# E-OFFICE COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY COMPETENCIES REQUIRED OF OFFICE TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION GRADUATES BY EMPLOYERS IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS IN EDO AND DELTA STATES, NIGERIA

**Onoyovwi, Donald Aijene**
*University Of Delta, Agbor*
*Donald.Onoyovwi@Unidel.Edu.Ng*
*08037232958*

**Tiemo, Aghwotu (Phd)**
*Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island*
*pere_tiemo@yahoo.com*
*08032384130*

**Okoduwa Cyprian Akhere**
*University Of Delta, Agbor*
*cyprianokoduwa@gmail.com*
*07030378381*

**Abstract:** This study is on e-office communication technology competencies required of office technology education graduates by employers in public organizations in Edo and Delta States. The purpose was to determine e-office communication technology competencies required of office technology education graduates by employers in public organizations in Edo and Delta States. One research question guided the study and one null hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significant. Survey research design was adopted to carry out the study. The population consisted of 262 respondents of employers in public organizations in Edo and Delta States. No sampling was done as the population was manageable. A structured questionnaire containing 10 items was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by two experts in business education and one in test and measurement education. The reliability of the instrument was ensured using test re-test

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*technique while Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was employed to determine the reliability coefficient which yielded 0.81. The statistical technique used for data analysis was the mean while the t-test statistics was used in testing the null hypothesis. The findings of the study showed that the identified competencies such creating official email accounts, sending and receiving emails, attaching documents to emails, sending bulk emails to different contacts, storing contacts list in email address folders, archiving previous emails, search archives to retrieve stored emails, update email password regularly to secure official email/addresses and use social media platforms among other competencies for the study were all accepted as required competencies employers. Based on the findings it was recommended among others that these identified competencies be used to enrich the programme of office technology education students for successful transition from school to the world of work.*

## Introduction

Communication is an important aspect of everyday life of an individual, group of persons, business organizations, corporate organizations etc. Through communication ideas, information, products, services are passed onto the respective audience of recipients. It is the life wire of every individual, group of persons, business organizations, corporate organizations in passing their ideas, feelings, thoughts, services and products from one person to another, from one organization to another or even within the organization. Communication leads to better understanding of relationship and dealings between persons, organizations, nations etc. Prior to emergence of information and communication technology, communication between persons, organizations involves writing and posting of communication instrument, or physical movement of the persons involved to actualize communication purposes. This could take time, loss of communication documents in transit and other related setbacks occasioned by physical movement from one place to another. However, with the emergence of information and communication technology and its adoption into business operations, communication has been made much easier, real time, and cost saving in terms of physical movement from one place to another.

Business environment has become more robust and flexible and always responding to changes especially in meeting customers' satisfaction. The rapid changes in modern technology has led to the emergence of different kinds of electronic, digital, automatic, intelligent and integrated office equipment which enable office workers to build and transmit information conveniently and efficiently. According to Chopra and Chopra (2006), the influx of electronic technologies in the office has transformed the work-habits of office managers

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as well as other office workers greatly in such a way that old habits and practices such as travelling, meetings, duplicating and reprographics are giving way to entirely new practices. Today most business transactions are now automated or done online. Office automation also known as electronic office (e-office), the modern office (Murray 2003, Oliverio, Pasewark, and White 2007, Agomuo 2014). E-office, in any form, is a term used to describe the growing use of computer to perform a variety of office tasks such as data processing, communication, accounting, and e-mail and document creation, storage and transmission. E-office has resulted in multi-tasking or integration of some major functions of the office activities. Office education, office technology education, or secretarial education is an aspect of business education training that prepares its graduates for office career as secretarial staff. The secretary or office technologist seats at the center of the office operation and undoubtedly as a result of the adoption of information and communication technology to business operation the functions of secretaries have extended beyond their primary role of taking dictation and transcribing, receiving visitors, telephone calls, to much more complex functions of multi-tasking of office functions. Today knowledge of basic computer application is necessary for all with greater demand on the secretarial profession in terms of the required competencies to effectively function.

Competencies are skills or knowledge that helps one perform better in a given task. Achilike and Okwuanaso (2001) see competencies as those abilities or power and authority of knowledge, attitudes and facts necessary for accomplishing tasks. Ojukwu and Ojukwu (2002) stated that competencies are the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are necessary for accomplishing a given task. Competency is more than just a set of skills and knowledge. It entails the ability to meet complex demands by utilizing and mobilizing psychosocial resources (such as skills and attitudes) in a given situation which are acquired as result of training and practice.

Office communication technology competencies refer to one's ability to converse with people through various technologies. Competencies in information and communication technology may also include the ability to communicate using older communication technologies such as telephones, radios, and televisions. The ability to communicate information accurately and clearly as intended is a vital life skill that organizations value greatly. To speak appropriately with a diverse range of people while maintaining good eye contact, demonstrate a varied vocabulary and tailor language to the customers, listen effectively, present ideas appropriately, and write clearly and concisely are essential communication skills required of office employees. Furthermore, communication is simply the act of moving information from one location to another. It can be done either vocally or in writing (using printed or digital media such as books, magazines, web or emails). Visually (through the use of a logo, maps, charts, or graphs) or nonverbally (using body language, gestures and the tone and pitch of voice). Communication is a tool for business success because it promotes understanding between many individuals and groups in an organization. According to Kline in Abraham (2014), communication is essential in all aspects of life;

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we use it to persuade, influence relationships, inform, educate, share discovery, and uncover information. The position of secretarial personnel in any organization is so vital to successful implementations of the organization goal. The office is regarded as the nerve centre of any organization where information flows in and out of the organization. The secretarial personnel are at the center of the action of receiving, recording storage and disseminating both oral and written information. Offices have recently advanced new competencies for office functions as a result of unprecedented technological innovation. Improved relationships, which necessitate effective communication in the business world, are also affected, necessitating the acquisition of necessary competencies by secretaries who appear to be heavily involved in various types of inter-relationships in the organization. Individuals involved in office communication, whether employer, employee, or customers/visitors, have various ways of relating to one another and must clearly affect understanding in the process to attract correct feedback. Obi (2001) saw communication skills as not just an index of a good educational foundation, but also as a vital tool for job acquisition/maintenance. Office communication has improved so much digitally that hours spent waiting for letters, orders, and price lists have been reduced with the help of telecommunication technology. Telecommunication, according to Horby (2015), is the technology of sending signals, images, and messages over long distances via radio, telephone, television, and satellite. According to Buchanna (2014), the convergence of technology and information technology has made telecommunication an essential component of office information systems. According to Ohakwe (2014), telecommunication is about meeting or discussing with people who are far away. He mentioned telephones and wireless phones, electronic mail, teleconferencing and video conferencing, word processors and telex, television, public address systems, internet and intranet services, satellite radio and satellite phones, electronic organizers, global positioning systems, and computer voice recognition. They claimed that in this age of information overload, when people are bombarded with data, getting the right information in the right amount and at the right time is a difficult task. It is only those organizations that have succeeded in managing information that will survive.

In the management of modern organizations of which the office is at the center, information is a critical corporate resource. The sole product of the office, in whatever form it may take, is information. Data is delivered to the office via mail, phone, and the internet. If the office is to make good use of the volume of information, it must be organized. Electronic information processing, according to Davis and Olson (2000), is a system that collects, evaluates, transmits, and stores data into a meaningful and useful context and communicates it to a recipient who uses it to make decisions within an organization. According to Murray (2003), information processing skills will be required for jobs in the twenty-first century. As a result, developing digital information literacy becomes an unavoidable requirement for office workers especially the secretarial personnel.

## Statement of the Problem

One of the aspirations of every student on graduation is to seek employment and be gainfully employed. This aspiration gives

fulfillment and self-actualization, while on the other hand it could be frustrating and discouraging if after spending years in school and graduated, the goal is not attained. One of the goals of our institutions of higher learning's programs (business education inclusive) is to provide graduates with the necessary skills/competencies to engage in a life of work in offices as well as self-employment. Given this end goal of every graduate, employers of labour on the other hand have often complained of the present day graduates as not market ready. Okoye (2016) noted that one of the major concerns of employers of labour in this information age is the recruitment of employees with requisite employability competence to fit into the various organization job vacancies and positions. It is of note that some graduates of business education are unable to find something doing because they lack the necessary office skills to be able to function in the office as office employees. This view was expressed by (Tymon, 2011) that despite the importance of broader skills on the employability of fresh graduates in Nigerian labour market, it is unfortunate that responses of employers of labour reveal that recent graduates are not yet ready to enter and face the complexities and challenges of the world of work in the era of modern technology. This is due to the graduates' apparent lack of transferable skills/competencies, which are required in the workplace in the information technology era. According to Imeokparia and Ediagbonya (2012), who cited Austin Oniwon, Group Managing Director of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), eighty percent (80%) of job applicants failed the corporation's recruitment test (www.thenationonline.ng.net/2011/index). The

report implied that, despite their academic credentials, those job seekers lacked the employability skills required by NNPC. While Phillips Consulting (2014) observed that the current education system somehow doesn't appear to be producing graduates with standardized and essential skills, hence the rate of youth unemployment continues to rise. Similarly, Ann-Marie (2015) averred that lack of competency-based skills is an integral factor hindering students from securing employment after graduation. It is on this note that this study was undertaken to determine the e-office communication technology competencies required of office technology education graduates by employers of public organizations in Edo and Delta States.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study focused on e-office communication technology competencies required of office technology education graduates by employers in public organizations in Edo and Delta States. Specifically the study sought to determine e-office communication technology competencies required of office technology education graduates by employers in public organizations in Edo and Delta States.

**Research Question**

What are the communication technology competencies required for operating e-office by office technology education graduates in public organizations in Edo and Delta States?

**Hypothesis**

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of less experienced and experienced employers in public

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organizations in Edo and Delta States on communication technology competencies required for operating e-office by office technology education graduates.

## Significance of the Study

The findings of this study on the electronic office communication technology competencies required of office technology education graduates for employability in a modern office would be significant because it would reveal the electronic office communication technology competencies required by employers for a successful transition of graduates from school to the world of work.

The various stakeholders in the education industry such as: the National Universities Commission (NUC), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) would benefit greatly from the findings of this study, also the Association of Business Educators of Nigeria (ABEN), Tertiary Institutions Management, Business Educators, Employers, Researchers, and Students would not be left out of the benefits of the findings. Where necessary the findings of the study be used to enrich the programme of office technology education.

## Scope of the Study

The study was carried out to determine e-office communication technology competencies required of office technology education graduates by employers in public organizations in Edo and Delta States. The public organizations are the ministries, parastatals, agencies, local governments and public tertiary institutions.

## Method

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. The population for the study consisted of all the employers of public organizations in Edo and Delta States which include government Ministries, Parastatals/Agencies, Local Governments and Public Tertiary Institutions which are 262 employers and there was no sample. A structured questionnaire titled electronic office competencies required by office technology education graduates (EOCROTEG) which consisted of 10 items constitute the research instrument for data collection. The instrument was subjected to face validity test with the assistance of three experts, two in vocational education (business - office technology education) and one expert in test and measurement. The instrument was also subjected to a reliability test to further evaluate the stability of the instrument items. The instrument was distributed to 20 Anambra State public-sector employers. Anambra State is used for the reliability test because Anambra State is outside the scope of this study. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the instrument's reliability after the test, and a reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained. The questionnaire was distributed to public-sector employers in both States. The instrument was administered through personnel contact and with the assistance of six research assistants who had been trained in the administration and retrieval of the instrument. The filled instruments were also retrieved using the same method. The data collected was analyzed using percentages for the demographic data, mean score for the instrument items. To reject or accept the competencies required of office technology education graduates, a criterion mean of 2.50 was used. The T-test was used to test the hypothesis. The comparison of

the chosen alpha level (0.05) and the probability value (p-value) or significant was used to make the decision. The null hypothesis was rejected if the sig was less than 0.05, but accepted if the sig was greater than 0.05.

## Data Analysis

## Administration and Retrieval of Questionnaire

**Table 1: Percentage Analysis of Administration and Retrieval of Questionnaire**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| No of Questionnaire Administered | | 262 |
| No Successfully Returned | | 240 |
| Percentage of Successfully Returned | | 92% |

Source: Fieldwork, 2021

The table 1 above shows the administration and retrieval of the questionnaire. A total of 262 copies were administered while 240 were successfully completed and returned representing 92% return rate. The 240 was then used for the data analysis for the study.

## Analysis of Demographic Data

**Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Employers years of experience**

| S/N | Employers years of experience | Frequencies | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Less Experienced | 78 | 33 |
| 2 | Experienced | 162 | 67 |
| 3 | Total | 240 | 100 |

Source: Fieldwork, 2021

The data presented in table 2 shows that 78 (33 percent) of the respondents were less experienced and 162 (67 percent) were experienced employers. This implies that of the total respondents of the employers, experienced employers were more in number than their less experienced counterparts in the study.

## Results

## Research Question

What are the communication technology competencies required for operating e-office by office technology education graduates in the opinion of less experienced and experienced employers in public organizations in Edo and Delta States?

**Table 3: *Descriptive results on communication technology competencies required for operating e-office by office technology education graduates in the opinion of less experienced and experienced employers***

| S/N | Mean Scores |
|---|---|

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| | Communication technology competencies required for operating e-office  - Able to: | LE | E | Total | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Create official email accounts | 3.56 | 3.40 | 3.45 | Accepted |
| 2 | Send and receive emails | 3.36 | 3.34 | 3.35 | Accepted |
| 3 | Attach document to e-mails | 3.29 | 3.35 | 3.33 | Accepted |
| 4 | Send bulk emails to different contacts | 3.29 | 3.25 | 3.26 | Accepted |
| 5 | Store contact list in email address folders | 3.37 | 3.31 | 3.33 | Accepted |
| 6 | Archive previous emails | 3.19 | 3.12 | 3.15 | Accepted |
| 7 | Search archives to retrieve stored emails for information | 3.26 | 3.03 | 3.13 | Accepted |
| 8 | Update passwords regularly to secure official email address | 3.26 | 3.04 | 3.11 | Accepted |
| 9 | Use webinar, webex, zoom etc for online meetings | 3.02 | 3.18 | 3.07 | Accepted |
| 10 | Use social media platforms such as instagram, whatsapp, facebook etc for instant communication | 3.19 | 3.08 | 3.09 | Accepted |
| | **Grand Mean** | **3.30** | **3.19** | **3.23** | **Accepted** |

Source: Fieldwork, 2021

Cut-off mean = 2.50; Less experienced = 78; Experienced = 162 and Total = 240

The data represented in Table 3 shows that, the opinions of less experienced employers on all the items were greater than the cut-off mean score of 2.50 with mean scores of 3.56, 3.36, 3.29, 3.29, 3.37, 3.19, 3.26, 3.26, 3.02 and 3.19 respectively. This implies all items were accepted by the less experienced employers. On the other hand, the experienced employers' opinions for all items were also higher than the cut-off mean score of 2.50 with mean scores of 3.40, 3.34, 3.35, 3.25, 3.31, 3.12, 3.03, 3.04, 3.18 and 3.08 respectively. This implies that all items were accepted. The table further reveals that, on the whole the combined opinions give all items mean scores above the cut-off mean score of 2.50 with mean scores of 3.45, 3.35, 3.33, 3.26, 3.33, 3.15, 3.13, 3.11, 3.07 and 3.09 respectively. This

implies that all items were accepted. The grand mean score of the less experienced employers (3.30) was greater than that of the experienced employers opinion (3.19) with a combined grand mean score of (3.23) being greater than the cut-off mean score of 2.50. This simply means that, less experienced employers' opinion on communication technology competencies required for operating e-office by office technology education graduates is better than the experienced employers in public organizations. Consequent upon the observed difference in opinion, the t-test analysis was carried out in order to authenticate if the difference is significant or not (see Table 4).

**Hypothesis**

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of less experienced and experienced employers in public organizations in

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Edo and Delta States on communication technology competencies required for operating e-office by office technology education graduates.

**Table 4: *t-test analysis of the difference in the mean responses of less experienced and experienced employers in public organizations in Edo and Delta States on communication technology competencies required for operating e-office***

| Variables | N | Mean | SD | Df | t-cal. | t-crit. | Sig | Decision at P< 0.05 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Less experienced | 78 | 33.03 | 3.704 | 238 | 1.760 | 1.960 | 0.080 | NS |
| Experienced | 162 | 31.91 | 4.984 | | | | | |

NS = Significant at 0.05 alpha level; N = 240

The data in Table 4 shows that the t-test analysis is not significant at the 0.05 alpha level because the calculated t-test value of 1.760 is less than the critical Table t-test value of 1.960 with 238 degrees of freedom at the 0.05 alpha level. As a result, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. As a result, the null hypothesis is retained, which states that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of less experienced and experienced employers in public organizations in Edo and Delta States on communication technology competencies required for operating an e-office by office technology education graduates.

## Discussion of Findings

The result in Table 4 above shows that, there is no significant difference in the mean responses of less experienced and experienced employers in public organizations in Edo and Delta States on communication technology competencies required for operating e-office by office technology education graduates. From the table, it was noted that, the opinion of the less experienced employers was higher with a total mean of 3.30 than that of the experienced employers with a total mean of 3.19. This implies that the opinion of the employers – experienced and less experienced agreed on the e-office communication technology competencies required by office technology education graduates to operate in the modern office (e-office) given the cut off mean of 2.50. The identified competencies such as creating official email accounts, sending and receiving emails, attaching documents to emails, sending bulk emails to different contacts, storing contacts list in email address folders, archiving previous emails, search archives to retrieve stored emails, update email password regularly to secure official email/addresses and use social media platforms among other competencies for the study were all accepted as required competencies. The study's findings indicate that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of respondents (employers) in Edo and Delta States. This finding is consistent with Onoja's (2020) findings from a study on office automation and secretarial productivity in Rivers State. According to Onoja's findings, office automation devices have a positive and significant effect on secretaries' productivity, particularly in the area of office communication as sending and receiving mail, messages, e-mail systems, whatsapp, instagram, zoom, and teleconferencing. The finding of this study is also

in agreement with the finding of Baba, Victor-Igwe and David (2014) who investigated the competency improvement needs of business teachers in Polytechnics in Kogi State. The study revealed the need for teachers' communication skills to be improved as a fundamental means of equipping students with the necessary communication skills in the workplace. Jimoh (2014)'s findings from a survey designed to examine information and communication competences among academic staff at Auchi Polytechnic also backed up this finding. Jimoh's findings revealed that the overall level of competency among academic staff was moderate, implying that such competencies can be easily imparted to students. The study also revealed that there is no significant difference between male and female staff on information and communication technology competence.

## Conclusion

The study focused on e-office communication technology competencies required of office technology education graduates by employers in public organizations in Edo and Delta States. The study interest was as a result of emergence of information and communication technology (ICT) which has permeated almost every sector of the economy the world over. Almost all businesses and organizations have now deployed information and communication technology (ICT) to their operational activities. The office being the hub of every organization is highly affected by the advances in information and communication technology. Some years back office activities were manually and mechanically carried out. The office skills then were limited to the level of facilities available. However, with the deployment of information and communication technology to office activities it is obvious that the skills/competencies needed in this era will certainly change to reflect the state of the art technology currently in use in businesses and organizations the world over. Sitting behind the ICT facilities for document creation, recording, transmission, storage, and retrieval in the office are the secretarial personnel also known in modern terms as office education technologist. The secretarial personnel are tasked with the day to day office operations and a high display of the office competencies especially in area of communication technology is required of them by their employers.

## Recommendations

The study recommends based on the findings amongst that:

> The identified competencies such as creating official email accounts, sending and receiving emails, attaching documents to emails, sending bulk emails to different contacts, storing contacts list in email address folders, archiving previous emails, search archives to retrieve stored emails, update email password regularly to secure official email/addresses and use social media platforms among other competencies for the study were all accepted as required competencies.

> The identified competencies be used to enrich the programme of office technology education and this can be achieved by ensuring that enough computers with internet facilities be made available for the teaching and learning of office technology education students for successful transition from school to the world of work.

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> In addition to providing enough computer systems with internet facilities, regular maintenance of the computers should be carried out by experts in order not to inhibit the teaching and learning process.
> One major challenge facing the application of ICT in training institutions is electricity supply. Efforts should be made by training institutions to ensure constant supply of electricity in the laboratories to enhance students more practice from time to time.

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