 1: What is the extent of the influence of Office Technology and Management curriculum on office skills possessed by graduating students in polytechnics?**

**Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of responses on the extent of the influence of Office Technology and Management curriculum on office skills possessed by graduating students in polytechnics**

S/N	Item Statements	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
1.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess the ability to write in Shorthand properly.	2.95	0.92	High Extent
2.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess the ability to type document fast.	3.23	0.76	High Extent
3.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess the ability to use the keyboard without fixing eyes on the keys.	2.92	0.87	High Extent
4.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess the ability to work on basic computer literacy skills i.e., open and create word document on the computer.	3.24	0.78	High Extent
5.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess the ability to open, save and close word document on the Microsoft office.	3.31	0.76	High Extent
6.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess the ability to organize the office.	3.33	0.71	High Extent
7.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess the ability to plan and schedule meetings.	3.25	0.73	High Extent
8.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess the ability to Critically think and logically solve a problem	3.16	0.74	High Extent

9.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess the ability to learn new office skills.	3.39	0.67	High Extent
10.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess the ability to relate and work with other people in the office.	3.48	0.63	High Extent
11.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess Time-management skills.	3.30	0.75	High Extent
12.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess Verbal and written communication skills	3.31	0.68	High Extent
<b>Weighted average</b>		<b>3.24</b>	<b>0.75</b>	<b>High Extent</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2022

The data in Table 1 reveals that the respondents indicated a high extent of influence of Office Technology and Management curriculum their office abilities which include Shorthand writing, use of the keyboard, basic computer literacy, office organization planning and scheduling of meetings, critical thinking and logical solution to problem, verbal and written communication skills.

**Research Question 2: To what extent does Office Technology and Management curriculum influence the managerial skills of graduating students in polytechnics?**

**Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of responses on the extent of the influence of Office Technology and Management curriculum on the managerial skills of graduating students in polytechnics**

S/N	Item Statements	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
1.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess the ability to lead a team.	3.29	0.68	High Extent
2.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess the ability to encourage others to express themselves freely.	3.38	0.64	High Extent
3.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess the ability to listen and respect opinion of others when deliberating in a team.	3.37	0.72	High Extent
4.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess the ability to inspire others to achieve goals.	3.34	0.73	High Extent
5.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess the ability to run effective and productive meetings.	3.17	0.84	High Extent
6.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess the ability to effectively delegate function when necessary.	3.15	0.76	High Extent
7.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess confidence to engage people or team members in difficult conversation.	3.06	0.82	High Extent
8.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess the ability to inform people about their duties and responsibilities, clarify rules and policies.	3.35	0.67	High Extent
9.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess the ability to set specific performance goals.	3.23	0.77	High Extent
10.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess the ability to handle stress without transferring aggression.	3.13	0.81	High Extent
11.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess the ability to set goals and establish a long-term vision.	3.21	0.67	High Extent
12.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess the ability to accept criticism.	3.12	0.76	High Extent
13.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess the ability to	3.19	0.82	High Extent

	work with people of different ethnic group, tribe or religion.			
14.	OTM curriculum helps students to possess the ability to manage human and material resources.	3.17	0.96	High Extent
<b>Weighted average</b>		<b>3.23</b>	<b>0.76</b>	<b>High Extent</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2022

The data in Table 2 reveals that the respondents indicated that the curriculum influences their managerial ability which include to lead a team, confidence to engage people or team members in difficult conversation, and ability to inform people about their duties and responsibilities, set goals and establish a long-term vision, and clarify rules and policies to high extent.

**Hypotheses**

**H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean perception scores of male and female Office Technology and Management students regarding the influence of OTM curriculum on office skills possessed by graduating students in polytechnics.**

**Table 4: Summary of t-test of the difference between the mean scores of male and female respondents regarding the influence of OTM curriculum on office skills possessed by graduating students in polytechnics**

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	Df	p-value	Decision
Male	102	3.98	0.05	20.00	292	0.06	Not Rejected
Female	192	2.85	0.57				

Source: Field Survey, 2022

P>0.05

The table reveals that there is no significant difference between the mean perception scores of male and female Office Technology and Management students regarding the influence of OTM curriculum on office skills possessed by graduating students (t<sub>292</sub> = 20.00, P>0.05). Therefore, the null hypothesis that states that there is no significant difference between the mean perception scores of male and female Office Technology and Management students regarding the influence of OTM curriculum on office skills possessed by graduating students in Polytechnics was not rejected. H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean perception scores of ND II and HND II respondents regarding the influence of OTM curriculum on managerial skills possessed by graduating students in polytechnics.

**H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean perception scores of ND II and HND II respondents regarding the influence of OTM curriculum on managerial skills possessed by graduating students in polytechnics.**

**Table 5: Summary of t-test of the difference between the mean scores of ND II and HND II respondents regarding the influence of OTM curriculum on managerial skills possessed by graduating students in polytechnics**

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	Df	p-value	Decision
ND II	123	3.92	0.17	24.13	292	0.05	Rejected
HND II	171	2.73	0.53				

Source: Field Survey, 2022

P=0.05

Table 5 reveals that there is a significant difference between the mean perception scores of ND II and HND II respondents regarding the influence of OTM curriculum on managerial skills possessed by graduating students (t<sub>292</sub> = 24.13, P=0.05). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

## Discussion

Research question one examined the extent of the OTM curriculum influence on the office skills possessed by graduating students in polytechnics. The data analysis results revealed that the OTM curriculum influences the office skills of graduating students in polytechnics to a high extent. The results of null hypothesis one (Ho1) also confirmed that the OTM curriculum actually influences the office skills possessed by graduating students of the programme in polytechnics. The ND II and HND II responses show that Office Technology and Management curriculum Influences the managerial skills of graduating students in polytechnics to high extent ( $\bar{X} = 3.92$ ; SD = 0.17) and ( $\bar{X} = 2.73$ ; SD = 0.53). Their responses are close to the mean as the standard deviations are very low. The table reveals that there is a significant difference between the mean perception scores of ND II and HND II respondents regarding the influence of OTM curriculum on managerial skills possessed by graduating students ( $t_{292} = 24.13$ ,  $P=0.05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis that states that there is no significant difference between the mean perception scores of ND II and HND II respondents regarding the influence of OTM curriculum on managerial skills possessed by graduating students in polytechnics was rejected. This implies that ND II and HND II respondents differ significantly in their responses regarding the influence of OTM curriculum on managerial skills possessed by graduating students. Their responses show that ND II respondents rated the influence of OTM curriculum on managerial skills higher than the HND II respondents (mean difference = 1.19). These findings agree with the report of Ukata (2019) that OTM programme provides students with in-depth administrative office preparation to meet the demands and challenges in the business environment and, through the programme, students can obtain marketable skills applicable to various careers and industries as well as cognitive skills transferable to other employment situations and life experience. Therefore, the researcher in this study strongly opines that the OTM curriculum is strongly influencing the acquisition of office skills needed by graduates of the programme to function effectively in the world of work.

Research question two examined the extent of OTM curriculum influence on the managerial skills possessed by graduating students in polytechnics. The results of the data analysis revealed that OTM curriculum positively influences managerial skills possessed by graduating students in polytechnics to a high extent. The results of null hypothesis two (Ho2) also confirmed that OTM curriculum influences the managerial skills of graduating students in polytechnics to high extent. This shows that the curriculum is influencing the acquisition of abilities to lead a team, express themselves freely, respect opinion of others when deliberating in a team, inspire others to achieve goals, run effective and productive meetings, handle stress without transferring aggression, and accept criticism.

The male and female responses show that Office Technology and Management curriculum influences the entrepreneurial skills of graduating students in polytechnics to high extent ( $\bar{X} = 4.00$ ; SD = 0.01) and ( $\bar{X} = 3.00$ ; SD = 0.50). Their responses are close to the mean as the standard deviations are very low. The Table reveals that there is a significant difference between the mean perception scores of male and female students regarding the influence of the curriculum on entrepreneurial skills of graduating students in polytechnics ( $t_{292} = 19.98$ ,  $P=0.05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis that states that there is no significant difference between the mean perception of male and female respondents regarding the influence Office Technology and Management curriculum on entrepreneurial skills of graduating students in polytechnics was rejected. This implies that male and female respondents differ significantly in their responses regarding the influence of the Office Technology and Management curriculum on entrepreneurial skills of graduating students in polytechnics. Their responses show that male respondents rated the influence of Office Technology and Management curriculum on entrepreneurial skills higher than the female students (mean difference = 1.00). This agrees with Okoli (2020) that OTM curriculum avails its learners with the acquisition of skills, knowledge and competencies that could make them proficient in secretarial profession. The researcher through this study is therefore of strong opinion that the OTM curriculum influences the managerial skills of the graduating students of the programme.

## **Conclusion**

From the findings of the study, it was concluded that OTM curriculum has high extent influence on the career readiness of the graduating students of the programme, The curriculum is able to equip the graduates with all knowledge, skills and abilities needed to function effectively in the world of work. This indicates that the curriculum components have the capacity to prepare the graduating students for the world of work. The problem of skill gap or inability to transit from academic life to work life being experienced among graduates is therefore not the fault of the OTM curriculum; it could be caused by some other factors apart from the curriculum.

## **Recommendations**

1. Since acquisition of knowledge, skills and abilities of OTM graduates depend greatly on the OTM curriculum of study, the curriculum should be implemented to diligently by the Lecturers to afford the students the opportunity to acquire all the office skills/competencies needed in the world of work.
2. With the establishment of the fact that the OTM curriculum provides students with managerial skills and competencies, all the provisions in the curriculum such as role playing, discussion, excursion among others, should be employed by the lecturers to impart the managerial skills and competencies to the students for their adequate preparation for the world of work.

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