STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) SKILLS IN OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

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Abstract

Many teaching practices implicitly assume that skill acquisition can be abstracted from the situations in which it is learned. This paper argued that this assumption inevitably limits the effectiveness of such practices. It discussed that although curriculum emphasizes what students should learn, it also recognizes that how its content is taught is equally important. In planning instruction, effective teachers draw on a growing body of research knowledge about the nature of learning and on craft knowledge about teaching that has stood the test of time. Typically, they should consider the special characteristics of the material to be learned, the background of their students, and the conditions under which the teaching and learning are to take place. The paper therefore highlighted the issues of strategies in the teaching of Office Technology and Management information and communication-enriched course content which will enhance students' ICT skills for effective and efficient use of technological devices. It noted that the utilization of ICT as instructional materials with appropriate strategies will provide recipients with enhanced skills for operation of technology in business offices which will act on the bottom line of business organisations and therefore bring about sustainable development. The paper recommended among others that institutions should encourage collaboration instructional learning to cover the gap of the shortage of facilities in the institution.

Keywords: Teaching, Strategies, Office Technology and Management, Information and Communication Technology, Skill.

Introduction

The importance of education in bringing about sustainable development in Africa cannot be over emphasized. This is because education is a systematic training and instruction designed to transmit knowledge and develop skills in individuals. It is a process of changing the behavioural pattern of individuals in the desired direction (Vin-Mbah, 2012). It also involves a continuing development of relevant knowledge, skills and habits whose broad understanding and application enable individual to contribute meaningfully towards the growth of their society.

Vin-Mbah in Amiaya and Ovbiagele (2015) posits that the success or failure of any educational endeavour depends not only on the method adopted by the teacher but also on the strategies applied in the teaching process.

Teaching, according to Vin-Mbah, (2012) is an all-purpose profession engaged in human resource development for individual and economic growth. It is an attempt to help someone acquire or change some skills, attitude, knowledge and idea. Oko in Amiaya and Ovbiagele (2015), defined teaching as the deliberate effort by mature or experienced persons to impart information, knowledge and skills to immature or less experienced persons through a process that is morally and pedagogically acceptable. Teaching is also a systematic activity deliberately engaged in by somebody to facilitate the learning of intended worthwhile knowledge, skills and value by another person and getting necessary feedback. Borich (2004) also contributed that teaching is an exercising process of helping students to discover new sounds with which they can communicate. It involves creating environment in which students can safely suspend the absoluteness of their everyday realities to enter a world which previous learned rules do apply.

In teaching, the teacher attends to people's needs, experiences and feelings and makes specific interventions to help them learn particular things. The teachers' task is to create desirable changes in behaviour or in tendencies toward behaviour in students. The goal of teaching is to bring about the desired learning in students. Therefore, teaching is the degree to which the teacher has been able to impart knowledge, skill and attitude in students. For a teacher to lay a strong foundation for learning, he must establish attention, give instruction, complete the task and provide reinforcement (Bruner in Rogers, 2016). This he cannot quite achieve without the right strategies.

Strategic teaching is a way of making decisions about a course, an individual class, or even an entire curriculum, beginning with an analysis of key variables in the teaching situation. These variables include the characteristics of the learners, the learning objectives, and the instructional preferences of the teacher. Once these variables have been analyzed, informed decisions can be made about course content, structure, methods of assessment, and other key components Oyekan in Amiaya and Ovbiagele (2015),.

Office Technology and Management (OTM) programme was designed to equip secretarial and office education students to acquire vocational skills for employment in various fields of endeavour (National Board for Technical Education, 2006) in view of advancement in technology. Such vocational skills are expected to enable them operate modern office technologies and are referred to as information and communication technology skills. Information and communication technology (ICT) skill according to Atakpa (2014) is the ability to manipulate and use ICT facilities and gadgets to perform a given task. OTM programme provides among other objectives that recipients should be imparted with ICT skills for quality office service delivery that will bring about sustainable development. The teaching of these skills could be enhanced with strategies that bring about mastery. Enhancement of ICT skills of students therefore is the art of adding to the strength or worth of the skills which will bring about improved understanding and degree of usage of these skills.

Office Technology and Management Programme

National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) introduced a new curriculum christened Office Technology and Management to replace the Secretarial Studies curriculum in 2004. The new curriculum was enriched with several ICT courses amidst other injections. It is designed in modular approach and accommodates practical and theoretical ICT knowledge which is

intended to equip students with office and secretarial skills for employment in various fields or be self-employed (Ndinechi & Gude, 2014).

Worth acknowledging is the provision of the programme that teaching of the theory and practical work should, as much as possible, be integrated. The curriculum content of the programme emphasizes the need to balance the teaching of theory and practical in the ratio of 50:50 or 60:40 or the reverse. This presupposes that the theories and practical should not be taught in isolation. This strategy if correctly utilized in the implementation process will, according to Ehirheme (2014) aid in producing office managers equipped with requisite skills to fit into any type of job or organisation and perform effectively or become an employer of labour.

Meanwhile Esene (2010) in discussing OTM programme asserted that the programme outlined three divisions which include: secretarial studies, which have to do with techniques in office management; information and communication technology application which consist of word processing, computer application and webpage design; and general education which deals with the matters of contemporary problem solving using general studies courses. The components of OTM according to him are in five programme-courses which include: ICT courses; general studies/education; foundation courses; entrepreneurship education and supervised industrial work experience scheme (SIWES).

The general objectives of the programme as stated by NBTE (2006) are expected to serve as guideline in the teaching process of the programme. This statement is in line with the view of Amagoh in Agbongiasede (2014:31) which pointed out that the provisions of the objectives of the OTM curriculum content would aid curriculum educators to direct their energy to the areas where effective teaching and learning will materialize.

The curriculum lays emphasis on the skills that will enable the ND/HND graduates fit into automated offices and perform professionally the roles of office managers (Ikelegbe & Odede, 2012). Ndinechi and Gude (2014) established that the introduction of ICT courses presupposes that the lecturers should understand that apart from the vocational competencies in office technology and management, the students are expected to be equipped with standard knowledge of word processing and spreadsheets. This is to enable them type effectively various office documents with 98 percent accuracy. Another implication of this new curriculum content as cited by Odumah in Adelakin (2009) is that there is more emphasis on practical facet of teaching.

Moreover, Umukoro (2014) observed that the implication of the objectives and components of the OTM programme is that its recipients are expected to be impacted with skills to use computer and its application software. To implement this, Akarahu and Ile (2014) observed that one of the strategies needed is the ability of the teacher to take the students to the laboratory for practical demonstration. Moreover Odah (2010), postulates that strategies for instruction delivery in Office Technology and Management (OTM) will remain as variable as the teacher who provides models and directions for learning.

Information and Communication Technology Skills

Skill is the ability, talent, dexterity, expertise, proficiency, knack, aptitude, competence; flay to do something well usually gained through training or experience. It is something that requires training and experience to do well which could be in the form of trade or technique.

Nwaokolo as well as Arukwe, in Nwachukwu (2014) saw skill as the aptitude and proficiency acquired by individuals that will help them to function effectively when employed.

According to Ehirheme (2014) the current wave of ICT requires office technology management graduates to exhibit skills needed in office information system with word processing, micrographics, reprographics, telecommunications and data processing as its major components. Akpomudjere (2014:194) is of the opinion that ICT is found in host of devices like software applications, computers and connectivity, teleconferencing or web-conferencing among others, it then means that having the ability to perform all that is required to effectively use these devices is skill. She recognized the skills needed for using ICT as follows:

- ✓ Ability to produce numeric data using Microsoft word, Spreadsheet and Excel applications;

- ✓ Proficiency in the production of various documents using Microsoft Word, to carry out training programmes using Web-based training (WBT) and also navigating on the computer;

- ✓ Ability to use the computer hardware and software to organize telecommunication and teleconferencing;

- ✓ Capacity to access the internet for various purposes;

- ✓ Aptitude in the use of ICT to produce power point for the presentation of information;

- ✓ Proficiency in tele-collaboration.

These skills according to Onojafe (2013) could be broadly divided into creative skills; manipulative skills, processing skills, transmission skills, information management skills and technical skills.

Hence, modern information and communication equipment and gadgets are indispensable in the office of today. Ndukwe and Nwosu (2010), Adebayo and Akinyele (2012) identified the basic device in the ICT revolution as the computer. Most other devices can only be connected to it to be of much relevance. The computer therefore houses software and devices that are relevant for office management in the information age. Therefore, a teacher who must train others should be able to skilfully use strategies that can enhance impartation of skill through the use of the computer and other technological devices. In the view of Onojafe 2013 such teacher must be able to align strategies with intended outcome of instruction.

Ugwuanyi and Eze (2009) stressed the need for educators in the polytechnics to be able to use teaching strategies that will enable students to learn and manipulate the applications in the computer system and other ICT devices. They pointed out that some of the courses which include ICT I & II, Modern Office Technology, Desktop Publishing, Management Information System, Multimedia, Webpage Design, Database Management cannot be appreciated without practical application of modern technologies. Adegbenjo (2014) identified that OTM students require skills in the following areas for efficient use of word processing, spread sheet, database management, power point, presentation packages, internet, e-mail, digital camera, projector, scanner, among others. The teacher should therefore use teaching strategy that will enhance impartation of such ICT skills for efficient manipulation of the technologies for information communication..

According to Agomuo (2005), an OTM lecturer should be skilful enough to use teaching strategies that will enable students to learn skills to help them start a browser, go to Internet Service Providers (ISP) (Home page); click at a button to start the web E-mail client; click compose; type the body of the mail and click on send to send the e-mail and sign out. He added that such strategy should enable them also know how to hook-on to the internet and other networking skills. He upheld that teaching strategy which will enable students employ the use of computers to handle e-commerce and web activities should not be under-utilized. ICT skills such as ability to select keywords for search engines; ability to choose a domain; ability to register domain name; ability to use web hosting service; ability to develop text content; ability to optimize images; ability to design logos; ability to design web page and navigate the internet; being able to insert meta tags into web pages, being able to optimize pages for search engine placement; ability to use online payment systems among others can only be imparted when the teacher uses a teaching strategy that can enable him or her demonstrate same to the students.

Strategies of Teaching and Learning in Office Technology and Management: Strategies of teaching are teaching techniques employed by the teacher to enhance his/her teaching. Effective teachers are always on the prowl for new and exciting **teaching strategies** that will keep their students motivated and engaged. Thus, the techniques to be employed will depend, to a large extent, on the subject-matter to be taught. Amiaya and Ovbiagele (2015) described learning strategies as general plan formulated for determining how best to achieve an overall academic goal before dealing with the learning task itself. The following strategies of teaching and learning according to Vin-Mbah (2012) can, therefore, be considered as appropriate for teaching and learning in OTM in order to enhance information and communication technology (ICT) skills learning by the recipients:

Computer Aided Instructional Strategy in Teaching and Learning of OTM: The computer aided instructional strategy in OTM will enable the students to learn and acquire the knowledge, skills, ability and attitude necessary to function successfully in the global business and economic environments. In the opinion of Adelakin (2009) this is done by integrating the appropriate technology to support practices that link learning objectives and high levels of achievement. Consequently, for this strategy to be effective the institution must provide the technological environment, based on the curricular and students must be mindfully engaged in the teaching/learning process.

Concept Mapping Instructional Strategy in Teaching and Learning OTM: Concept mapping is a learning strategy that many students find useful in understanding complex ideas and clarifying ambiguous relationships. According to Ajaja (2009), concept mapping instructional strategy is creating a graphic representation of a topic to help the students visualize the key concepts and organize their knowledge more clearly than other strategies of study. A concept map is a two-dimensional representation of the relationship between key ideas. It shows how we think and suggest affinities and associations that might not otherwise be obvious. At first glance, a concept map looks like a flow chart in which key terms are placed in boxes connected by directional arrows. These boxes and directional arrows are meta-cognitive tools that empower the learner to take charge of learning in a highly organized and

meaningful manner. ICT skills with regard to webpage design and e-commerce administration can be enhanced through this strategy.

Industrial Collaboration Instructional Strategy in Teaching and Learning of OTM: According to Oduma (2008), industrial collaboration instructional strategy is the means of partnership with other bodies on something for mutual benefit. Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education and industrial collaboration are an effective way of technology transfer and it is of mutual benefit to the school and industry. According to Frankie-Dolor in Nwosu andOjo (2014) the relationship between OTM and industry is necessary for helping schools for adequate placement of students in industry for industrial attachment. It also helps in reviewing the training content with the aim of designing effective curricula that is related to industrial human resources demand and improving the quality of skilled manpower being turned out. In line with this aspiration, it follows then that educational institutions offering OTM should collaborate with industry in all phases of the training programme. These will assist OTM recipients to acquire knowledge and skills of those technologies that are not found in the classroom. Nwosu (2006) asserts that learning environment must be a replica of office environment. He further noted that technologies in learning environment should be the same in the office environment. Oduma (2008) equally maintain that industry in this strategy will serve as laboratory where students will have the opportunity to apply the principles and practice of what they have learnt in school in the changing office environment.

Laboratory-Centred Instructional Strategy in Teaching and Learning of OTM:

Laboratory-centred strategy according to Oduma (2008) connotes that all instructions requiring the acquisitions of skills and use of instructional facilities should, of necessity, be taught in a well-equipped laboratory. A well-equipped laboratory will facilitate teaching and learning of OTM that require practical. Institutions offering OTM should ensure that there is a well-equipped laboratory in the institution of learning to enable students learn and acquire appropriate skills and knowledge for them to be functional in the world of work.

Simulation Instructional Strategy in Teaching and Learning of OTM: Simulation instructional strategy in the teaching and learning of OTM is a role play strategy. Individual acts a part to express his/her own perception of the roles or functions workers perform while discharging office routine or duties. According to Farrant in Vin-Mbah (2012), role-play can be regarded as the experimenting stage of learning where the students tries out his newly acquired knowledge and skills with the activities of people and things. Hence, role-play encourages the student to stimulate creative imagination, provide opportunity for experimentation beyond the real level of development, exercise learning competencies, engage in independent learning and gain experience and express himself freely with confidence. Simulation strategy is fundamental in OTM because it enables the students to play the role of a secretary or manager as if he is in real working environment during teaching-learning process.

Conclusion

The use of appropriate strategy with facilities as instructional materials in teaching and learning Office Technology and Management in this information era appear to be strange in our educational system. A lot of Office Technology and Management educators still use the strategy of rolling out instructions and other strategies that are not appropriate in the teaching of OTM for the acquisition and enhancement of skills. Therefore, it is the contention of this paper that teaching must be according to the school curriculum content demand for the realization of its goals and to a large extent, improve the quality of instruction in the classroom. The appropriate use of teaching strategies will enhance acquisition and effective use of ICT skills by students. There must also be a cordial relationship among the teachers and the students to enforce the appropriate teaching strategies to achieve the set objectives of Office Technology and Management Programme course content.

Recommendation

The following recommendations are made:

1. In choosing strategies in the teaching and learning of OTM, the expectation of both the school and the world of work in terms of curriculum development must be considered.

2. Curriculum planners and developers should review the curriculum, out-lining teaching strategies that will best deliver the expected outcome to recipients. Such curriculum will guide OTM educators in the choice of strategy for teaching modern office techniques.

3. Modern technological devices should be provided to aid teachers as instructional materials for teaching. Governments, such as Federal and State should equip office technology laboratories with necessary equipment for effective teaching and learning.

4. Institutions should encourage collaboration instructional learning to cover the gap of the shortage of facilities in the institution.

5. Office Technology and Management educators should be trained and retrained on how to use appropriate methods and strategies with instructional facilities to impart desirable knowledge to students.

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