

Strategies for Preparing Office Technology and Management Students for Global Competition in the 21st Century

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Abstract: *This purpose of this paper was examined the strategies for preparing office technology and management students for global competition. It critically examined the features of a globally competitive student, role of teachers in preparing students for global competition and the strategies for preparing students for global competition. The paper revealed that global competitiveness needs global competence, hence the information technologies that can enhance the growth of a business application tools, online security, cloud-based computing and various business transactions is a trend that has made a great positive impact. Based on the extensive discussion it was concluded that for the recipients of office education to be globally competitive, office technology and management educators should make effective use of the identified learning strategies (problem-based learning, work-based learning, digital based learning among others) for proper delivery with the ultimate aim of producing students that will compete favourably in the global market; as the effectiveness of office technology and management education is largely related to the teacher's skills and his knowledge of using different teaching strategies. It was recommended among others that office technology and management educators should adopt the use of innovative instructional strategies in educating the students on secretarial and business ethics, risk management practices, business presentations, management practices and regulatory practices of business organisations and that Office technology and management curriculum should be periodically reviewed to reflect the trends in modern organisation.*

Keywords: *Office technology and management, global competition, strategies, students, preparing.*

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Introduction

As the world becomes increasingly globalised, what constitutes a relevant and competitive education is shifting; whilst basic literacy may have previously been sufficient for success on the

job market, relevant language skills, an emphatic understanding of different cultures and a good grasp of foreign political agendas are becoming imperative. In the global context, education is the only strategic instrument for technological, economic and social transformation. Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) stated in the National Policy on Education that there is need for functional education to be relevant, practical and acquisition of appropriate skills and development of competencies as equipment to the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society.

According to Umoru (2015) the United Nations Educational and Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) aims at ensuring that both developed and developing nations have access to the best educational facilities necessary to prepare youths to play full roles in modern society and to contribute to a knowledge nation. Nations are positioning their educational systems to be part of the global economy and to compete favourably.

Onyesom & Umoeshiet(2013) defined strategy as the technique or mechanism put in place to maintain a degree of excellence of a product/or service. To Osuala (2009) Strategy is a broad and basic plan of action by which an organization(s) or individual(s) intends to achieve a particular purpose. Strategy in this context, strategy means the methods, ways, techniques, activities, behaviours adopted by the teacher/educator to deliver his lessons.

Unarguably, Nigeria and other developing countries are yet to join other developed nations in the pursuit of expanding technology learning. The 21st century youths will definitely sell, buy, work for international organizations, compete with and manage employees from other cultures, collaborate with other people and solve global problems. Office technology and management students should be prepared to be globally competitive. The current standard of education in Nigeria cannot adequately prepare students for global competition. Nwoasa, Okwuokenye and Olaniye (2013) revealed that there is substantial decay in the education sector in the nation, they stressed that the standard of education in Nigeria has declined considerably and cannot be compared with those of developed nations. This paper will examine the strategies for preparing office technology and management students for global competition.

The Concept of Office Technology and Management Programme

Office technology and management programme is among the educational programmes offered by polytechnics and universities under the supervision of National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and National University Commission (NUC), these agencies have the responsibility of ensuring quality and high standard of educational programmes in Nigeria. (Ovbiagale & Mgbonyebi, 2018). In 2014 NBTE replaced the secretarial programme with office technology and management programme to align with the changes and developments in technology that has taken place in modern offices, industries and our homes.

Office Technology and Management is a practically oriented programme that is geared towards the development of skills, competencies and attributes that are necessary for efficiency of the economy. It is an educational programme that equips its recipients with knowledge and functional skills that empowers them to contribute meaningfully in their respective areas in a business environment. According to National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) (2004) Office Technology and Management education is the type of education that equips beneficiaries with vocational skills, effective work competencies and socio-psychological work skills essential for inter-personal relations. OTM programme is used as a comprehensive term referring to aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of new technologies and related sciences; the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (Baba &

Akarahu, 2012).

Aliyu (2006) defined OTM as a type of business education that assists its recipients to acquire skills to solve problems in business and office education. It is education for the development of competencies, attitudes and attributes which are necessary for the efficiency of the economic system. To Etonyeaku (2009) In this era of globalization, OTM has contributed a lot in national development in the areas of provision of accountability and has become an indispensable tool for development; hence graduates of OTM programme is expected to possess both intellectual and vocational abilities which will help them to earn a living in a contemporary and career changing environment.

Globally Competitive Student

Global competitiveness in education can be characterized as the set of skills that support individuals in their areas of specialization and globally. Equipping Office Technology and Management students with essential skills to compete in a global job market is important but cultivating their abilities to effectively share ideas and communicate across cultures in appropriate and respectful ways is critical.

While basic skill development and workforce preparation skills are important in the education system, paradigm shift must take place recognizing for one to be truly globally competitive, he must be globally competent. Educating OTM students to become globally competent will allow them to learn about the interdependence of the world's systems, believe that solutions to global challenges are attainable, and feel morally compelled to confront global injustice and take responsible action to promote a peaceful, just and sustainable world. According to Jackson (2018) the advent of technology and communication advancements have made preparing students for global competition a need rather than a luxury and more realizable than ever before. Social entrepreneurs have developed several proven models and adopted into formal and informal education to make its recipients to be globally competent.

Globalization entails global collaboration between and with people in different parts of the world through several channels like web chats, E-learning, video conferencing, international trade, E-banking as well as working for international organization that prefer employees linguist and also possess multiple skills and ability to interact with people from diverse cultures. Nwosu and Okoro (2018) stressed that global competitiveness needs global competence, hence the information technologies that can enhance the growth of a business application tools, online security, cloud-based computing and various business transactions is a trend that has made a great positive impact. Office Technology and Management students should be able to use the internet, web chats, video conferencing to have discussions, engage in dialogue and form friendship with other business organization across the globe. This implies that they should also be equipped with specialized skills that will help them compete globally. This means that Office Technology Management programme can adequately prepare its students to think globally if the teachers are great and the government will play their expected roles.

To Russo and Osborne (2017) the following are the basic characteristics of a globally competent student:

1. A globally competent student must have a diverse and knowledgeable world view. He should develop a conceptual framework that informs the way he views the world; this framework should continually be used to analyse and compare political, cultural, historical, economic, scientific, environmental and technological developments. The globally competent student recognizes and value cultural differences, he is fully aware of

the growing interconnectivity of the world and of the necessity of his ability to function within it.

2. He comprehends international dimension of his major field of study. In addition to constructing an overall framework to his overall world view, a globally competent student also seeks to understand the international dimensions of his chosen career; he recognizes the need for an individual within the discipline to be internationally aware.
3. He communicates effectively cross- culturally. The globally competent student recognizes that the knowledge of a foreign language gives an advantage to a more in-dept understanding of the cultures and peoples associated with the language.
4. He exhibits cross-cultural sensitivity and adaptability. This can be achieved by having a meaningful interactions and experiences as members in one or more internationally oriented student organizations, involvement in activities that bring together international students.
5. He carries global competencies throughout his life. The globally competent student builds upon the established framework throughout life and becomes a globally competent individual that is equipped to contribute on both local and international scale.

Role of Teachers/Educators in preparing students for Global Competition

Teachers are regarded as one of the major inputs in the education sector. According to Nwaosa, Okwukenye and Olannye (2013), Nwosu and Okoro (2018) teachers are individuals whose life is spent directing, guiding and influencing the feelings, behaviours and thoughts of learners. As the demand for skills has shifted to non-routines cognitive and interpersonal skills since many jobs are being done using modern communication technologies; education curricula do not normally put this change into consideration and education systems do not have the required tools to address these changes. Globalisation has made these changes present in every nation; adding to existing inequalities and contributing to the intergenerational transmission of poverty. In many developed nations certifies educators lack knowledge in some areas, lack adequate quantities of textbooks and connectivity is rare in school buildings.

To be able to prepare students for global competitiveness, teachers will need to meet the continuous demand of the global economy by exemplifying and embedding in instruction the mastery of the 21st century skills (technological skills, leadership skills, critical thinking skills, creativity, entrepreneurial skills, collaboration and team work). Teachers will have to make serious efforts to communicate and collaborate with each other and with the learners/students, become flexible with managing new classroom dynamics; be able to support and assist independent learners, and be willing to adapt their teaching styles to accommodate new pedagogical approaches to learning (Nwosu and Okoro, 2018). To promote skills needed to become globally competitive, these skills should be developed in a structured way in the teachers' workforce. This means in-service education through collaboration and group discussions on cultural appreciation, ethnic and gender identities, empathy and general knowledge of current world affairs and challenges.

One of the ways to prepare students for global competition is to give them a voice in the educational systems. They should be allowed to be responsible for lives and choices; and to make mistakes and learning to correct them effectively. Teachers are to motivate students to learn, attend classes regularly and pay attention, be interested and curious although an average learner hates to think on his own and come up with answers instead they want the answers to be given to them (Kozma 2009). Nwaiwu and Ama (2014) maintained that the 21st century student finds it difficult to concentrate on lecture and other academic related activities due to some

unwholesome internet activities; hence teacher's role should be to redirect their interest and energy. Teachers need to help students to perform at high levels; that is to be professionally developed through planned and organized processes that actively engage the students in cycles of continuous improvement guided by the use of data and active inquiry around authentic problems and instructional practices (Coggshall, 2012). Office technology and management educators should continuously create opportunities and deliver instruction that ensures global competence to its recipients. They should provide students with instructional practices that consistently engage global content, multicultural perspectives and problem solving across several disciplines.

Strategies for preparing Students for Global Competition

There is a great shift of teaching from traditional to the technological based to ensure the quality of education (Eady & Lockyer, 2013). Traditional Learning is where all the power is in the hand of the teacher. The teacher teaches and a student learner will listen sitting on the same place, it is a learning process where the students' different learning styles are neglected and the student are forced to learn in the same manner as the teacher wish to (Mikre, 2012). According to Hahighi & Eskandari(2012) for the educational development plan to meet the global challenges ICT should be used as an instrument as this helps the students to practice what they learned in the first-hand knowledge experience. ICT helps to increase the interest of the students by removing the old traditional teaching process into the new way of learning with new learning experience; with the ICT the teacher gets new ideas, instructional techniques, and this furthers the development of the students which prepares them for the competitive global market.

There are several steps that does not require legislation that mandates a change in the curriculum, the introduction of a global studies course for graduation, or a line item from state or federal budget which educators can take to put students on the path towards a better world(According to Tichnor-Wagner, 2016). In a recent study of teachers committed to globally competent teaching he found out that the educators used the following classroom strategies to prepare learners for competency:

- i. **Integrating global topics and perspectives across content areas:** In this approach globally competent teaching does not require a separate course or unit of study, rather educators' infused global content into the curriculum, regardless of subject areas.
- ii. **Connecting the global experiences of students and educators to the classroom:** In this approach, educators adopted culturally responsive teaching practices the incorporated the cultures, languages, experiences and perspectives of diverse students into curriculum and instruction. They also incorporated their own cross-cultural experiences into the classroom through informal conversations, discussions and lesson plans that incorporated knowledge gained in relationships built through their global experiences.
- iii. **Providing opportunities for authentic engagement with global issues:** Educators provided real world audiences for students to engage with around global issues. This approach can take the form of pen pal and SKYPE exchanges with schools in other nations, service learning projects emphasizing issues of international concern or working in teams to devise and debate solutions to real-world problems.

The instructional strategies are used by educators to shape learning environment and represent professional conceptions of teaching, learning and the learners. To prepare the students for global competition, it is believed that office technology and management educators and other educational stakeholders should focus on real world problems and processes, support inquiry-

based learning experiences, provide opportunities for collaborative project approaches to learning and focus on teaching students how to learn. These innovative strategies according to Nwosu and Okoro (2018) include:

5. **Problem-based Learning Strategy (PBL):** This is an instructional strategy that challenges students to “learn to learn”, working in groups to find solutions to real world issues. This method replicates the commonly used systematic approach to resolving problems that are encountered in real life and this will help to prepare students for global competitiveness. Kehinde (2017) stressed that in teaching skill based courses, there is need to go beyond the traditional method to a more proactive, practical, functional and result oriented. In problem-based learning students learn how contents are taught through the application of skills in real world; students are also presented with real scenario from which they must identify a problem that needs solution. Mike (2012) opined that Problem-based learning, pedagogical value includes exposing students to real global challenges, higher thinking skills, independent learning, interdisciplinary learning, information communication skills, team work and communication.
6. **Digital Learning Strategy:** This refers to any instructional practice that effectively uses technology to strengthen learners experience and includes a wide range of tools and practices such as :
 - i. Interactive learning resources software that engage learners in academic content;
 - ii. Learning environments that allow for collaboration and communication;
 - iii. Access to online database and other primary source documents;
 - iv. Hybrid learning which occurs under direct instructor supervision;
 - v. Online and computer-based assessments.

Some of the different categories of digital tools used in teaching and learning office technology and management programme include ICT tools such as wireless technology, Email, database, video conferencing, e-library/virtual library, asynchronous web based software and synchronous web based software etc (Amesi, Akpomi and Okwuanaso, 2014).

7. **Discussion Strategy:** This method helps student to understand current events, analyze and relate facts to real life situations. It is an effective way of reviewing knowledge of facts, increasing understanding and developing learning to a mastery level. According to Osuala (2009) the following approaches are used in discussion strategy method:

- i. **Panel discussion:** this is a planned informal reporting on a topic by a group of learners who have researched a topic.
- ii. **Adversary approach:** This approach is suitable in order to help students develop the need to defend principle, a policy or an opinion.
- iii. **Small group discussion:** this approach enables students to interact with small groups.

8. **Work-based learning (WBL) Strategy:** This is an educational strategy that provides students with real-life work experiences where the learner can apply technical and academic skills and develop employability skills. This approach should be integrated into the education curricula from basic school through higher education level rather than viewed as an isolated unit of instruction studied at a particular time and level. For functional education to be achieved, there should be some form of school work based learning integrated into educational curricula as part of national economy development strategies (Baba, 2013).

9. **Project-Based Learning Strategy:** This is a student-oriented learning strategy that goes beyond “one size fits all” approach of learning and brings in formats that appeal to a variety of learning styles and learning needs. It is a form of experiential learning strategy that exposes learners to real world problems that requires a blend of skills and knowledge to tackle (Kozma, 2009). Project based learning is a student-centered pedagogy that involves a dynamic classroom approach in which the students acquire deeper knowledge through active exploration of real-world challenges and problems, increasing the possibility of long term retention of skills and concepts (Hye-Jung & Cheolil, 2012).

In project-based learning approach experiences are sourced and designed within organisations that welcome the insights of students with discipline-specific knowledge. In this approach it is the roles of the educator/teacher to assist the learner build a scaffolding of knowledge, but then it is up to the student to initiate a real and intentional application of the knowledge. This approach is useful in teaching office technology and management programme because of the high degree of knowledge and skill transferability between jobs globally.

Conclusion

Conclusively office technology and management programme is practical oriented programme that equips its recipients with practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. For its recipients to be globally competitive office technology and management educators should make effective use of the identified learning strategies (problem-based learning, work-based learning, digital based learning among others) for proper delivery with the ultimate aim of producing students that will compete favourably in the global market; as the effectiveness of office technology and management education is largely related to the teacher’s skills and his knowledge of using different teaching strategies.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations are made:

1. Educational reforms should consider the plans of full integration of ICTs in the educational system at all levels, for the 21st century learners which require the skill and competencies to compete in the global market.
2. Office technology and management curriculum should be periodically reviewed to reflect the trends in modern organisation.
3. Office technology and management educators should adopt the use of innovative instructional strategies in educating the students on secretarial and business ethics, risk management practices, business presentations, management practices and regulatory practices of business organisations.
4. Government should ensure consistent training and retraining of office education educators to ensure that they are abreast of trends in the changing society.
5. Teachers should learn to collaborate, co-create, plan classes, and monitor their work together

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