
Microsoft Access Application Competencies Possessed by Office Technology and Management Students for Employability and Self-reliance

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Abstract

This study was conducted to ascertain the level of Microsoft Access application competencies possessed by office technology and management (OTM) students for employability and self-reliance in North-Central, Nigeria. One research question and one research hypothesis was raised and formulated respectively for the study. The study employed descriptive research design. The HND students of 2019/2020 academic session in the eight publicly owned polytechnics in North-Central, Nigeria constituted the population for the study while the HND II (final year) students were purposively sampled for the study. The observational method was used to collect data. A four point modified likert rating scale with a structured observational form consisting of 10 items was used for data collection. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was determined using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. A reliability of 0.72 was obtained. The mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the research question. The hypothesis was tested using t-test at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that OTM students possessed very low level of competencies in Microsoft Access application. The null hypothesis was rejected. The study therefore recommended among others that that institutions and OTM departments specifically should device means of adequately training OTM educators in the skill of Microsoft Access so as enhance their capacity to teach the course effectively. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the high unemployment rate prevalent among graduates of the programme is not unconnected to their very low level of competencies in this application.

Keywords: Microsoft Access, competencies, office technology management, employability, self-reliance

Introduction

Nigerian government has made concerted effort to tackle the issue of unemployment but not much impact is felt in this regard as the unemployment rate is said to be growing in geometric progression (Nwankwo & Ifejiolor, 2014). Stakeholders have often questioned whether educational institutions are effectively meeting the needs of the society. Indications from past studies show that the high rate of unemployment experienced by graduates of tertiary institutions is not only as a result of the unavailability of jobs, but also because of dearth of candidates with employable skills (Emeh et al, 2012; Pitan, 2015). Office Technology and Management (OTM) programme which was considered a lucrative programme of study is not left out of the menace (Ejeka et al, 2017; Ogungboyege, 2019).

It is evident that out of over 40 million unemployed youths in Nigeria, 23 million of them are unemployable partly because they lack necessary skills for employment (Emeh et al, Abaroh, 2012). Soludo (2012) describing the Nigerian situation said that unemployment is not a problem in Nigeria rather Nigerian graduates are not employable and they are misfit for today's workplace.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2018), unemployment rate in Nigeria rose from 6.4 % in the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2014 to 23.1% in the third quarter (Q3) of 2018. Most graduates and young school leavers rely on white-collar jobs which are insufficient due to the large number of graduates from higher institutions of learning yearly without any form of gainful engagement either by the government or private sectors.

The human capital theory by Theodore W. Schultz (1961) highlights the role of education and training in boosting economic and social development. In other words, knowledge, competencies, skills and abilities acquired in one's academic programme are critical to enhancing employability as the eventual employability of the citizens is dependent on what they get exposed to, learn and use during the years they spent going through education and training. Based on human capital theory, training in Microsoft Access applications impart students with office competencies which increase students' productivity and consequently enhance their employability and job performance. Thus, the further students go in OTM programmes as exemplified by the level of students used in this study, the more equipped they should be and the higher their level of competencies, the higher their propensity to be employable and self-reliant and the more successful they would be in the world of work (Okolocha & Odimega, 2019).

Microsoft Access which is a subset of Microsoft office applications is a form of database management system (DBMS) designed by Microsoft Corporation to facilitate data independence, shareability, consistency and non-redundancy. Microsoft Access is a database management system software that controls the structure of database and access to data. It is the application that enables an organisation to centralise data, manage them efficiently, and provide access to the stored data by application programmes (Alozie & Nnorom, 2013). It has the ability to quickly search extremely large numbers of records and fields for commonalities and then help the user generate detailed and complete report for decision making.

George and Martin (2010) describe competency as the acquisition of knowledge, skills and abilities at a level of expertise sufficient to be able to perform appropriately a given task in a work place. Competency in the view of Ajie-Uche and Jumbo (2016) mean knowledge, skills, attitudes, and judgments generally required for the successful performance of a task. In the same vein, Sanchez (2011) sees competencies as a cluster of related knowledge traits, attitudes and skills that can be measured against well accepted standards and can be improved through training and development.

OTM is a comprehensive term referring to that aspect of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (Baba & Akarahu, 2012). In agreement with the aforementioned view, Esene (2013) states that office technology and management is designed to develop skills, abilities, understanding, attitude, work habits and appreciations encompassing knowledge to make progress in employment on a useful and productive basis. In view of the foregoing, OTM could be seen as a programme of study put together to enable the recipients to acquire knowledge, skills, competencies, abilities and attribute by engaging their brains and hands so as to equip them to live and contribute meaningfully to the development of the society.

Employability has become a very important concept due to the evolving nature of the world of works triggered by globalization, rapid developments in technology and an increasingly unstable and chaotic business environment (Coetzee & Beukes, 2010). Employability according to Osere (2017) is a term used in reference to the marketability of the cumulative skills of an individual and the capability of such an individual to function as situation demands. He adds that, employability of the individual is not limited to gainful

employment in the labour market; it also involves the individual's capacity to create job for their selves.

Umoru and Nnaji (2015) describe self-reliance as the ability of an individual to establish a business of his own instead of working for another person. They add that, it is the ability for independent decision making. In the same vein, Ibrahim, et al (2018) consider self-reliance as synonymous with self-sufficiency. It means doing things for ourselves rather than having things done for us. They further highlight that self-reliance is the personal initiative in the ability and effort to identify, harness and manage effectively and efficiently the personal and collective resources, human or natural in the immediate surroundings in order to uplift one's or a people's quality of life, standard and condition of existence. In a nutshell, self-reliance refers to the reliance on one's capabilities; knowledge, skills, competencies abilities to improve life or an individual depending on his/her own resources; skills, competencies, knowledge, etc. for economic gains instead of being an employee.

Microsoft Access application competency is evident in students' ability to create a database, set field properties, modify table structure, create database tables, create a database using wizard, open database tables in datasheet view, change/illustrate table structure, specify data types, enter date and time, switch between design view and datasheet view amongst others (NBTE, 2004).

The use of paper in offices results to countless file creation, proliferation of files resulting in poor documentation and storage, waste of valuable time in retrieving urgent information to the detriment of efficiency in office functions and achievement of organisational goals (Eze & Oluigbo, 2015). Hence, file management becomes a challenge to the realization of office efficiency and organisational objectives.

To be of maximum value, records must be organized and properly managed (Ayodele & Adeoye, 2010). This means that, in order to enjoy the benefits of modern electronic record management system, an average organisation should have fully computerized business and administrative processes. Based on the training received, OTM graduates are the most appropriate to be employed to handle these responsibilities; using Microsoft Access application to manage records. In view of the foregoing, office technology and management graduates with competencies in database management systems would have an edge over those who do not as they are keenly sought during job recruitment and selection exercises. Udo (2014) observes that even though ICT (Microsoft Access inclusive) related course accounts for the highest number of contact hours in OTM curriculum, most OTM graduates are deficient in the area of competencies as they cannot match with the requirements of employers. Thus, the reason behind the high number of contact hours earmarked for the course to enable students have adequate time to practice the skills effectively is defeated. It is therefore not surprising then to see many graduates of OTM all over the place without gainful employment as a result of inadequate database management competency (Akwa et al, 2018).

More so, inadequate laboratory facilities is another issue militating against office technology and management programme. Considering the nature of OTM programme, it is difficult to effectively teach and learn without these important machines/equipment adequately in place. The programme cannot succeed without computer laboratories and resource centres among other things and without adequate computers many educators handling computer based courses (database management inclusive) would continue to have a hard time imparting these competencies. In addition to the above mentioned challenges is student's negative attitude towards skill and competency-oriented courses. Because of such negative attitudes, their personal interest and willingness to concentrate in order to acquire maximum level of skills expected of them is absent. This negative attitude is reflected in their failure to practice in order to acquire maximum skills for competency, self-development and fulfillment.

Sometimes practice assignments given in class are not done by students rather they take these assignments to business centres for assistance. Thus, in spite of these potential benefits, OTM students appear to graduate with little or no database management systems competencies among others expected of them. This according to them results from lack of adequate provision of facilities in such a way that it affects the process of acquiring competencies (Edokpolor & Chukwu, 2017). Similarly, Siddiquah and Salim (2017) in a study carried out by them affirm that students possess low competencies in MS Microsoft Access.

In view of the forgoing, effective acquisition of Microsoft Access competencies requires the use of instructional facilities and strategies that will encourage learning and the acquisition of “skills by doing” thereby leading to the development of key competencies required for employment and self-reliance. These skills and competencies are best acquired when the classroom replicates key features of real work conditions and instructional activities that are similar to those performed by workers in the work place. Therefore, without the necessary instructional facilities in place, the chance of acquiring the required level of competencies for employability and self-reliance is slim.

Statement of the Problem

Secretarial Studies programme in the polytechnics served its purpose until the evolution in office technology necessitated a change in the curriculum. In 2004, the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) in collaboration with United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), came up with a comprehensive content review of the curriculum for secretarial studies programme for polytechnics in Nigeria for a critical content overhaul of the then existing curriculum. The programme developed following the review became known as Office Technology and Management (OTM). Its purpose was clear; to guarantee employability and promote self-reliance of its graduates in the face of adverse economic situation in the country.

It has been close to two decades since Microsoft Access application has been incorporated into the Office Technology and Management curriculum in an attempt to ensure that students of the programme acquire the requisite skills needed to function effectively and efficiently in modern offices. However, it appears that, only minimal impact has been felt in this regard as graduates of the programme reportedly have had to be retrained by their employers to use this application effectively despite the presumed acquired skills. Indications from studies show that graduates are not well prepared for the world of work as competencies possessed do not match the needs and demand of employers and as a result, there exists a gap between the competencies acquired and those required (Oduwole, 2015).

This continued mismatch between Microsoft Access application competencies acquired by students and the expectation of employers in the world of works if not promptly addressed, may jeopardize all efforts made in terms of the review of the curriculum and the continued huge government investment in the Programme. This study therefore, is aimed at ascertaining the level to which final year office technology and management students are competent in Microsoft Access application for employability and self-reliance in North-Central, Nigeria.

Research Question

One research question was raised to guide the study

1. To what level are students of Office Technology and Management competent in Microsoft Access for employability and self-reliance?

Research Hypothesis

Based on the research question, the following null hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female office technology and management students on the level of Microsoft Access application competencies possessed for employability and self-reliance.

Method

Descriptive survey research design was used in the conduct of the study. The choice of the design was based on the opinion of Otache (2016) who states that descriptive research design is considered suitable for this kind of study because it is centered on individuals and their competency levels. The study was carried out in North-Central, Nigeria; Benue State, Kogi State, Plateau State, Nasarawa State, Niger State and Kwara State. The population of the study consists of the entire 1048 HND OTM students in the eight publicly owned polytechnics in North-Central, Nigeria.

The researcher purposively sampled all the 522 HND II students for the 2019/2020 academic session in all the eight publicly owned polytechnics viz; Benue State Polytechnic, Ugbokolo, Federal Polytechnic, Idah, Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja, Federal Polytechnic, Offa, Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin, Federal Polytechnic Nasarawa, Nasarawa State Polytechnic, Lafia, Federal Polytechnic, Bida, and Plateau State Polytechnic, Barikin- Ladi in the six states involved. The HND II students were used for the study because, they are the final year students who are presumed to have acquired adequate Microsoft Access application competencies for employability and self-reliance and thus should be capable of demonstrating the level to which they possess such competencies.

The method of data collection was by direct observation. The observational form was the instrument used to obtain data from participants. Data was obtained using a 10-item observation form developed by the researcher to measure the level of competencies titled: Levels of Microsoft Access Application Competencies Possessed by Office Technology and Management Students for Employability and Self-reliance (LMAACPOTMSES) to measure the levels of students' competencies. A four point modified Likert numeric rating scale of Very Highly Level (VHL) - 4, High Level (HL) -3, Low Level (LL) -2, Very Low Level (VLL) -1, was used. The instrument was face validated by three research experts in the Department of Business and Entrepreneurship Education, Faculty of Education, Kwara State University, Malete.

The reliability of the instrument was determined using Pearson Product Moment Correlation co-efficient (r) formula which gave a correlation coefficient of 0.72 for the instrument. The value obtained is in agreement with the views of Isyaku (2010) who states that an instrument is reliable if the value of correlation is close to 1. The data collected were collated and analysed using mean to answer the research questions while the t-test was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. Out of the 522 expected participants only 480 presented themselves for observation. Therefore the analysis will be based on the 480 participants.

Results

Table 1:

Table 9: Mean and Standard Deviation of Level of Microsoft Access Application Competencies Possessed by Office Technology Students for Employability and Self-Reliance

Items	Demonstration of Participant on Microsoft Access Competencies possessed	\bar{x}	SD	Remarks
1	Loading MS Access	3.10	0.49	HL
2	Opening an Existing Database	2.88	0.79	HL
3	Creating a Database	2.05	0.47	LL
4	Creating Table in Design View	1.94	1.04	VLL
5	Creating Table using Wizard	1.83	0.72	VLL
6	Creating Table by Entering Data	1.40	0.98	VLL
7	Sorting Records	2.03	0.87	LL
8	Creating Table Relationship	1.97	1.02	VLL
9	Setting Primary Key	1.51	0.39	VLL
10	Creating a Backup for Database	1.11	0.86	VLL
Grand Weighted Mean		1.98	0.75	VLL

Source: Field Study, 2020

Table 9 shows the mean and standard deviation of OTM students rating in each of the item in Microsoft Access application competencies. Loading MS Access ($\bar{x} = 3.10$); Opening an Existing Database ($\bar{x} = 2.88$); Creating a Database ($\bar{x} = 2.05$); Creating Table in Design View ($\bar{x} = 1.94$); Creating Table using Wizard ($\bar{x} = 1.83$); Creating Table by Entering Data ($\bar{x} = 1.40$); Sorting Records ($\bar{x} = 2.03$); Creating Table Relationship ($\bar{x} = 1.97$); Setting Primary Key ($\bar{x} = 1.57$); Creating a Backup for Database ($\bar{x} = 1.11$). The grand weighted mean of ($\bar{x} = 1.98$) indicates that OTM students possess very low level competencies in Microsoft Access application. A grand standard deviation of 0.75 with items ranging from 0.39 – 1.04 indicates homogeneity in participants' mean ratings.

Table 2: Summary of t-test analysis showing the difference between mean ratings of federal and state office technology and management students on the level of Microsoft Access application competencies possessed for employability and self-reliance

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	Std	T-cal	P-value	Decision
Federal	280	2.66	0.63	478	0.05	-0.27	0.00	S
State	200	1.23	1.05					

P<0.05 *S ≡ Significant

Table 2 shows the t-test analysis of hypothesis tested. The table shows that the computed t-calculated value of -0.27 and a p-value of 0.00 is less than the alpha level of 0.05. This implies that the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of office technology and management students in Federal and State polytechnics on the level of Microsoft Access application competencies possessed for employability and self-reliance in North-Central, Nigeria is rejected. Hence, OTM students in Federal and State

polytechnics differ significantly in their mean ratings on their level of Microsoft Access competencies possessed for employability and self-reliance in North-Central, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

With reference to the research question, findings on Table 1 shows that office technology and management students in polytechnics in North-Central, Nigeria possess very low level competencies in Microsoft Access applications for employability and self-reliance. This finding runs contrary to established expectation of final year OTM students. In spite of the fact that competencies in this application enhances employability and self-reliance as it enables superb performance, high level security, availability and manageability of these valued office resources (Eze & Oluigbo, 2015), OTM students are still deficient in these competencies stipulated in the curriculum. Supporting the findings, Siddiquah and Salim (2017) affirm that students possess low competencies in MS Microsoft Access. Similarly, Udo (2014) observes that even though Microsoft Access course accounts for one of the highest number of contact hours in OTM curriculum, most OTM graduates are deficient in this area of these competencies as they are unable to match up with the requirements of employers. This finding therefore reveals an existing gap in the effective implementation of the curriculum. Edokpolor and Chukwu (2017) identify lack of adequate provision of hardware and software facilities as affecting the process of acquiring database management system competencies. It is therefore not surprising then to see many graduates of OTM all over the place without gainful employment as a result of inadequate database management competency (Akwa, Nimfel, & Nguwap, 2018).

The analysis in Table 2 shows that there is a significant difference in the mean ratings of office technology and management students in Federal and State polytechnics on the level of Microsoft Access application competencies possessed for employability and self-reliance. Corroborating the forgoing, Edokpolor and Chukwu (2017) and Okoro (2013) reveal that students in Federal polytechnics are more competent in office applications than those of State polytechnics, this according to the authors is as a result of the regular substantial subventions that goes to Federal institutions unlike State institutions.

Competencies in database management system are very critical to employability and self-reliance of OTM students. Ugwuanyi (2011) asserts that office technology and management graduates with competencies in database management systems have an edge over those who do not as they are keenly sought during job recruitment and selection exercises. More so, graduates could establish and manage consultancy outfits to assist growing firms, nongovernmental organisations and government agencies to establish electronic office and data management procedures. (Ugwanyi, 2011; Akwa, Nimfel, & Nguwap, 2018). It is therefore obvious that those OTM students are lacking in database management competencies would miss out in the above economic opportunities as they have no capacity to carry out file management tasks.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that office technology and management students possessed very low level competencies in Microsoft Access application for employability and self-reliance in North-Central, Nigeria. Consequently, the objectives of the programme is far from being achieved as final year students of the programme are lacking competency in this key office application in spite of the fact that competencies in this application is very critical to employability and self-reliance. Thus, the finding may not be unconnected to the high unemployment rate prevalent among graduates of the programme and the inability of its graduate to venture into self-reliant endeavours in database management systems.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that institutions and OTM departments specifically should device means of adequately training OTM educators in the skill of Microsoft Access so as enhance their capacity to impart the skills effectively. On the other hand, OTM students in North-Central, Nigeria should be given adequate orientation on the economic prospects and opportunities (self, government or private enterprise employments) available to graduates who could demonstrate very high level of competencies in the application.

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