# Executives' Appraisal of Professional Competence of Office Technology and Management Graduates in Osun State Polytechnic, Iree

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## Abstract

This study is carried out to investigate professional competence among graduates of the Office Technology and Management programme as appraised by their direct supervisors. The study employs a survey design. Thirty-six (36) executives, consisting of eight females and twenty-eight males, of Osun State Polytechnic, Iree having the targeted graduates, who are attached to them, form the population of the study. No sampling is made as the population is of manageable size. A self-developed questionnaire is the research instrument used for data collection. Experts in the field validate the research instrument. The split-half method is used to test the reliability of the instrument using ten executives from another institution, which is not part of the study population. The correlation coefficient yields 0.78, which is considered reliable. Data collection is conducted face-to-face. The analysis reveals that the graduates are appraised to be professionally competent in administrative proficiency but slightly competent in technical, manipulative and communication proficiencies. The study concludes that Office Technology and Management graduates' professional competence does not meet the employers' expectations. Therefore, it is recommended that educators devise better means of implementing the training curriculum to achieve better results.

## Keywords:

Executives, Professional Competence, Office Technology and Management, Graduates, Higher Institution

## INTRODUCTION

The professional competence of office managers, otherwise known as secretaries, is crucial in any organisation targeting organisational success. There are high expectations from employers, customers and visitors in the haulage of the duties and roles of office managers (Okolocha & Osahon, 2015). Professional secretaries are highly indispensable in any establishment as secretarial duties are viewed as the pivot of office activities (Okoye, 2016). Yakubu and Ugwu in Okoye (2016) advocate that the efficiency and effectiveness of secretarial duties depend primarily on the skills and professional competencies of the secretaries. In addition, Mayhew (2020) mentions that secretaries and office managers as executives' gatekeepers and first responders who interact with practically every worker in the organisations and whose professional competencies cannot be compromised. In her view, professional competencies and skills that secretaries have acquired from previous times have now become obsolete because of the technological revolution and innovations in contemporary offices.

However, instead of rendering secretarial personnel jobless, professional secretaries with modern office proficiencies are indispensable since no organisation can achieve success without the effectiveness of secretarial duties.

A considerable amount of literature has emphasised technological advancement resulting in the review and change in the training programme and curriculum for secretarial professionals, from secretarial studies to Office Technology and Management (OTM), to meet the demands of the contemporary technology-driven offices. As a result of the technological revolution and innovation in the modern offices, there has been a significant re-designation in the secretarial profession and review of training curriculum for office managers (National Board for Technical Education, 2004). Scholars view higher education institutions as the leading trainers in equipping graduates with the necessary skills to operate professionally within the workplace environment. Therefore, higher education institutions designed the Office Technology and Management (OTM) curriculum to equip its graduates with the necessary skills, particularly in technical, administrative, and communication skills, to perform their professional duties in the contemporary technology-driven environment competently. The importance of professional competencies of graduates in this programme cannot be overemphasised, as organisations' production, service delivery, profitability and survival depend mainly on the workers' competent performance and productivity.

By implication, graduates of OTM are supposed to demonstrate technical, administrative, and communication skills competently to showcase their professionalism and thus, contribute to attaining organisational objectives. Therefore, the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) revamped the training curriculum and programme to improve OTM graduates' performance in response to the dynamic of the contemporary technology-driven office. Jusoh and Mohd Noor (2008) stated that the former Malaysia Prime Minister affirmed that a significant reason for the improvement in the education system is to produce workers who are ready to fulfil the need of the industrialised country.

In a similar vein, Law and Kue (2020) opine that improvement in the expected skills of graduates will lead to higher employers' satisfaction. A re-designation and change in the training curriculum of office managers will be worthwhile if the programme can produce workers that will satisfy and meet the needs of the employers. Based on this background, the study seeks to investigate the professional competence of these graduates of the OTM programme as being appraised by their executives, their direct supervisors.

Therefore, this study investigates how professionally competent OTM graduates are in technically, administratively and communication skills as appraised by their direct supervisors and executives in Osun State Polytechnic, Iree. This study analysed OTM graduates' competencies based on four elements of proficiencies (technical, manipulative, communication and administrative proficiencies). Accordingly, four hypotheses were tested to rule out or ascertain gender bias as secretarial profession is commonly viewed as female dominant profession (Kurtz, 2013; Vandekam, 2013; Williams, 2016; Odemuyiwa, 2017) and verify the findings that gender does not significantly influence the appraisal \\of OTM graduates' work performance (Akintola and Adepoju, 2016; Ejeka, 2019).

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to Janudin et al. (2015), competence is expected to influence work and, subsequently, the performance of an organisation. In other words, it affects work productivity as well as the survival of an organisation. Janudin et al. (2015) further view competence as a combination of knowledge, skills, behaviour, and attitude that contributes to an individual's efficiency. Moreover, competence is the ability of individuals to respond to demands in their environment which provides satisfaction and a sense of efficacy (Valle et al., 2013). Similarly, Boyatzis, in Valle et al. (2013), defines competency as an individual's underlying characteristic causally related to effective or superior performance. It consists of codes of conduct that make people effective in a given situation and condition of service. Competence relates to task accomplishment and achievement of excellence. It is a set of verifiable characteristics and skills that improves job performance.

Professionalism is defined as qualities and typical features of a profession. According to Middleton (2018), professionalism includes how we look, do our jobs, and interact. Middleton opines that the professionalism of an office manager revolves around proficiency in technical matters such as e-mail management, report preparation, correspondence review, handling phone calls, and communication skills. Okolocha and Osahon (2015) discuss the high expectations of employers, colleagues, customers, visitors and others in the haulage of the duties and roles of the secretary/office managers. They view professionalism when a person conforms to the technical and ethical standards of his or her profession. The state of professionalism is an appreciable level of performance that usually justifies required standards. In addition, Oludele et al. (2017) describe professionalism as the decisive and peak performance level that guarantees continual relevance in the dynamic world of work. Professionalism is valued in the workplace, and thus, demonstration of professional competence, according to Granowski (2015), is extremely important at all levels of work.

Hence, professionalism in secretarial practice is an all-important issue that determines practitioners' advancement and success rate. Areas of professional competence required of office workers for effective functioning of any organisation include technical expertise, analytical thinking and personal effectiveness (Valle et al., 2013). Furthermore, office managers and secretaries perform administrative functions of overseeing everyday operations involving many different members of staff, which require possession and competent exhibition of interpersonal and organisational skills (Monster.com, n.d.).

Apart from that, secretarial work can be viewed professionally by addressing communication and administration (Zuin & Findlay, 2014). Proficient secretaries usually provide various services, including providing information on commonly used files, composing routine statements for frequently sent letters and making practical arrangements for solutions of petty office problems and challenges (Zuin & Findlay, 2014). The current technological innovations in the offices have rendered the professional competencies of secretaries of the past few decades, i.e., graduates of the old Secretarial Study, obsolete (Okoye, 2016). In response to the challenges posed by technological innovations and advancement in the contemporary world of work, NBTE has reviewed the training curriculum for secretaries and changed the programme to Office Technology and Management.

Yakubu and Ugwu (2015) in Okoye (2016) advocate that the OTM graduates should be able to use computers to create spreadsheets with packages like Microsoft Excel, compose correspondences using packages like Microsoft Words, Word Star or Word Perfect, manage databases using software like Microsoft Access, create presentations with Microsoft Power

Point, and publish reports and documents using desktop publishing software like Microsoft Office Publisher. Secretaries are acquired to competently apply these technological skills to be professionally efficient in modern technology-driven offices. Maaji et al. (2020) infer that the technological innovations in office operations have rendered shorthand skills obsolete and that efficiency and effectiveness of a secretary in current office operations depends on his or her knowledge and skills in operating modern office technology. Similarly, CareerBuilder (2020) deliberates that secretaries/office managers must demonstrate strong technological competence.

Okoye (2016) emphasises that the abilities to use computers and printers, teleconference devices, digital photocopiers, scanners, internet facilities, paper shredders and digital duplicators are referred to as manipulative competencies that secretaries must master in the modern automated offices. Apparently, Miller and Okoro, in Okoye (2016), contend that employers expect their secretaries to effectively manipulate modern office technologies available in the current automated offices without hesitation. The study further reveals that communication competencies such as good command of English (oral and written), ability to integrate information for dissemination to staff and clients, ability to communicate effectively with telex-machine, e-mail and intercom within and outside the offices are required of secretaries. Odendaal (2015) also opines that the duties of a modern secretary include serving as the hub of communication in an office. While describing the duties of a confidential secretary, Washington State University (n.d.) affirms that performance of administrative support functions characterises the duties of a confidential secretary in Washington State University. These include preparation of routine correspondence, meeting management that involves professional arrangement of venue and preparation of relevant meeting books/materials, maintenance of office inventories, and any other administrative duties assigned by the executive.

Similarly, SHRM (n.d.) asserts that personal secretaries are expected to perform administrative responsibilities like scheduling meetings, maintaining records, training and supervising clerical staff, and taking part in operational decision-making levels. According to Bloom (2018), businesses of all sizes employ secretaries and office managers to help manage front offices and perform certain administrative functions like scheduling, cancelling and rescheduling appointments, ordering office supplies, proofreading documents, and drafting e-mails. Secretaries are also expected to be proficient in note-taking during any meetings.

In further support, Mayhew (2020) affirms that core professional competencies, namely verbal and written communication and professional traits like integrity, are compulsory for a secretary and office manager. Also, in his appraisal of OTM graduates' work performance study in Imo State Civil Service, Ejeka (2019) uses 166 directors and permanent secretaries, who are direct bosses to the OTM graduates. The study focuses on the appraisals of these graduates in record management, human relations and information and communication technology (ICT) functions. The study found that the work performance of OTM graduates in these areas to be adequate and that male and female directors and permanent secretaries did not significantly differ in their appraisals of the graduates. Although Ejeka (2019) concentrated on appraising the performance of OTM graduates in ICT functions, they did not appraise the graduates' competence in using the common office application software such as Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, and Microsoft Access to perform daily jobs in today's technology-driven office. Since previous studies have not appraised the professional competence of the OTM graduates in manipulative, administrative and communication skills, this study expanded the current knowledge by investigating these skills.

This study applied the functionalist theory (functionalism), focusing on the macro-level of social structure. The theory postulates that each aspect of works is vital for the stability of the whole society and system. Any dysfunction of the system will affect and create social problems. According to the functionalists, an institution only exists because it serves a vital role in the functioning of society and will die if it no longer serves the role (Crossman, 2020). Training institutions offering OTM programme plays vital roles in preparing graduates for contemporary offices for the stability of society at large. When Office Technology and Management programme no longer produces graduates that are professionally competent to manage the contemporary office, it will create social problems and pose a setback for the continuous existence of the programme.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a survey research design. Thirty-six (36) executives of Osun State Polytechnic, Iree, consisting of eight females and twenty-eight males, with Office Technology and Management graduates being attached to them, form the study population. For this case, no sampling is made as the population is of manageable size. The instrument in the study uses a self-administered questionnaire, Office Technology and Management Graduates' Professional Competence Appraisal Questionnaire, for its data collection as finding the exact items from pre-existing questions are difficult, as affirmed by Hyman et al. (2006).

In addition, Diem (2004) and Harlacher (2016) guidelines were used in developing the questionnaire. The questionnaires were divided into two sections: A and B. Section A consisted of items that were related to the demographic information of the respondents, while section B consisted of 24 items drawn in 4-point Likert-type response mode, ranging from not competent (1) to highly competent (4), to elicit responses while answering the research questions. The items on the questionnaire are limited to 24 statements to avoid boredom and make completion easier and faster for busy executives.

The content of the instrument was subjected to a validity test done by experts in OTM field. The split-half method was used to test the reliability of the instrument using ten executives from nearby institutions in Osun State, which were not part of the study population. The test yielded a correlation coefficient of 0.87. Data collection was done through face-to-face contact. The collected data were analysed using means to answer the research questions. A mean score of 3.50 and above is considered highly competent, between 2.50 and 3.49 as competent, a mean of 1.50 – 2.49 as slightly competent, while a mean below 1.50 is considered not competent.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1, 2, 3 and 4 are the results of the appraisals done by thirty-six executives for OTM graduates on four types of competencies, specifically technological, manipulative, communication and administrative proficiencies.

**Table 1: Executives' appraisal of professional competence of OTM graduates in technological proficiency**

| | Items | Mean | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Creating, storing and retrieving different types of documents using Microsoft Word | 3.16 | Competent |
| 2. | Creating a spreadsheet and keeping impressive account using Microsoft Excel | 2.47 | Slightly competent |
| 3. | Creating, managing and maintaining databases using Microsoft Access | 2.11 | Slightly competent |
| 4. | Creating presentation slides using Microsoft PowerPoint | 1.42 | Not competent |
| 5. | Preparation of publishing materials like brochures, business cards, reports, flyers etc. using Microsoft Publisher/Adobe PageMaker | 1.88 | Slightly competent |
| 6. | Usage and manipulation of modern office technologies like digital photocopier, scanner, different types of printers, electronic facsimile etc. | 2.72 | Competent |
| | Grand Mean | 2.29 | Slightly competent |

Based on Table 1, OTM graduates in Osun State Polytechnic, Iree have been appraised to be technically competent in the use of Microsoft Word for creating, storing and retrieving different types of documents, and also in the use of office technologies like digital photocopiers and printers with the mean of 3.16 and 2.72, respectively. However, the graduates are appraised to be slightly competent in using Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Access, and desktop publishing software like Microsoft Publishers and Adobe PageMaker, with means between 1.88 and 2.47. A mean of 1.42 shows that the OTM graduates are appraised as not competent in using Microsoft PowerPoint. The grand mean of 2.29 indicates the overall appraisal of technical proficiency to be slightly competent.

**Table 2: Executives' appraisal of professional competence of OTM graduates in manipulative proficiency**

| | Items | Mean | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Use of internet facilities to source for information | 1.5 | Slightly competent |
| 2. | Manipulating the computer for optimal performance | 3.03 | Competent |
| 3. | Use of teleconference devices | 1.69 | Slightly competent |
| 4. | Use and effective manipulation of different types of printers | 3.33 | Competent |
| 5. | Use and effective manipulation of different types of photocopiers and digital duplicator | 3.44 | Competent |
| 6. | Use of different types of scanners | 1.72 | Slightly competent |
| | Grand Mean | 2.45 | Slightly competent |

Table 2 presents the results of manipulative proficiency among OTM graduates' competence. The results unveil that OTM graduates are appraised to be slightly competent in manipulating internet facilities to source information, using teleconference devices and manipulating different types of scanners. The mean ratings for these three items range between 1.5 and 1.72. Nevertheless, the graduates are appraised to be competent in manipulating the computers, printers and photocopiers for optimal performances with mean ratings of 3.03, 3.33

and 3.44, respectively. In general, the grand mean of 2.45 shows that the graduates are appraised to be slightly competent in manipulative competence.

The competence of OTM graduates in communication proficiency is shown in Table 3. From the table, the grand mean of 2.33 indicates that the OTM graduates are appraised to be slightly competent in communication competence. However, the graduates, with mean ratings of 3.25 and 3.19, are appraised to be competent in oral communication and the use of non-verbal language. Moreover, they are slightly competent in composing correspondence and writing reports, using e-mail technology and communicating with electronic facsimile with mean ratings of 2.41, 1.92 and 1.75, respectively. In contrast, the result deems that the OTM graduates are not competent in using teleconference devices to organise meetings with a mean of 1.47.

**Table 3: Executive appraisal of professional competence of OTM graduates in communication proficiency**

| | Items | Mean | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Communicating orally with good command of English language | 3.25 | Competent |
| 2. | Composing correspondence and writing reports with good grammar, correct spellings and punctuations | 2.41 | Slightly competent |
| 3. | Sending and receiving messages using e-mail technology | 1.92 | Slightly competent |
| 4. | Using teleconference device to organise meetings | 1.47 | Not competent |
| 5. | Communicating with clients and colleagues using electronic facsimile | 1.75 | Slightly competent |
| 6. | Communicating effectively with colleagues at work using non-verbal language | 3.19 | Competent |
| | Grand Mean | 2.33 | Slightly competent |

**Table 4: Executive appraisal of professional competence of OTM graduates in administrative proficiency**

| S/N | Items | X | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Preparing reply to routine correspondence | 2.69 | Competent |
| 2. | Arranging, organising and managing meeting | 2.94 | Competent |
| 3. | Maintaining office inventories | 3.61 | Highly competent |
| 4. | Training and supervision of clerical and other junior staff | 3.75 | Highly competent |
| 5. | Ordering and maintaining of office supplies | 3.52 | Highly competent |
| 6. | Proofreading of documents | 2.97 | Competent |
| | Grand Mean | 3.25 | Competent |

Table 4 depicts the competence of OTM graduates in administrative proficiency. The results show that OTM graduates are appraised to be competent in administrative proficiency with a grand mean of 3.25. They are appraised to be highly competent in maintaining office inventories, training and supervising junior staff and maintaining office supplies with means of 3.61, 3.75 and 3.52, respectively. In preparing routine correspondence, managing meetings and proofreading, they are appraised to be competent with mean ratings of 2.69, 2.94 and 2.97, respectively.

The study results confirm that OTM graduates in Osun State Polytechnic, Iree are professionally competent in administrative proficiency but slightly competent in technical, manipulative and communication proficiency. Considering the findings, OTM graduates demonstrate professional competence in using Microsoft Word but are deficient in creating electronic spreadsheets, creating and maintaining databases and desktop publishing tasks. Contrary to CareerBuilder (2017), this implies that OTM graduates do not conform to professional standards expected by employers; thus, they need to intensify their efforts to be technically competent. According to the executives' appraisals, the professional deficiency of OTM graduates in manipulative and communication proficiency centres around internet-related functions, as shown in Tables 2 and 3. These results corroborate Okoye (2016) that employers expect secretaries to effectively use and manipulate modern office technologies available in today's technology-driven offices.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study extended the current body of knowledge of OTM graduates' competency levels by measuring the manipulative, administrative and communication skills. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the executives appraised OTM graduates to be slightly competent in technical, manipulative and communication competencies, which do not entirely meet the employers' expectations. They are, however, appraised to be competent administratively. Based on these results, several recommendations are made. Firstly, OTM graduates should consciously expand their efforts to improve their proficiencies to be professionally competent in application software like Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Access, Microsoft Publisher, and Adobe PageMaker to meet employers' expectations for their professionalism. Secondly, office educators should note the areas of professional deficiencies among their graduates and devise means for better curriculum implementation to achieve desired results. Thirdly, training institutions should make internet facilities available to expose their students to the reality of the contemporary world of office works. Lastly, employers should assist OTM graduates in their employment opportunities of on-the-job training and development, which can go a long way to boost their professional competencies, especially in the specified areas of deficiencies.

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APPENDIX 1

**OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT GRADUATES' PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE APPRAISAL QUESTIONNAIRE**

Sir/Madam,
Please assist in completing the following questionnaire to appraise the OTM graduate/secretary in Osun State Polytechnic, Iree, on their professional competence. Your sincerity and promptness in completing it will be highly appreciated, and confidentiality of your responses is assured.

Thank you.

*Oludele, L. Y.*

**Section A**
Sex:    Male    ☐                    Female    ☐


Qualification: HND/B.Sc/B.Ed ☐      M.Sc/M.Ed ☐      PhD ☐

**Section B**
Key: HC – Highly competent, C- Competent, SC – Slightly Competent, NC – Not Competent

| S/N | Items | HC | C | SC | NC |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Indicate how competent your secretary is in the following: | | | | |
| | *(Technological competence)* | | | | |
| 1. | Creating, storing and retrieving different types of documents using Microsoft Word | | | | |
| 2. | Creating a spreadsheet and keeping impressive account using Microsoft Excel | | | | |
| 3. | Creating, managing and maintaining databases using Microsoft Access | | | | |
| 4. | Creating presentation slides using Microsoft PowerPoint | | | | |
| 5. | Preparation of publishing materials like brochures, business cards, reports, flyers etc. using Microsoft Publisher/Adobe PageMaker | | | | |
| 6. | Usage and manipulation of modern office technologies like digital photocopier, scanner, different types of printers, electronic facsimile etc. | | | | |
| | *(Manipulative competence)* | | | | |
| 7. | Use of internet facilities to source for information | | | | |
| 8. | Manipulating the computer for optimal performance | | | | |
| 9. | Use of teleconference devices | | | | |
| 10. | Use and effective manipulation of different types of printers | | | | |
| 11. | Use and effective manipulation of different types of photocopier and digital duplicator | | | | |

| 12. | Use of different types of scanner | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *(Communication competence)* | | | | |
| 13. | Communicating orally with good command of the English language | | | | |
| 14. | Composing correspondence and writing reports with good grammar, correct spellings and punctuations | | | | |
| 15. | Sending and receiving messages using e-mail technology | | | | |
| 16. | Using teleconference device to organise meetings | | | | |
| 17. | Communicating with clients and colleagues using electronic facsimile | | | | |
| 18. | Communicating effectively with colleagues at work using non-verbal language | | | | |
| | *(Administrative competence)* | | | | |
| 19. | Preparing reply to routine correspondence | | | | |
| 20. | Arranging, organising and managing meeting | | | | |
| 21. | Maintaining office inventories | | | | |
| 22. | Training and supervision of clerical and other junior staff | | | | |
| 23. | Ordering and maintaining office supplies | | | | |
| 24. | Proofreading of documents | | | | |