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DELTA STATE BUSINESS CENTRE OPERATOR'S PERCEPTION OF INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY COMPETENCIES REQUIRED FOR SUCCESS

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Abstract

This study sought to determine the perception of Delta State business centre operators of ICT competencies needed for success in their business. Two research questions has guided the study. The study was a survey research and the area of study was Delta State. The population of the study consisted of 624 business centre operators registered with the ministry of commerce in Delta State. The sample for the study consisted of 375 business centre operators randomly selected from the population of the study. Structured questionnaire with 43 items used for data collection, for the study. The reliability of the instrument was determine by the use of split half method using spearman rank order of correlation while the coefficient was further computed using the spearman brown' prophecy formula, t-test statistical tool was used for analysis of the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that word processing and spread sheet competencies are perceived as highly required for successful operation of business centre. It was recommended among others that curriculum planners should incorporate the various competencies as perceived by Delta State business centre operators in ICT programmes both at the secondary and tertiary levels of education and that business centre operators who are deficient in the perceived competencies in word processing and spreadsheet should endeavour to acquire further training in order to achieve the required competencies for successful business centre operation.

Keywords: Business Centre operators, word processing, spreadsheet analysis

Introduction

Business centre operators are classified among the small scale entrepreneurs that offer job opportunities to the teaming population of unemployed and also offer various services such as word processing, internet, reprographic and telecommunication services. In recent years, business centre operators have increased in number as they are seen in almost every busy street corners and shops, schools, shopping malls and libraries.

The early beginning of business centre can be traced to the late 1970's and early 1980's when Rank Xerox Corporation extended its technological breakthrough to Asia and Africa. In Nigeria, Rank Xerox offices were Located in Lagos, Ibadan, Port Harcourt, Benin, Warri, Kano and other big cities. Exactly when the name business center was coined is not known because in the early beginning they were known as 'copy shops' that were involved in sales and photocopying of documents.

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According to Ahukannah (2007) in the Dark Ages business transactions were executed through personal contacts. A universal system of writing and keeping record had not developed. Before the Industrial Revolution, according to Ahukannah (2007), paper was rarely used in commerce as business transactions were made by word of mouth.

The Industrial Revolution brought new needs to communicate and record business transactions with the invention of the first practical typewriter by Christopher L. Sholes in 1867, and the era of word processing using technology was born. The typewriter has however undergone dramatic changes since its invention, from the manual typewriter to electric to electronic typewriter and to microcomputer which has brought about expansion of businesses throughout the globe.

The invention of the typewriter brought about the training of secretaries and the growth of the secretarial profession. In Nigeria, before the independence in 1960, English ladies and gentlemen who were trained abroad mostly held secretarial positions. Formalized training for the secretary was then not available. The situation persisted for some time after independence because of the low level of education in the country. Not many Nigerians were qualified and capable to be trained as secretaries. However, for the few who were found qualified and suitable, training facilities did not exist in the country for their training, so they were sent to the Pitman College in London to train.

The rapid growth in the industrial sector between 1960 and 1970 created numerous secretarial job opportunities and anybody who could type, whether certificated or not, quickly got employment as typist. The result, according to Ahukannah (2007) was a corresponding growth in the number of vocational schools where typists were trained. The subjects taught were mainly typewriting, shorthand, office practice and English Language. Some of the trained typists who could not find paid jobs immediately went into self employment by renting small shops that were used for typing of documents for those who needed their services.

After the civil war as stated by Ahukannah (2007), the Nigerian economy witnessed a more rapid growth with a corresponding increase in the quantity and quality of secretaries needed by the public service and industry generally. The educational sector responded by mounting certificate and diploma courses in secretarial studies. The period 1970 - 1990 saw an increase in the number of colleges of technology and polytechnics which ran courses in secretarial studies. These secretaries trained on how to use modern technological equipment assisted greatly in managing the office. The secretaries obtained certificates which assisted them to secure paid employment or to be self employed by opening business centers of their own with which to make a living. Business centers are thus equipped with office equipments such as computers, photocopying machines, printers, fax machines, spiral binding machines, guillotine and other office machines with which various services such as e-mail services, internet services, telephone services and typing of documents are rendered to their clients.

In recent years, sequel to increased awareness of the importance of small scale business, business centers that provide various services such as data processing, desktop

publishing, internet services and reprographic services, among others, have been established in every urban or sub-urban area of the country. The services they offer require training in order to acquire skills that assist them in the delivery of their services. Business centre operators make use of information communication technology equipment as tools in providing the needed services to the public. The term information technology (I T) as a component of 1 C T refers to the gadgets with which information is generated and disseminated. It includes such gadgets as the telephone, digital or analogue telephone, radio, fax and other emerging technologies that make it possible to communicate ever more conveniently across borders and cultures (Dick 2009).

Business centres are owned and managed by both male and female operators. In rendering their services, business centre operators need special skills in operating various equipments and to coordinate people employed in order to achieve the objectives of the business. This means that the actual competencies required to operate business centre is centered on moderate education and the ability to use the office machines adequately. While some of them may have the basic skills, qualifications and experience for the business, others do not have. However, for a business centre operator to function effectively, he/she requires office and basic ICT skills to perform adequately.

Ukor (2009) pointed out that business centres have become an essential part of our economy as they generate employment for many Nigerians which include youths and unemployed persons and are found in institutions and busy streets occupying small rented shops, housed by caravan or found in make shift apartment. They provide services in communication using modern information communication equipment such as computers, photocopying machines, scanners, laminating machine etc to render services to the teaming population that patronize them. According to Ayeriteh (2007), business centres are businesses owned and managed in their dominant field by private individuals to meet their desired income needs. The services they provide are essentially in word processing using Microsoft word, desktop publishing, graphics, internet services and use spreadsheet packages to produce accounting documents as well as render reprographic service.

Hornby (2010), defined perception as the way we notice things especially with the senses or an image one has as a result of what he can see or understand. Graham (1999) used the term perception to refer to the complete act of perceiving and involving the psychological factors and stated that the obvious consequence is that we do not necessarily perceive that which we immediately perceive with no contradiction. According to Kendra (2006), perceptional process allows us to experience the world around us, get information about properties and elements within our environment that are critical to our survival. Perception not only create our experience of the world around us, it allows us to act with our environment.

Competency, according to Hornby (2010) is a skill that you need in a particular job or for a particular task. Ojukwu and Ojukwu (2002) defined competency as the knowledge, skills and behaviour that enable an employee to meet established performance criteria. This

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means that it is the knowledge and ability to perform a task adequately. Competencies in any subject according to Ekpeyong (2006) can be actual or perceptual or expected and while it is easy to measure actual competencies in most field, to measure perceptual competencies particularly of groups can be very difficult because perception may be selectively gathered, interpreted or stored.

Karl (1996) stated that one of the best ways to measure competencies is in the use of competence index, taking cognizance of demographics, years of experience in the profession, seniority and level of education. Large organizations make annual performance assessment of their managers and support staff using competence index and statistical methods for analyzing the index which can provide employee turnover. Small organizations like business centers can as well measure competencies of their employees especially before they are given the opportunity to join the business, this is known as workplace competence. Dillion (2001), defined workplace competence as a description of a required skill, attribute or behaviour for a specific job, it is used to define and measure an individual's effectiveness. Karl (1996) stated that workplace competencies give employees a clear guide to what is expected of them in terms of their performances. They indicate which behaviours are valued, recognized and rewarded. The focus according to the author moves away from formal qualifications and career history toward proven capability to do the job, through recorded workplace experience or tests designed to assess an individual's capabilities that directly relate to the job. Each competency according to him consists of knowledge, skill, ability or personal characteristics, which are sometimes in combination.

Statement of the Problem

As indicated in our background statement, competence in any subject can be in three forms - actual or perceptual or expected. It needs to be indicated here that while it is easy to measure actual competencies of business centre workers, just as those of other businesses or workers, to measure their perceptual competencies particularly as groups can be very difficult because perception may be selectively gathered, interpreted or stored.

On the other hand one may retrieve information in a way that fit ones self concept, viewpoint, attitude, emotions, values, self interest or illusion in order to escape from reality. In the circumstance, it becomes difficult to have a clear picture of perception of business centre operators with particular reference to those in Delta State of Nigeria. The researcher is therefore interested in knowing Delta State business centre operators perceive ICT competencies they require for success in their business.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the perception of Delta State business centre operators on ICT competencies they require for success in their trade. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the perception of Delta State business centre operators on word processing competencies for success in their business operation.

2. Determine the perception of Delta State business centre operators on spreadsheet competencies required for success in their business operation.

Significance of the Study

Business centre operators, clients of business centres, publishing companies, printing press and organizations that employ secretaries and other I C T workers will benefit from the study. This is because business centres, publishing companies, and printing press will be abreast with the essential skills required to operate business centres.

Also the findings of this study will be beneficial to stakeholders in the education sector such as universities, polytechnics, colleges of education. Education regulatory bodies such as N U C, N B T E, N C C E will all benefit in the sense that the result of the study will help to focus training on desired competencies that are required in operating needed software packages in institutions of learning.

The result of the study will help controlling agencies in the education sector in future policy formulation. The study will as well serve as a guideline for other researchers in the area of I C T competencies required by employers of labour with regard to word processing and spreadsheet software packages.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent do Delta State business centre operators perceive word processing competencies as required for success in their business?
2. To what extent do Delta State business centre operators perceive spreadsheet competencies as required for success in their business?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance

1. Delta State male and female business centre operators will not differ significantly in their mean ratings regarding word processing competencies required for success in their business operation.
2. Delta State urban and rural business centre operators will not differ significantly in their mean ratings regarding spread sheet competencies required for success in their business operation.

Method

Survey research design was adopted for the study as the study sought to determine the perception of business centre operators in respect of the ICT competencies required for success in their field using questionnaire. The population of the study consisted of all registered business centre operators in the state totaling 624 from which a sample Of 375 was randomly selected and used for the study.

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A structured questionnaire which was developed from the research question and hypotheses was validated by three experts in test construction and research from the Department of Vocational Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability of the instrument was determined by the use of split half method. Spearman rank order of correlation was used to determine the degree of linear relationship which yielded the scores of 0.95, and 0.92. The coefficient was further computed using spearman brown prophecy formula which yielded the scores of 0.97, and 0.96 respectively which indicate that the instrument is reliable.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using the arithmetic mean and standard deviation in respect of the research questions while the t-test statistical tool was used to analyze the data to test the two hypotheses.

Results

The research question and null hypotheses are presented and analysed.

Research Question 1: To what extent do Delta State business centre operators perceive word processing competencies as required for success in their business operation? Analysis of data collected in respect of research question one are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Mean scores and standard deviations in respect of word processing competencies required for successful operation as perceived by business center operators.

S/N	Perceived word processing competencies required in business centres.	Mean	S.D	Remark
1.	Competencies in Loading Ms Word	3.91	1.30	Highly required
2.	Creating computer files and folders	4.31	1.35	"
3.	Using storage devices to enter and edit text	3.56	1.42	"
4.	Storing document	3.71	1.43	"
5.	Retrieving document previously stored	3.51	1.20	"
6.	Editing existing document	3.51	1.21	"
7.	Adjusting margins and centering text within document	3.62	1.41	"
8.	Creating documents from previously stored paragraphs and phrases	3.56	.41	"
9.	Creating personalized Letters using a mailing list	3.92	1.44	"
10.	Replacing word/names automatically throughout an entire document	3.83	1.58	"
11.	Creating back up of files	3.76	1.54	"
12.	Ability to use spell check appropriately	4.04	1.57	"
13.	Opening an existing document	3.66	1.43	"

Table 1 contd.

S/N	Perceived word processing competencies required in business centres.	Mean	S.D	Remark
14.	Deleting or recalling files from recycle bin	4.06	1.57	"
15.	Copying, cutting and pasting text in a document	4.07	1.60	"
16.	Inserting pictures and symbols in a document	4.01	1.30	"
17.	Changing text font and size in a document	3.63	1.43	"
18,	Creating tables in a document	4.02	1.42	"
19.	Formatting a table in a document	3.61	1.30	"
20.	Using word art to create and shape text in a document	3.48	1.18	Moderately Required
21.	Changing text direction	3.56	1.30	Highly required
22.	Merging and spilling cells in a table.	4.00	1.31	"
23.	Merging text, graphics from other environment. E.g. Spreadsheet, Corel draw, and internet environment	3.58	1.52	"
24.	Previewing and printing text	3.58	1.52	"
25.	Addressing envelope and labels	4.02	1.42	"
26.	Importing flyers and cards from other software environment E.g. Publisher	4.24	1.24	"
	Grand Mean	**3.80**	**1.40**	**"**

The data presented in Table 1 reveal that the mean scores of respondents ranged from 3.48 to 4.24 with a grand mean of 3.80. Business centre operators assessed 25 items concerning word processing competencies as highly required while they found only (item 20) to be moderately required. None of the competencies researched upon is lowly required. With a grand mean Of 3.80, it could be concluded that business centre operators perceived word processing competencies as being highly required for successful operation.

Research Question 2:

To what extent do Delta State business centre operators perceive spreadsheet competencies as required for success in their business operation?

Analysis of data collected in respect of research question two are presented in Table 2.

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Table 2: Mean scores and standard deviations in respect of spreadsheet competencies required for successful operation as perceived by business center operators.

S/N	Perceive spreadsheet competencies required in business centres.	Mean	S.D	Remark
27.	Competencies in opening spreadsheet application software	4.10	1.46	Highly required
28.	Competencies in saving and naming work done	3.96	1.67	"
29.	Competencies in typing in figures and letters	3.97	1.82	"
30.	Competencies in calculating or summing up of figures	3.92	I 74	"
31.	Competencies in inserting and deleting rows and columns	4.11	1.62	"
32.	Competencies in creating formula in worksheet	3.82	1.36	"
33.	Competencies in carrying out arithmetic computation in worksheet.	3.61	2.01	"
34.	Ability to change columns width and rows height	3.51	2.00	"
35.	Format chart using worksheet	4.6	1.76	"
36.	Competencies to browse the sheet table, pie chart, bar chart	3.88	1.72	"
37.	Sorting data in a worksheet	3.88	1.72	"
38.	Competencies in merging and centering data in a worksheet	3.71	1.71	"
39.	Inserting and deleting columns and rows	4.31	1.83	"
40.	Paginating a worksheet	3.61	1.09	"
41.	Competencies in editing chart and graphs in a spreadsheet	4.12	1.81	"
42.	Competencies to bold, italics and underline rows	3.82	1.76	"
43.	Competencies in arranging and printing work done in spreadsheet	3.55	1.33	"
	Grand mean	**3.88**	**1.67**	**"**

The data presented in table 2 reveal that the mean scores of respondents ranged from 3.51 to 4.31 with grand mean of 3.88. Business centre operators assessed 17 items concerning spread sheet competencies as highly required. None of the competencies researched upon is assessed lowly or moderately required. Since the grand mean is 3.88, this implies that business centre operators perceive spreadsheet competencies as being highly required for successful operation.

Results of Test of Hypotheses

Two hypotheses were formulated and were tested at 0.05 level of significance in order to provide useful information for the study.

Table 3: The t-test analysis for the mean ratings of male and female business centre operators on their perception of the extent word processing competencies are required for success in their business operation in Delta State.

Gender	No of subject	MeanX	SD	DF	Level of significance	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Male	42	3.88	1.31	323	0.05	0.87	1.960	accepted
Female	283	3.42	1.37					

From the t-test in table 3, the t-calculated value of 0.87 is less than t-critical value of 1.960 at 0.05 levels of significance and 323 degree of freedom. The null hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that male and female business centre operators in Delta State do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on their perception of the extent word processing competencies are required for success in business centres.

Table 4: The t-test analysis for the mean ratings of urban and rural business centre operators on their perception of the extent spreadsheet competencies are required for success in their business operation in Delta State.

Location	No of subject	MeanX	SD	DF	Level of significance	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Urban	158	3.81	1.38	323	0.05	0.56	1.960	accepted
Rural	167	3.68	1.55					

From the t-test in table 4, the t-calculated value is 0.56 while the t-critical value is 1.960 at 0.05 level of significance. The t-calculated value is less than t-critical value; the null hypothesis is therefore accepted. This indicates that urban and rural business centre operators in Delta state do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on their perception of the extent spreadsheet competencies are required for success in a business centre.

Findings

The findings from the analysis of the study on Delta State perception of business centre operations of information communication competencies required for successful business operations indicates that:

1. Word processing competencies are highly required for successful operation of business centres.
2. spreadsheet competencies are highly required for successful operation of business centres.
3. Male and female business centre operators in Delta State do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on their perception of the extent word processing competencies are required for success in a business centre.
4. Urban and rural business centre operators in Delta State do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on their perception of the extent spreadsheet competencies are required for success in a business centre.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it could be concluded that, word processing competencies, spreadsheet competencies, are perceived highly, and as such are required for successful business operation.

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Recommendations

On the basis of the findings and conclusions from the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Curriculum planners should incorporate the various competencies as perceived by business centre operators in ICT programs both at the secondary school and tertiary levels of education to enable prospective business centre operators acquire the necessary competencies before venturing into the business.
2. Business centre operators who are deficient in the perceived competencies in using word processing and spreadsheet should proceed for further training to acquire the required skills for efficient management of their business.
3. Workshops and seminars should be organized for business centre operators by the ministry of commerce and industry yearly, to teach and enlighten business centre operators on the need to upgrade their competencies on the skills required for success
4. Government policies should be geared towards assisting business centre operators through granting credits for expansion of their business. If this is done it will aid the business centre operators in the area of further training to achieve efficiency
5. Training institutions should endeavour to involve business centreoperators in designing the curriculum contents on software competencies to be taught to trainees to ensure uniformity in their contents.

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