

ICT UTILIZATION AND ACCOUNTANTS' PRODUCTIVITY IN BAYELSA STATE: IMPLICATION FOR BUSINESS EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The study focused on ICT utilization and accountants' productivity in Bayelsa State: implication for business education. Two research questions were used for the study. The study covered ICT and productivity of accountants in organizations in Yenagoa local government of Bayelsa State. Simple descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Random sampling technique was used to select 180 accountants from a population of 200. The researcher developed an instrument titled "ICT utilization for Accountants' Business Productivity" (ICTUABP). The researchers subjected ICTUABP item to face and content validation from experts in business education. The reliability co-efficient was computed and the result obtained from the test re-test method was 0.83% which was considered adequate for the study. Research questions were analyzed with simple percentages and weighted mean averages. The hypotheses were analyzed using the chi-square contingency table. The findings of the study also showed that the positive impact of accountants' productivity as a result of ICT utilization on accountants' productivity is to a large extent. They also said that with ICT utilization, preparation of financial statements such as balance sheet ledger, trial balance, etc will be prepared easier, faster, more convenient and with few or no errors and also reduces their working hours and also create accuracy and efficiency in accounting profession. Finally, it was recommended that ICT related courses should be introduced in the curriculum/syllabus of departments and institutes of Business Education and Government should carry out enlightenment campaign on the importance of ICT to the public and also make provisions for computer training programs for their accountants as to give them computer education.

KEYWORDS: ICT, Accountant and Business Productivity

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of ICT has greatly improved the quality and speed of accounting information through the application of the computer in performing accounting functions. Before the application of ICT in performing accounting functions, accountants were carrying out their duties manually and this led to delays and monumental frauds. But the computerization of accounting system has made the whole system easy. This is because large quantity of financial data can be processed, summarized, analyzed, interpreted, stored and retrieved easily and more accurately than the manual procedure. For example, the introduction of accounting software has made the preparation of payrolls, cashbooks, balance sheet, trial balance, ledgers, bank reconciliation statement and the cash flow schedule easier, faster, more convenient and with few or no errors. It also reduces the working hours of accountants.

Most of these tasks are relatively repetitive and involve substantial calculations and referencing across different accounts. ICT (computer) applications can automate such structured tasks and substantially reduce the processing time.

Without the computer, the auditor has to write down all the numbers by hand and make difficult calculations using a calculator. Sometimes, the need arises to repeat the same entry several times on different sheets. For example, the amount of cash may appear on the balance sheet, the working trial balance, the cash flow schedule, the bank reconciliation and so on and all the numbers are the same or related, the auditor has to be very careful when writing down the numbers in order not to make duplication or repetition. It is also very tedious. But with the application of the audit software, he/she only needs to key in the entry once and make the appropriate choice. Then, all the related numbers will be generated automatically and cross-referenced and there will be no need to punch any key on a calculator. With the computer, the working hours on an engagement can be reduced by more than half of that without the computer. Ekanem and Iyoha (2002) said that approximately 50% of the total acceleration of productivity can be attributed to the use of Information and Communication Technology.

The documents in the database can be easily retrieved by a search function or with associated links. Also, a senior auditor observed that database storage allows quick references and modifications from previous audit plans and reports for the client and consequently, work hours for a client can be reduced significantly. In addition, the organization uses notes as a tool to manage internal resources and documents to save time and increase effectiveness.

The internet also is another component of ICT that has made the accounting system easier. The internet enables other users of financial information with an organization to now have easy access to such information from their different locations through the computer network system which allows different users to have access to information from their various locations. This saves companies the man-hour cost of shuttling from different sections to the accounts/financial sections in search of financial data for their operation. It helps easy co-ordination of the system. Also software payroll packages use a wide Area Network (WAN), which is set up to link all branches of an organization with the central server at the head

office. Thus the internet has made it possible for large organization with large manpower and braches to have central data base for all staff and also centralized the preparation of payroll guide against fraud.

The Local Area Network (LAN) are very instrumental because there can be an interconnection of databases from different location which will give online access to users at any time. Also features of the internet such as the electronic mail (e-mail), Worldwide Web (www) have been of great benefit in the preparation of other financial reports in terms of accessing and exchanging financial data with customers and other organizations that are also connected to the internet. Improved data transmission through the internet has greatly reduced the difficulties of accessing vital information and reduces the volume of paper documents, thereby improving the quality of accountant's productivity and management's decision.

The staff in the financial / accounts department (accountants) via the internet relates the status of the organization's account with their bankers to enable them prepare the financial statements and reports for decision-making. Although the computer (ICT) has taken over almost everything in the accounting system, they are not substitutes for qualified people with abilities to generate and use accounting information. They have not eliminated; rather, there is the need for accounting personnel to be acquainted with the application and the operation of the computer.

Although the application of computers in the performance of accounting functions has numerous benefits, there are also problems associated with the use of computers in processing financial information. One of such problems is the deliberate modification or destruction of financial data by staff that has access to the computer. Theft or dire could also be a form of physical destruction. Sometimes, the staff in charge of data inputs could disclose vital financial information therefore the organization has to go extra mile to ensure the protection. This could be done by storing back-up copies of the accounting files in a place where its safety is guaranteed.

Again, the issue of computer networking that allows different users to have access to the information stored in the computers at different locations also stands the risk of unauthorized retrieval of financial information. According to Okon (2001), in such cases, the organizations should put a secret password and user's identification system that will only be disclosed to authorized personnel in the accounting department and this will limit unauthorized access to the information. Other problems of ICT are listed below: Garlock (1999) said that ICT could quickly become obsolete therefore requires a lot of funds to keep it up; Cascio (2000) said that the disadvantages of ICT include high set-up and maintenance cost; Norman (2001) states that customer/employee and management relationship suffer as services and information are passed from one to other through cold technological device as against warm face to face interpersonal relationship; and Boyer (2001) says that as organization gets to full computerization, less manpower is needed thereby causing unemployment.

Finally, the problem of a computer virus which practically destroys all records in the hard disk or diskette can be guided against. However, in order to guide against losing vital financial information to virus, back-up and duplicate copies of all financial information should be made and stored separately in an external storage device.

Statement of the Problem

In recent times it has been observed that most company and accounting operations are normally carried out with ICT facilities. This is applied in order to provide more excellent and efficient service that will meet general demands. A common challenge faced by workers is the difficulty to adjust to such frequent changes. Some workers may lose interest and this may lower job morale, but others may see it as a task in order to maintain relevance and it gives them a job focus (Taiwo, and Agwu, 2016). Generically, there is difficulty in the measurement of the cost and benefits of ICT on organizational performance as it is a wide qualitative factor that cannot be measured easily, numerically.

Currently, the usage of computers and other advanced technology have increasingly been adopted in most practices including accounting. Prior to this, accountants were vigorously involved in all accounting activities as the traditional methods were in place. Daily records had to be kept by humans, preparation of financial statements such as the statement of financial position and statement of comprehensive income were done manually by the accountant (Linus, 2012). According to Francis (2013), the implication of technology has indeed caused obvious changes in organizations relating to their accounting systems and organizational performance, which has been of great concern and interest. Accounting decisions and plans have to be made with consideration of ICT in order for companies to stay relevant and competitive. It is necessary to acknowledge that computerized systems have improved the functionality of accounting department in organizations. However, the study intends to find out the extent to which ICT utilization by accountants can influence their productivity.

Purpose of the Study

The study is based on ICT utilization and accountants' productivity in Bayelsa State: implication for business education. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the extent to which ICT utilization had positively impacted on business productivity in Bayelsa State.
2. To find out the extent to which accountants use internet for accounting functions.

Research Questions

The research questions were developed and used as a guide for the study:

1. What is the extent to which ICT utilization had positively impacted on accountants business productivity in Bayelsa State?
2. To what extent do accountants use internet for accounting functions?

Scope of the Study

The study covered ICT and productivity of accountants in organizations in Yenagoa local government of Bayelsa State. Also, it covered ICT packages like internet and productivity of accountants.

METHODS

Design of the study

Simple descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Survey design was used because questionnaires were distributed as a means of obtaining data from respondents. Akuezulo, and Agu (2007) stated that in a survey research is one in which questionnaires are used as a means of data collection.

Population and Sample of the Study

The population of this study covers total number of 200 accountants in different firms, both public and private in Bayelsa state. The population distribution comprises of Bayelsa East - 50 questionnaires, Bayelsa Central - 90 and Bayelsa West - 60 questionnaires distributed to accountants. Random sampling technique was used to select 180 accountants from a population of 200.

Instrument for Data Collection

The researcher developed an instrument titled "ICT utilization for Accountants' Business Productivity" (ICTUABP). The instrument consists of five point likert scale consisting of Very Large Extent, Large Extent, Fairly Large Extent, Small Extent and No Extent. The response options were weighed as 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively.

Validation of the Instrument

The researchers subjected ICTUABP item to face and content validation from experts in business education. The experts checked the language and grammatical expressions of the questionnaire. Their recommendations and corrections were effected before final copy was produced and distributed to the field.

Reliability of the Instrument

ICTUABP was subjected to pilot testing to obtain the instrument reliability. In order to establish the reliability of the instrument, a test retest technique was adopted by this method, 85 of the questionnaires were administered to 85 accountants in Port Harcourt in River State. After two weeks, the instrument was re-administered to them. From the responses obtained from the respondents, the reliability co-efficient was computed and the result obtained from the test re-test method was 0.83% which was considered adequate for the study.

Administration of the Instrument

A total number of 200 copies of the questionnaire were administered on the subject, the researcher and some of her friends administered the questionnaires and collected them from the accountants on the agreed date. Out of which 180 were retrieved which make up to 90% of the instrument received and used for analysis.

Method of Data Analysis

Research questions were analyzed with simple percentages and weighted mean averages.

DATA ANALYSIS

Research Questions 1

What is the extent to which ICT utilization had positively impacted on Accountants' business productivity in Bayelsa State?

Table 1: ICT utilization had positively impacted on Accountants' business productivity in Bayelsa State.

S/NO	Response	W	X	%	W x	\bar{x}	Rmk
1	Very Large extent	5	6.5	3.6	32.5		
2	Large extent	4	6.3	3.5	25.2		
3	Fairly Large extent	3	2.7	1.5	8.1		
4	Small Extent	2	1.8	1.0	3.6		
5	No Extent	1	7	4	7		
	Total		180	100	701	3.89	LE

Source: Survey data 2010

29% of the respondents believe that the difference in productivity of accountants as a result of ICT utilization is to a very large extent; 24% say that the difference in productivity is to large extent; the same percentage (14%) of the respondents believe that the difference in productivity is to fairly large extent and small extent; while 19% claim that there is no difference in productivity of accountant as a result of ICT utilization. With a weighted mean score of 3.29, the extent of the difference in productivity of accountants as a result of ICT utilization is to a large extent.

Research Questions 2

To what extent do accountants use internet for accounting functions?

Table 2: Accountants use internet for accounting functions

S / N O	R e s p o n s e	W	X	%	W x	- x	Remark
1 .	Very Large extent	5	3 5	1 9	1 7 5		
2 .	Large extent	4	4 0	2 2	1 6 0		
3 .	Fairly Large extent	3	5 2	2 9	1 5 6		
4 .	Small Extent	2	5 0	2 8	1 0 0		
5 .	No Extent	1	3	2	3		
	T o t a l		1 8 0	1 0 0	5 9 4	3.30	L E

Source: Survey data 2010

It is of the opinion of 35 of the respondents (19%), that accountants use internet in accounting functions to a very large extent; 40 of the respondents (22%) say that they are used to a large extent; 52 respondents (29%) that they are used to fairly large extent; 50 respondents (28%) that they are used to a small extent and it is the opinion of 3 of the respondents (2%) that accountants do not use internet for accounting functions at all. A weighed mean score of 3.30 indicates that organization use internet to a large extent.

Discussion of findings

The findings of the study showed that the positive impact of accountants' productivity as a result of ICT utilization on accountants' productivity is to a large extent. They also said that with ICT utilization, preparation of financial statements such as balance sheet ledger, trial balance, etc will be prepared easier, faster, more conveniently and with few or no errors and it also reduces their working hours and also creates accuracy and efficiency in accounting profession. Findings showed that there is a significant difference in productivity of accountants as a result of ICT utilization. Ekanem and Iyoha (2002) found that approximately 50% of the total acceleration of workers' high productivity can be attributed to the use of Information and Communication Technology.

Implication for Business Education

In order to get a proper understanding for the implication for Business Education, it is imperative that Business Education is defined. Business Education has been defined in several ways by different people. Business Education is that aspect of vocational education that provides instructions and preparations for office occupations such as secretaries, data processors, word processors, accountants, etc. and Business Education in recent years has developed into a more complex kind of learning which requires the knowledge of other subjects. It is more complex with increase in technology and computerized society.

A professional must equip himself/herself with all forms of skills to be able to fit in the competitive business environment. It implies that introducing ICT to Business Education programme equips the graduates with the necessary skills needed. Thus, introducing ICT in the classroom will be very imperative, since innovation is being advocated for in classroom practice. Learning with the aids of ICT will lead not only to skills development but also create enjoyment in the learning process.

According to Koko (2004), the objectives of Business Education programme are; to equip graduates with necessary teaching competencies in business subjects in institutes of learning, to produce graduates who will engage in professional studies in business education and to produce strong advocates and promoters of viable industrial and business enterprise. She also stated that Business Education provides career opportunities in areas of teaching in secondary schools, holding administrative positions in the public and private sectors of the economy, to be self-employed in industry and commerce and to undergo higher studies. This implies that introducing ICT in the programme will enable graduates to be able to open small businesses such as computer training centers, business centers for typesetting, photocopying, scan etc, of their own and can manage and operate it very well.

Recommendations

Upon the findings obtained from the study, it is recommended that:

1. ICT related courses should be introduced in the curriculum/syllabus of departments and institutes of Business Education.
2. Government should carry out enlightenment campaign on the importance of ICT to the public and also make provisions for computer training programs for their accountants as to give them computer education.

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