



# **Competencies Required of Office Management and Technology Graduating Students for Effective Performance in Modern Offices**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study sought to ascertain the competencies required of Office Management and Technology graduating students in Rivers State Universities for performance in modern offices as perceived by Business Educators and OMT graduates. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study comprised 123 respondents, 58 business educators and 65 OMT graduates from Rivers State University and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. The entire population was studied due to its manageable size. A structured questionnaire titled “Questionnaire on Competencies Required by Office Management and Technology Students for Performance in Modern Offices (QCOMTSPMO) developed on a 4 point rating scale by the researcher and duly validated by experts in the field was used as an instrument for data collection. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach Alpha method which yielded coefficient values of 0.75 and 0.77 for the two clusters. The mean was employed in answering the research questions while z-test was used in testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that graduating OMT students will require communication and office management competencies for effective performance in modern offices. The study also revealed no significant difference in the mean responses of the respondents. The study therefore concluded that communication and office management competencies are indispensable for effective performance as such OMT students as potential secretaries and managers of modern offices need to develop these competencies and also be versatile in their application in real life situation as translating these competencies into performance is believed to promote effectiveness. Based on the findings and conclusion the researcher recommended among others regular review of the curriculum to incorporate identified competencies and also Students should be exposed to modern office technologies so that they get acquainted with them while in school.

**Keywords:** Competencies; Office Management and Technology; Communication; Office Skills; Performance; Modern Office

## **INTRODUCTION**

The office is a service delivery unit of an organization carrying out such services as clerical, secretarial, accounting and research duties (Sannie, 2009). It is often regarded as the live wire and core of all organizational activities. It receives, arranges, processes, and communicates information. Today, procedures of carrying out these functions of the office have transformed the traditional office into modern offices especially with the emergence of technology. Many organizations have embraced the advantage of technology by introducing modern and sophisticated machines gadgets, facilities such as computers, internet, electronic mail, dictating machines, electric calculators, electric pocket organizers,

photocopying machines, computer software and packages among others to ease the work of the office staff as well as promote efficiency in all areas. The introduction of these automated technologies, have specifically altered the duties expected of OTM graduates in modern offices areas of communication, information technology and in office management. Enyekit (2006) emphasized that the modern business organization is briskly altering as a result of office mechanization, which has brought about new methods in carrying out functions performed by employees in organizations. Similarly, Akpomi and Ordu (2009) asserted that these technological changes have also tremendously changed the roles performed by OMT graduates in modern offices as they are been exposed to office technology and innovations, posing great challenge for graduating students as potential secretaries if they are deficient in the competencies required for effective performance. Corroborating these views, Azih (2013) pointed out most traditional way of carrying out office functions have gradually been improved and replaced by these modern technologies and there is hardly any modern business organization that operates without the use of one form of modern office technology or the other. Consequently, offering new roles and responsibilities and challenges for Office Management and Technology (OMT) graduates.

Office Management and Technology (OMT) is a core aspect of the Business Education programme that reflects the importance of education as identified in the objective of the National Policy on Education which emphasizes the acquisition and development of both mental and physical abilities, skills, attitude and competencies necessary for the survival of the individual and contribution to the development of the society (FRN, 2014). OMT is a name for the old secretarial studies as a result of the review of its curriculum which now lays emphasis on the acquisition of office and secretarial competencies for performance in various fields or self-employment (Ndinechi & Gude, 2014). The programme also has a mission to produce modern secretaries and office managers who are proficiently prepared for both public and private organizations and will be expected to handle numerous office functions relating to information processing and management. They can be described as the heart of the office because virtually all other activities revolve around them as their duties encompasses the preparation, preservation and transmission of different types of office documents as well as conventional secretarial duties of confidential nature at various levels in an organization including other functions necessary for the smooth running of the office (Ejeka, 2007). Over the past decade the roles expected of OMT graduates as secretaries and office managers in organizations has changed as management philosophies in the business world have been influenced by technological advances, new business procedures, and global markets which have contributed to the new demands on their roles. Thus, the acquisition of relevant competencies has become an imperative for graduates of OMT in the performance of their duties as secretaries and office managers in modern offices (Ikelegbe & Odede, 2012). This is essential because OTM graduates are pervasive office workers needed in every type of the organization to assist their superiors or executives in carrying out their responsibilities.

Performance is a multi-dimensional concept that can be described using different perspectives. Looking at it from the behavioural aspect, performance involves a specific behaviour which is goal oriented while from the outcome perspective it refers to the result of the individuals behaviour. However, for job performance to be effective these two aspects must be related. Vichita and Jintawee (2007) describes effective job performance as the attainment of specific results or outcomes required by the job through specific actions while maintaining or being consistent with policies, procedures and conditions of the office environment. Performance accesses how well an individual carries out a particular job and is thus a critical criterion for the success of any organization. Today effective performance has become the vision of many modern offices across the globe and depends to a large extent on competencies possessed and exhibited by workers along other factors (Aliata &Hawa, 2014).

Competence according to Rahman (2012) is an essential knowledge and skill obtainable in a profession and those which the professionals in the field must develop and possess in order to demonstrate at optimal level of acquisition and functioning. Competency includes the knowledge, skills, abilities, traits and behaviours acquired through education, training, experience, or natural abilities that allow an individual to perform a task within a specific function or job (Vichita & Jintawee, 2007). It also denotes a blend of

awareness, proficiency, approach, worth and individual attributes that allow the worker to behave professionally and fittingly in a situation, deploying them in a more articulate way (Koster & Dengerink, 2008). Ezenwafor and Okeke (2011) stated that competency in modern office requires a combination of skills, knowledge, practical behaviours and attitudes attributes and behaviours that are directly related to successful performance on the job. In recent times competency has become a highly critical factor among OMT graduates for employment into public and private offices and in achieving performance as employers are usually faced with the task of hiring the right employees. The importance of competency among OMT graduates has increased overtime due to the strategic roles they play as secretaries and office managers in contemporary work environment. This has continuously increased the demand for competent OMT graduates in both public and private offices in acquiring competitive advantage.

The OMT programme has been designed to help students develop a number of competencies including communication, office management, information technology, human relations, problem solving, and decision making, secretarial abilities etc. Cornacchione (2012) pinpointed that such competences provide a foundation for consistent and objective performance standards about what is needed and expected in an organization. These competencies have become essential in determining the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of individuals and a highly critical in achieving excellence in performance.

According to Dambo (2011) communication is the process by which understandable information is exchanged between two or more individuals in a system to initiate action. It involves the act of conveying thoughts of feeling to other people or receiving in return in accordance with the purpose and manner of the act (Chukwumezie, 2014). To Elendu (2018) communication is the process of conveying information from one person or group of persons, department or organization to another, through post, telephone, or by any other means which includes, memorandum, reports, minutes, notices etc. Communication is the bedrock of all human activities and existence. It brings people together, keeps people together and also ensures understanding among people, hence very vital to work relationship. Communication competencies will promote the efficiency of OMT graduates in decision making and judgement. Graduating OMT students as potential secretaries will be expected to possess communication competencies in order to coordinate and organize the routine and office schedules and paper work of modern offices. Without communication group activity in the office will be impossible as coordination and change cannot be effected, resulting in setbacks in the achievement of organizational goals (Dambo, 2011). Yakubu and Ugwu (2015) asserted that modern offices are automated and utilizes modern communication facilities such as telex, electronic mail, fax, and telephone, intercom to send and receive information. This simply implies that graduating students who are not skilled in the use of these communication facilities will not be effective in their performance. Thus, it is very imperative that students are acquainted with relevant communication competencies which they will be expected to translate into performance.

Subsequently, graduating OMT students are also expected to possess office management competencies to enable them gain employment advantage and also perform duties effectively (Ugwanyi, 2011). They will be expected to demonstrate enough office competence in their work places. One of the objectives of the OMT programme clearly emphasises the production of graduates with mastery of office skills (NBTE, 2018). Olise and Ihimekpan (2008) opined that the possession of office management competencies will facilitate effective job performance in the office in terms of carrying out office functions. Oraizowanlan (2010) asserted that lack of office competencies will result in poor record keeping, lack of initiative, poor communication, lack of filing habits and lack of patience. Similarly, Miller, Okoro and Oji-anyaegbu (2012) contended that today's employers are obviously expecting secretaries to acquaint themselves with an understanding of office facilities as they are expected to manipulate available modern office facilities to their advantage in managing information. Corroborating these views, Ezenwafor (2013) asserted that good office management competencies such as the ability to protect office documents from loss or destruction, ability to properly handle and adequately maintain their work equipment and facilities, ability to manage the work environment by properly arranging furniture, equipment, ability to suitably use office hours and ability to maintain confidentiality of office records, ability to organize personal efforts and

energy as well as those of subordinates and ability to persistently seek solutions to problems, among others are required for effective functioning.

It has thus become imperative that the perception of Business Educators as implementers of the programme, who play key role in training of OMT students to become competent and occupy positions in modern offices and OMT graduates who are engaged in office management and also receiving further training and education in the programme are elicited to determine the competencies required of graduating OMT students for performance in modern offices.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Developments and innovations in technology have brought about tremendous changes in modern offices and business environments as well as in the roles and functions expected of OMT graduates, demanding greater responsibilities and improved performances in view of their vital roles. The implication is that OMT graduating students who will be unable to cope with the demands of modern office practices will become irrelevant, low priced or even unemployed as the case may be. Observations have shown that the performances of some OMT graduates are below accepted standards in modern offices and in the utilization of modern technologies (Azih, 2013) as a result, employment opportunities and some office functions that are supposed to be handled by OMT graduates are gradually been taken over by graduates of other related disciplines. The question is; could this be that the preparation of OMT students are not producing the required impact as it appears that they might be deficient of the required competencies for effective performance? Consequently, OMT graduating students are bound to lose and will continue to lose their employment opportunities and roles to more competent graduates of other related field or disciplines, as their performance in modern offices is definitely bound to be unimpressive and ineffective owing to this deficiency. Unfortunately, this lacuna seem to have created disparity between what is imparted to the OMT students in terms of competencies and what is expected and demanded in reality thus, creating a dichotomy in the work environment and in the employment of OMT graduates.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the competencies required of Office Management Technology (OMT) graduating students of Rivers State universities for effective performance in modern offices as perceived by Business Educators and OMT graduates. Specifically, the study sought to ascertain:

1. The communication competencies required of OMT graduating students for effective performance in modern offices.
2. The office management competencies required of OMT graduating students for effective performance in modern offices.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What communication competencies do OMT graduating students require for effective performance in modern offices?
2. What office management competencies do OMT graduating students require for effective performance in modern offices?

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of Business Educators and OMT graduates on the communication competencies required of OMT graduating students for effective performance in modern offices.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of Business Educators and OMT graduates on the office management competencies required of OMT graduating students for effective performance in modern offices.

**METHOD**

The study adopted descriptive survey research design for the study. The population of the study comprised of fifty-eight (58) Business Educators and sixty-five (65) OMT graduates (2018/2019 academic session) from Rivers State University (RSU) and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE), a total of one hundred and twenty-three (123) respondents. No sample/sampling technique was adopted because of the manageable size of the population. The instrument for data collection was a 29 item structured questionnaire titled “Questionnaire on Competencies Required by Office Management and Technology Students for Performance in Modern Offices (QCOMTSPMO)” drafted on a four point rating scale of Highly required (HR=4points); Required (R=3points); Fairly required (FR=2point) and Not required (NR= 1 point) for the research questions. The instrument elicited information from the respondents on communication and office management competencies required of OMT graduating students for effective performance in modern offices. The instrument was validated by two research experts from Rivers State University and Ignatius Ajuru University, Port-Harcourt. Cronbach Alpha method was used to test the reliability of the items and a reliability coefficient of 0.75 and 0.77 respectively obtained. 123 copies of questionnaires were administered and retrieved by the researcher and two research assistants. However, only 100 copies were retrieved and analyzed using mean for the research question and z-test for the test of hypotheses. The decision rule for the research question was based on the real limit of numbers as follows: Highly Required (3.50-4.00), Required (2.50-3.49), Fairly Required (1.50-2.49) and Not Required (1.00-1.49). The null hypothesis was accepted when the z-calculated was less than the z-critical value and rejected when the z-calculated was greater than the z-critical value.

**RESULTS**

**Research Question 1**

*What communication competencies are required of OMT graduating students for effective performance in modern offices?*

**Table 1: Mean Responses of Respondents on Communication Competencies required of OMT Graduating Students for Effective Performance in Modern Offices**

S/N	Items Communication Competencies required by OMT Graduating Students	Business Educators: N=46		OTM graduates: N=54		Remark
		$\bar{X}$	R	$\bar{X}$	R	
1.	Ability to write clearly and concisely	3.20	R	3.33	R	Required
2.	Skill in speaking clearly, confidently and with empathy	3.24	R	3.06	R	Required
3.	Ability to display good listening skills	2.70	R	2.93	R	Required
4.	Ability to effectively utilize a variety of modes or presentation in any given environment	3.41	R	3.33	R	Required
5.	Ability to be succinct, confident and adaptable in presenting one’s self and ideas	2.98	R	3.02	R	Required
6.	Skill in re-reading and proof reading work for clarity, typos and errors.	3.52	HR	3.44	R	Required
7.	Developing a friendly tone in speaking	2.50	R	2.69	R	Required
8.	Ability to use modern communication facilities such as intercom, e-mail, telex, fax, telephone	3.57	HR	3.15	R	Required
	<b>Cluster Mean</b>	<b>3.14</b>	R	<b>3.12</b>	R	Required

*Source: Research Data, 2021.*

Results from Table 1 show that all eight items on communication competencies listed had mean ratings ranging between 2.50 to 3.57. This indicates the perception of the respondents that all the items on communication competencies are required of graduating OMT students for effective performance in modern offices.

**Research Question 2**

*What office management competencies are required of OMT graduating students for effective performance in modern offices?*

**Table 2: Mean Responses of Respondents on Office Management Competencies required of OMT Graduating Students for Effective Performance in Modern Offices**

S/N	Items Office Management Competencies required by OTM Graduating Students	Business Educators: N= 46		OTM graduates: N= 54		Remark
		$\bar{X}$	R	$\bar{X}$	R	
1.	Maintaining good filing system	3.70	HR	3.56	HR	Highly Required
2.	Ability to plan or organize work	3.36	R	3.22	R	Required
3.	Effective time management	3.22	R	3.07	R	Required
4.	Ability to utilize modern office equipment and facilities	3.61	HR	3.59	HR	Highly Required
5.	Articulate and interpret administrative policy	2.78	R	3.11	R	Required
6.	Ability to manage office information.	3.17	R	3.33	R	Required
7.	Ability to demonstrate flexibility and adaptability	3.24	R	3.06	R	Required
<b>Cluster Mean</b>		<b>3.30</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>3.28</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>Required</b>

*Source: Research Data, 2021*

Data in Table 2 reveal that two items 1 and 4 were rated highly required while all the other five items (2, 3, 5, 6, and 7) with mean ratings between 2.78 to 3.36 were rated required. The cluster means value of 3.30 and 3.28 respectively is an indication that office management competencies are a requirement of graduating OMT students for performance in modern offices after graduation.

**Test of Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis 1**

There is no significant difference in the mean rating of Business Educators and OMT graduates on the communication competencies required of OMT graduating students for effective performance in modern offices.

**Table 3: Summary of z-test analysis of significant difference between the mean ratings of Business Educators and OMT graduates on communication competencies required for effective performance in modern offices.**

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	Z <sub>cal</sub>	Z <sub>table</sub>	Level of Sign.	Decision
Business Educators	46	3.14	0.69	98	0.12	1.99	0.05	Accepted
OTM graduates	54	3.12	0.65					

*Source: Research data output, 2021*

The results in Table 3 reveal a z-calculated value of 0.12 less than the z-table value of 1.96 at .05 level of significance and 98 degree of freedom. Since z-calculated is less than z-table ( $0.12 < 1.99$ ). Hence the null hypothesis is accepted that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of Business Educators and OMT graduates on the communication competencies required of OMT graduating students for effective performance in modern offices.

### Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean rating of Business Educators and OMT graduates on the office management competencies required of OMT graduating students for effective performance in modern offices.

**Table 4: Summary of z-test analysis of significant difference between the mean ratings of Business Educators and OMT graduates on office management competencies required for effective performance in modern offices.**

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	Z <sub>cal</sub>	Z <sub>table</sub>	Level of Sign.	Decision
Business Educators	46	3.30	0.62	98	0.13	1.99	0.05	Accepted
OTM graduates	54	3.28	0.63					

*Source: Research data output, 2019*

Table 4 above revealed a z-calculated value of 0.13 which is less than the z-table value of 1.99; thus the null hypothesis is accepted. The result therefore was that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of Business Educators and OMT graduates on the office management competencies required of OMT graduating students for effective performance in modern offices.

### DISCUSSION

The findings of this study were discussed in line with the research questions developed for this study. Findings from research question one proved that respondents considered ability to write clearly and concisely; skill in speaking clearly, confidently and with empathy; display good listening skills, ability to use modern communication facilities, skill in re-reading and proof-reading work for clarity and errors; ability to be succinct and adaptable in presenting one's idea as some competencies required of graduating OMT students for effective performance in modern offices. This finding is in agreement with the view of Dambo (2011) that communication is a very important activity of the office that ensures the linking of individuals in and organization and the exchange of understandable information between them to achieve a common goal. Findings also aligns with Yakubu and Ugwu (2015) assertion that modern offices are automated as such graduating students as potential secretaries should be should be abreast of these communication competencies to enable them be more relevant in the modern day offices. The authors

further stated that an understanding of the demands of modern communication facilities will make communication fast, simple and effective as such OMT students must avail themselves opportunities to get acquainted with them. This is confirmed by Ezenwafor (2013) who reported that employers are widely complaining about the continued fall in the quality and communication skills of Nigerian university graduates.

The findings of the study on research question 2 showed that office management competencies such as ability to maintain a good filing system, ability to plan work, effective time management, ability to utilize modern office facilities, ability to manage information among others are required of graduating OMT students for performance in modern offices. This result is however expected and not surprising. This is because such competencies are required for proper functioning of the office. This is in agreement with the view of Olise and Ihimekpen (2008) who asserted that these competencies will help graduates to function effectively. This current finding also aligns with the opinion of Oraizowalan (2010) that lack of office management competencies will result in poor record keeping, lack of initiative, poor communication and business failure while development of these skills will improve human and public relations.

The study also revealed no disparity between the responses of the Business Educators and OMT graduates with respect to the competencies studied. The implication is that OMT programme in Rivers state universities must strive to achieve the objectives of the programme by ensuring that competencies that have been incorporated into the curriculum are developed by students before graduation as the test of the hypotheses have proven that no disparity in the affirmation of the respondents that communication and office management competencies are required of OMT graduating students for effective performance in modern offices.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of the study, it could be concluded that OMT students need to acquire and develop competencies in areas of communication, office management, and information technology and in their attitudes as potential secretaries and managers of modern offices. This implies that OMT students are expected to develop these competencies before graduation as translating these competencies into performance is believed to promote effectiveness and also enable them handle all types of duties required of them in modern offices successfully. Thus, OMT students do not only require these competencies but should also be versatile in the application of these skills in real life situation.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Curriculum planners and developers should review the curriculum regularly to meet what is expected in reality. The identified competencies could serve as guidelines for those who are already employed in modern offices as well as training package for graduating students.
2. Students should be exposed to modern office technologies so that they get acquainted with them while in school as getting exposed to these technologies after employment exposes their ineffectiveness in performance.

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