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## QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT OF OFFICE CONDITIONS, CORRESPONDENCE, FILES AND ACRONYMS AMONG CLERICAL STAFF IN EDUCATION BOARDS IN KEBBI STATE, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigated the quality of management of office physical conditions, correspondence, files and acronyms among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State. A descriptive survey design was used for this study. The total population of the study was made of up 156 subjects out of which a sample size of 112 participants comprising of 44 senior educational administrators and 68 clerical staff were selected from four education boards using deliberate stratified and simple random sampling techniques. A self-

### Introduction

Clerical staff have an important role to play for the efficient and effective running of an office. What they do or fail to do can have a significant impact on the activities and overall productivity of the office occupier. The complexities of clerical duties among others requires clerical staff to be able to create and sustain favourable physical conditions of an office, handle the volume of correspondence that comes in and goes out of an office, manage various files and be proficient in the interpretation and use of office acronyms. Office physical condition is operationalized in this study to refer to the conduciveness of environmental circumstances necessary for optimum comfort needed for effective. Conditions for a conducive office environment include the adequacy of lighting, ventilation, noise reduction, decorations, cleaning and functional conveniences. Office correspondence refers to messages that are transmitted from a source to a receiver in form of letters, memorandums, reports, circulars, proposals, telegrams, cablegrams, fax, e-mails, telephones among others. A file is a collection of documents in a folder for current action and future reference. Filing is a process of systematically classifying and arranging documents for safe keeping and prompt retrieval whenever such documents are needed. A folder is a file jacket, a two-leaved folder, cardboard or other material used for holding papers and other documents. Office acronyms are abbreviations or short forms of words derived from first letters of a group of words that make up the name of something



designed, structured questionnaire titled: Quality of Management of Office Practice Questionnaire” (QMOPQ) was used to collect data. The 31-item instrument with four sections was based on five-point scale to measure extent of quality. The instrument was pilot tested using test re-test method and Pearson Correlation which yielded a Co-efficient index of 0.83 at 0.05 alpha level. The data was analyzed using simple frequencies, percentages, and mean. It was found that the quality of management of office conditions, correspondence and acronyms among clerical staff was low and unsatisfactory. It was therefore recommended that strict supervision should be maintained to improve the quality clerical staff performance of their duties. Opportunities should be given for regular training and retraining as well as mentorship as to upgrade the quality of their skills and competences for effective office management.

**Keywords:** Physical Conditions, Correspondence, Files, Acronyms, Clerical Staff, Management, Quality

and that are accepted and recognized for use in office correspondence. For example, the words “please turn over” could be shorten as (P.T.O) and “for necessary action” (f.n.a) among other. Management of is the process of planning, organizing, directing and coordinating, and supervising activities for attainment of desired organizational objectives. A simple observation of the working environment in education boards in Kebbi State tend to show that offices are not kept in optimum physical condition for comfortable habitation. Some clerical staff seems to have the need to upgrade their skills of correspondence, handling of files and use of office acronyms for effective job performance.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical basis of this study was derived from Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory, which argues that for employees to be effective in their work, their physiological needs must be adequately satisfied at all times. These physiological needs that are necessary for the survival and wellbeing of an individual in work environment include the need for adequate ventilation, drinking water, food, clothing, shelter, exercise and rest (Manga, 2015). This means that where these basic needs are not satisfactorily met it will generate discomfort, poor concentration on official tasks, low morale and possibly low productivity. To some extent, clerical staff can play a significant role in ensuring that office conditions are fashioned towards meeting these needs, in addition to other statutory duties shouldered on them.

### **Review of Related Literature**

The physical environment of an office in addition to other factors contribute to workers comfort and overall productivity. Clerical staff are expected to help in modifying the office environment to



make it conducive and friendly for joyful activity of users. Osuala (1998) stated that the first thing towards a conducive environment is to ensure adequate lighting. Clerical staff are expected to ensure that electrical bulbs are switched on and off at the start and end of working day. They are to ensure that expired electric bulbs are replaced and also light switches and sockets promptly repaired when faulty. Manga (2007) noted staff are expected to ensure that fans and air conditioners are switched on and off at the beginning and at close of work respectively. They are to ensure that faulty fans and air conditioners are repaired when they malfunction. It is also very important that window frames and curtains are drawn open to allow for fresh air to circulate in school buildings and to allow for natural sunlight to illuminate offices. They are expected to close windows whenever there is air-conditioning or at closing hours. Azuka and Agomuo (2012) in their submission, stated that office staff should be able to control noise levels in an office by ensuring that visitors speak in low tones when conversing or using the phone inside the office. They are to ensure that radios and televisions in offices operated at low sound volumes are operated at low volume. They are to ensure that noisy fans are oiled and that doors are not slammed noisily during entry or exit from office. Fosu and Odina (2019) opined that a healthy office environment requires regular cleaning by staff who must ensure that office floors are swept and scrubbed, furniture is dusted, toilets and utensils are washed and air fresheners are sprayed on daily basis. They place request for supplies of moppers, brooms, detergents, towels and other cleaning equipment. Fries, Rowe and Travis (2013) opined that office aesthetics and layout of furniture are important in creating a beautiful office environment. To this end, they suggested that picture frames, paintings, calendars and display boards should be beautifully and strategically fixed to decorate office walls. Furniture in form of desks, chairs, television screens, refrigerators, photocopiers, satellite receivers, computers, flower vases, flower pots should be beautifully arranged in an office layout. Denya (2018), stated that staff should be able to serve office refreshments, meals, drinking water and to ensure that the office generator is fuelled, serviced and operated as appropriate. Correspondence is central in school administration. The educational managers and other senior officers depend on clerical staff to process and ensure smooth flow of office correspondence. According to Hatchett (2018), clerical staff should be able to write letters, notices, circulars, memorandums, telegrams, fax, cablegrams, e-mails and other letters. Klein (2010) states that clerical staff sometimes double as secretaries and should therefore be good stenographers and skillful in shorthand. Watchman (2010) noted that to be able to manage office correspondence effectively, clerical staff should be able to handle incoming mails in terms of receiving, recording, sorting and distributing the mails to the recipients. Harding (2014) stated that it is equally important that clerical staff are should be efficient in managing outgoing mails in terms of addressing, sealing, stamping, requesting and posting of mails. Holmes and Whithead (2019) highlighted that clerical staff should be able to manage the security of office correspondence so as to maintain secrecy and confidentiality of classified documents.



Management of office files is one of the most important function of clerical staff on daily basis. To this end, Akpomi and Chiorlu (2014) posited that clerical staff are expected to be skillful in performing different methods of file classification whether alphabetical, numerical, subject based, alphanumerical, central or geographical. Austin (2018) stated that clerical staff should be skillful in the procedure of opening files, ranging from opening of new files, temporary files, and the action required for lost files. Denya (2016) noted that clerical staff should be efficient in basic procedures of punching papers, fixing file tags, cross-referencing and file movement. Arukwe (2017) stated that clerical staff should be able to grade files into open files, secret files, confidential and restricted files. This will help in determining who have access to what file at any given time. Thelma (2009) highlighted that clerical staff should be able to ensure the security of both physical and electronic files. They should conversant with file storage and retrieval.

Use of acronyms is a common practice in file treatment in education boards and other educational institutions (Nwosu, 2012 & Hatchet, 2018). According to Spencer and Andrian (2010), clerical staff should know the objectives of using acronyms for speedy treatment of files and other correspondence. Warson (2013), Mills and Standford (2015), maintain that clerical staff should be able to interpret and use the acronyms correctly and appropriately if they are to efficient and effective in the discharge of their duties.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Offices in education boards in Kebbi State are expected to operate under conducive physical environment. Office correspondences and file treatment are supposed to be executed smoothly especially with the use acronyms for speedy operations. But in many instances offices seem to be deficient in terms of adequate lighting, ventilation, acoustics, aesthetics layout and other necessary factors required to satisfy the physical and psychological needs of users. Correspondences and files seem to be handled far below satisfactory professional standards. When clerical staff fails to discharge their functions effectively, it will most likely result in creating an unconducive office environment, chaotic handling of correspondence, improper treatment of files as well as inaccurate interpretation of office acronyms. This will to some extent have a cumulative effect on overall quality of office practice in education boards in Kebbi State.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were to:

1. find out the quality of management of office physical conditions among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State;
2. investigate the quality of management of office correspondence among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State;





3. ascertain the quality of management of office files among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State; and
4. determine the quality of management of office acronyms among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the quality of management of office physical conditions among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State?
2. What is the quality of management of office correspondence among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State?
3. What is the quality of management of office files among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State?
4. What is the quality of management of office acronyms among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State?

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. All the four Education Boards made up of Kebbi State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), Teacher's Service boards (TSB); Science and Technical Education Boards (STEB), Arabic and Islamic Education Board (AIEB) was used for the study. The total population of this study was made up of 156 subjects out of whom a sample size of 112 participants comprising of 44 senior educational administrators and 68 clerical staff, were selected using deliberate, stratified and simple random sampling techniques. A self-designed, structured and expert validated instrument titled: "Quality of Management of Office Practices Questionnaire" (QMOPQ). The 31-item instrument with four sections covering office conditions, correspondence, files and acronyms was based on five-point scale to measure extent quality from: 1 point = Very Low Quality (VLQ = 0-39%); 2 points = Low Quality (LQ = 40-49%); 3 points = Moderate Quality (MQ = 50-59%); 4 points = High Quality (HQ = 60-69%); and 5 points = Very High Quality (VHQ = 70-100%). The mean score of 3 points and above on the scale was used as cut-off for satisfactory performance while below 3 points is unsatisfactory performance. A reliability index of 0.83 was obtained using test re-test and Pearson Correlation Coefficient at 0.05 alpha level. All the 160 copies of the instrument administered were retrieved and analyzed using simple frequencies, percentages, and mean and presented in tabular form.

### **Results**

**Research Question 1:** What is the quality of management of office physical conditions among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State?



**Table 1: Quality of Management of Office Physical Condition among Clerical Staff in Education Boards in Kebbi State**

S/N	Item Statement	Rate	$\bar{X}$	Quality	Decision
<b>(a) Lighting</b>					
1.	Clerical staff open all windows for optimum day light to stream into offices	95%	5.0	VHQ	Satisfactory
2.	Clerical staff switch on office lights for optimum illumination during working hours	90%	5.0	VHQ	Satisfactory
3.	Clerical staff report for replacement of expired light bulbs and repair of faulty light switches and sockets	40%	2.0	LQ	Unsatisfactory
<b>(b) Ventilation</b>					
4.	Clerical staff open windows for cross ventilation	95%	5.0	LQ	Satisfactory
5.	Clerical staff close window when the air conditioner is working	60%	4.0	HQ	Satisfactory
6.	Clerical staff report faulty fans and air conditioners for prompt repairs or replacement	40%	2.0	LQ	Unsatisfactory
<b>(c) Acoustics (Noise Control)</b>					
7.	Clerical staff ensure that staff and visitors to the office speak in low tones when conversing and on telephone	40%	2.0	LQ	Unsatisfactory
8.	Office blinds are thick enough to screen external noise	40%	2.0	LQ	Unsatisfactory
9.	Clerical staff ensure that television sets and musical instruments in offices are operated at low tunes	40%	2.0	LQ	Unsatisfactory
10.	Office floors are covered with carpets to cushion noise	40%	2.0	LQ	Unsatisfactory
11.	Clerical staff ensure that creaking fans and door hinges are oiled and no doors are banged	40%	2.0	LQ	Unsatisfactory
<b>(d) Aesthetics and Layout</b>					
12.	Clerical staff ensure that pictures, paintings, calendars and display boards are well placed on office walls	60%	4.0	HQ	Satisfactory
13.	Clerical staff ensure the furniture, flower pots, electronics and sculptures are well arranged	40%	2.0	LQ	Unsatisfactory





<b>(e) Cleanliness</b>					
14.	Clerical staff regularly sweep ground, scrub floors, scrub furniture, wash toilets, clean utensils and spray air fresheners in office	60%	4.0	HQ	Satisfactory
15.	Clerical staff ensure that clean drinking water is always available in the offices	40%	4.0	LQ	Satisfactory
16.	Clerical staff ensure the office meals, tea and refreshment are neatly served	60%	4.0	HQ	Satisfactory
	Grand Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	47%	2.0	LQ	Unsatisfactory

**Key:**

VLE= Very Low Extent

LE= Low Extent

ME= Moderate Extent

HE= High Extent

VHE= Very High Extent

The grand mean of 47% and scale of 2.0 shows that the quality of management of physical conditions of offices among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State was low quality and was therefore unsatisfactory. The quality of management of physical conditions of an office was only of high quality and satisfactory on aspects of opening windows for sunlight and ventilations, switching on lights, decorating walls, daily sanitation and serving of food and drinks which were rated between 60% to 90% on a scale of 4.0 to 5.0.

**Research Question 2:** What is the quality of management of office correspondence among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State?

**Table 2: Quality of Management of Office Correspondence among Clerical Staff in Education Boards in Kebbi State**

S/N	Item Statement	Rate	$\bar{X}$	Quality	Decision
1.	Clerical staff are able to write letters, fax memorandums, circular, emails and notes	30%	1.0	VLQ	Unsatisfactory
2.	Clerical staff are good stenographers and skillful in short hand and have good English skills	10%	1.0	VLQ	Unsatisfactory
3.	Clerical staff are skillful in handling incoming mails in terms of receiving, recording, sorting and distribution	50%	3.0	MQ	Satisfactory



4.	Clerical staff are skillful in handling outgoing mails in terms of addressing, sealing, sampling, registering and posting	50%	3.0	MQ	Satisfactory
5.	Clerical staff ensure proper storage, safety and security of office correspondence	30%	1.0	VLQ	Unsatisfactory
	Grand Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	34%	1.0	VLQ	Unsatisfactory

**Key:**

VLE= Very Low Extent

LE= Low Extent

ME= Moderate Extent

HE= High Extent

VHE= Very High Extent

The grand mean rating of 34% and the scale of 1.0 indicates that the quality of management of office correspondence among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State was unsatisfactory. The quality is only satisfactory in the areas of handling incoming and outgoing mails which were rated 50% and the scale of 3.0 points each.

**Research Question 3:** What is the quality of management of office files among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State?

**Table 3: Quality of Management of Office Files among Clerical Staff in Education Boards in Kebbi State.**

S/N	Item Statement	Rate	$\bar{X}$	Quality	Decision
1.	Clerical staff are skillful in executing different methods of file classification be it alphabetical, numerical, geographical, signed based, department and others	65%	4.0	HQ	Satisfactory
2.	Clerical staff are skillful in procedures for opening new files, temporary files and special files	60%	4.0	HQ	Satisfactory
3.	Clerical staff are skillful in filing procedures in terms of punching papers, putting files tags, page numbering and cross-referencing	65%	4.0	HQ	Satisfactory
4.	Clerical staff are skillful in closing and disposing files	60%	4.0	HQ	Satisfactory
5.	Clerical staff are skillful in grading file into open files, secret files, personal files and restricted files	60%	4.0	HQ	Satisfactory



6.	Clerical staff know the procedure for file storage, safety, security and retrieval	65%	4.0	HQ	Satisfactory
7.	Clerical staff know the procedure for tracking file movement, follow up and bringing up file	60%	4.0	HQ	Satisfactory
	Grand Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	63%	4.0	HQ	Satisfactory

**Key:**

VLE= Very Low Extent

LE= Low Extent

ME= Moderate Extent

HE= High Extent

VHE= Very High Extent

The grand mean rating of 63% and scale of 4.0 in table 3 show that the quality of management of office file among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State was high, meaning that it highly satisfactory. They performed well in all items 1- to 7 investigated and presented in table 3 having been rated 60% to 65% and all on a scale of 4.0 each.

**Research Question 4:** What is the quality of management of office acronyms among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State?

**Table 4: Quality of Management Office Acronyms among Clerical Staff in Education Boards in Kebbi State**

S/N	Item Statement	Rate	$\bar{X}$	Quality	Decision
1.	Clerical staff know the objectives of using office acronyms in office correspondence	10%	1.0	VLQ	Unsatisfactory
2.	Clerical staff have the mastery of different acronyms used in file treatment	30%	1.0	VLQ	Unsatisfactory
3.	Clerical staff have attended workshops on the use of office acronyms	20%	1.0	VLQ	Unsatisfactory
4.	Senior clerical staff mentor junior ones on use of office acronyms	40%	2.0	LQ	Unsatisfactory
	Grand Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	35%	1.0	VLQ	Unsatisfactory

**Key:**

VLE= Very Low Extent

LE= Low Extent



*ME= Moderate Extent*

*HE= High Extent*

*VHE= Very High Extent*

The grand mean of 35% and scale of 1.0 in table 4 show that the quality of management of office acronyms among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State was unsatisfactory in all aspects.

### **Summary of Findings**

1. The quality of management of physical conditions of office among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State was unsatisfactory.
2. The quality of management of office correspondence among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State was unsatisfactory.
3. The quality of management of office files among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State was satisfactory.
4. The quality of management of office acronyms among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State was unsatisfactory.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The first finding of this study indicated that the quality of management of physical conditions of office among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State was low and unsatisfactory. Findings in table 1 show that clerical staff did not promptly report cases of expired light bulbs, faulty fans, Air conditioners, electric sockets and switches for replacement or repairs. This is contrary to Osuala (1998) and Manga (2007). The findings showed that clerical staff made little or no effort to manage acoustics or enforce noise control measures as staff and visitors were allowed to converse loudly in offices while television and radios were operated on high sound volume. Creaking ceiling fans and noisy door hinges were not oiled for smooth and silent opening and closing. There was tendency to noisily bang office doors while the floors were rarely covered with carpets to cushion noise. Floors were rarely covered with carpets to cushion noise, while window blinds were generally not thick enough to screen outside noise when windows were opened. This was contrary to Azuka and Agamuo (2012), Fosun and Odina (2019). The findings show that clerical staff did not bother to arrange furniture and electronic appliances beautifully to ensure proper aesthetics and layout. However, findings in table 1 also show that clerical staff were good at opening windows and switching on office lights, hanging official portraits on the wall, daily sweeping of offices and washing of office toilets. This was in line with Fries, Rowe and Travis (2013). The poor quantity of job performance of staff in terms of establishing suitable physical office conditions tend to suggest inadequate supervision and control by their superior officers who had the tendency to overlook their deficiency.



The second finding of this study indicates that the quality of management of office correspondence among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State was very low and very unsatisfactory. Table 2 shows that clerical staff were mostly unable to write good official letters, memorandum, circular, emails as they have poor command of English language. They were also incompetent in ensuring the safety and security of office correspondence. This was contrary to Hatchett (2015), Klien (2016). However, they were moderately competent in satisfactory handling incoming and out-going mails. This was in line with Watchman (2010) and Harding (2014). Their poor skills at managing office correspondence tend to suggest deficiency in their professional qualification and lack of opportunity for training and re-training.

The third finding of this study shows that the quality of management of office files among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State was highly satisfactory. This is in accord with Akpomi and Chiorlu (2014), Austin (2018) and Denya (2016). Their good performance of clerical staff in handling office files could be because file handling is the major activity in their daily routine. Thus, they tend to acquire practical skills and experiences as time goes on. However, they seem to be deficient in electronic file management and internet proficiency.

The fourth finding of this study indicated that the quality of management of office acronyms among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State was unsatisfactory. Findings in table 4 show that clerical staff are surprisingly not familiar with the main objectives of using office acronyms in official correspondence. Most of them had little or no mastery of the different acronyms used in file treatment. Also, there was little or no opportunities to attend workshop on use of office acronyms among clerical staff. This was contrary to Nwosu (2012), Hatchett (2018), Mills and Standford (2015) who pointed out that clerical staff should be able to recognize, interpret and use office acronyms correctly. This situation tends to suggest poor mentoring of junior clerical staff by senior colleagues some of whom might not have adequate understanding of office acronyms.

### **Conclusions**

The findings of this study conclusively showed that the quality of management of office physical conditions, office correspondence and office acronyms among clerical staff in education boards in Kebbi State was of poor quality and therefore, unsatisfactory. However, their handling office files was highly satisfactory. Their poor quality of management of their critical office activities suggested inadequate supervision, poor qualifications and inadequate training.

### **Recommendations**

1. To improve the capacity of clerical staff to create and manage conducive physical conditions in the office the head of departments should encourage them to promptly report any faulty electrical and electronic appliances for repairs or replacements. The culture of quietness in the office environment should be enforced by regulations which clerical staff should execute.



Superior officers should strictly supervise clerical staff to ensure that they discharge their roles of efficiently.

2. To improve management of office correspondence, clerical staff should be employed strictly on merit and be given opportunity for professional training and re-training.
3. To improve management of handling office files the, the knowledge and skills of clerical staff should be extend and general towards improving their capacity at handling electronic files and internet proficiency in line with current global developments in Information and Communication Technology.
4. To improve the management of office acronyms, senior clerical staff should be motivated to provide mentorship to junior ones on daily basis. The younger one should have the intrinsic ability and readiness to learn from the seniors with respect and humility.

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