THE ROLES OF ORAL SKILLS IN ENHANCING PRODUCTIVITY IN AUTOMATED OFFIECES OF 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract
Oral communication skill is now more important than ever in the workplace of the twenty-first century due to the growing use of automation and sophisticated office technologies. This study exmines how oral communication abilities might boost output in automated offices. A smooth human-machine connection, improved staff collaboration and efficient use of digital tools and automated processes are all made possible by effective speech communication. Also, effective verbal communication enhances decision-making, teamwork and customer relations. This contributes to the success of an organization. Human connection is still crucial for problem-solving, resolving conflicts and preserving workplace harmony even in the face of automation and artificial intelligence breakthroughs. The paper emphasizes the necessity of ongoing instruction and professional growth in oral communication techniques in order to adjust to changing demands in the workplace. It concludes that mastering oral skills in an automated office environment is vital for improving workplace productivity and achieving business objectives.

Keywords: Oral Skills, Automation, Workplace Productivity, Automated, Modern Office

Introduction

An office traditionally serves as a dedicated space where administrative and managerial tasks are conducted to support an organization's objectives. It functions as a central hub for information processing, communication and decision-making,

facilitating the coordination of various business activities (Echomgbe & Amadi, 2023). In the 21st century, offices have undergone significant transformations driven by technological advancements and evolving work paradigms. The integration of digital technologies has led to the emergence of automated offices, characterized by the use of computers, software applications and internet connectivity to perform tasks that were once manual (Oguejiofor & Okem, 2021). This shift has not only streamlined operations but has also introduced new dynamics in workplace interactions and productivity metrics.

One of the primary benefits of automation in modern office practices is its positive impact on productivity. Productivity, in this context, refers to the efficiency with which office tasks and processes are executed to achieve organizational goals. Lesi (2020) stated that office automation equipment has a significant effect on the productivity of secretaries, enhancing their efficiency and effectiveness in task execution. Despite these advancements, issues of low productivity persist in modern offices in Nigeria. Factors contributing to this challenge include inadequate training, resistance to technological adoption and deficiencies in essential communication skills among office practitioners (Arikwandu & Ocholi, 2023). Notably, poor oral skills among secretaries and administrative staff can impede effective communication, leading to misunderstandings, errors and delays in workflow. In some cases, a secretary's inability to articulate information clearly during meetings or telephone conversations can result in miscommunication that affects overall productivity.

Oral skills encompass the ability to communicate effectively through spoken language, including clarity of speech, active listening and appropriate verbal responses. In the context of automated offices, proficient oral communication is vital for coordinating tasks, resolving issues promptly and facilitating collaboration among team members. Arikwandu and Ocholi (2023) emphasized that secretaries need to be adept in both oral and written communication to perform their roles effectively in contemporary office settings. This paper aims to review existing literature on the role of oral skills in enhancing productivity in automated offices in Nigeria.

Automated Offices

An automated office refers to a work environment where advanced technologies are employed to perform routine tasks,. This concept encompasses the use of various systems and tools designed to handle functions such as data management,

communication and document processing without continuous human intervention. Geoffrey in Ejeka (2015) described office automation as a valuable tool for secretaries, as it enabled machines to efficiently handle routine clerical tasks with greater speed, precision and automation compared to human effort. This automation allowed secretaries to focus on more complex tasks such as payroll processing, drafting numerous letters and performing intricate calculations that required expertise and accuracy. Similarly, Ejeka (2015) defined office automation as the use of personal computers, including word processors and electronic intercom mail systems, alongside other technological advancements aimed at enhancing workplace productivity and efficiency. He explained that office automation involved the implementation of systems and processes that enabled the automatic execution of office tasks. Furthermore, Ejeka emphasized that office automation represented the integration of various technologies to facilitate seamless access to quality information and communication tools, ultimately improving the productivity of professionals and managerial staff. Ovbiagbale, Mgbonyebi and Olaniye (2019) described modern office automation as the integration of machines and equipment into the workplace to streamline administrative processes, eliminate bureaucratic bottlenecks and reduce unnecessary delays in office

functions. Similarly, Koko and Okogun (2020) defined modern office automation as the application of computer systems and software to enhance service delivery. In essence, office automation involves the utilisation of self-regulating devices to manage office tasks that were traditionally executed manually or through semi-mechanical methods. The primary objective is to streamline operations, reduce manual workload and minimize errors, allowing employees to focus on more strategic activities. The integration of automation in office settings has transformed traditional workflows, leading to significant changes in organizational structures and processes.

The components of an automated office typically include word processing systems, electronic mail, data storage solutions and telecommunication networks. Word processing systems facilitate the creation, editing and formatting of documents, replacing traditional typewriters and manual filing systems (Koko & Okogun, 2020). Electronic mail systems enable swift internal and external communication, reducing the reliance on physical mail and enhancing collaboration among employees (Arikwandu & Ocholi, 2023). Data storage solutions, such as cloud computing, offer secure and accessible repositories for organizational information, ensuring data integrity and availability. Telecommunication networks connect

various office systems, allowing for seamless information flow and real-time communication (Echomgbe & Amadi, 2023). These components collectively contribute to a cohesive and efficient automated office environment.

The benefits of adopting office automation are manifold. One significant advantage is the improvement in productivity, as automated systems can perform repetitive tasks faster and with greater accuracy than humans (Koko & Okogun, 2020). This efficiency leads to cost savings and allows employees to allocate time to more complex and value-added activities (Onoja, 2020). In the same vein, automation enhances communication within the organization, as electronic systems provide platforms for instant messaging, video conferencing and collaborative workspaces (Arikwandu & Ocholi, 2023). However, the transition to an automated office also presents challenges, such as the need for employee training, potential resistance to change and the requirement for substantial initial investment in technology infrastructure. Organizations must carefully plan and manage the implementation of automation to mitigate these challenges and fully realize the benefits. In this paper, the automated office represents a significant shift from traditional work environments, leveraging technology to optimize operations and enhance organizational

performance (Echomgbe & Amadi, 2023). While the transition requires careful consideration of various factors, including employee adaptation and technological investments, the potential benefits in terms of efficiency, productivity and communication are substantial. As technology continues to evolve, the concept of the automated office is likely to expand, incorporating emerging tools and systems that further transform the way organizations operate.

Productivity in Office

Productivity is a fundamental concept in both economics and organizational management, representing the efficiency with which inputs are transformed into outputs. Bennett (2017) defined productivity as a measure of output per unit of input, highlighting its role in determining economic growth and serving as a crucial indicator of a nation's economic health. This efficiency metric is influenced by various factors including technology, labor, capital and organizational structures.

In the context of office environments, productivity encompasses the effectiveness and efficiency with which administrative tasks are performed. In the context of organizational performance, Nwachukwu (2017) defined productivity as the measure of how well resources are

utilized to achieve desired results, emphasizing the importance of maximizing output while minimizing resource expenditure. Similarly, Awujo and Urieto (2018) saw productivity as a synonym for efficiency, focusing on how effectively organizations use various elements to create products or services. The British Council for Offices (2017) highlighted the importance of measuring both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of office output to assess productivity accurately. They propose a comprehensive productivity index that considers factors such as quality, timeliness and efficiency of office work. Similarly, Harris (2019) identified key components impacting office productivity, including comfort, office layout, interaction and distraction, suggesting that the behavioral environment significantly influences self-assessed productivity. Office productivity, therefore, refers to the degree to which office-related tasks are completed efficiently and effectively, contributing to the overall performance of an organization. It involves optimizing various elements of the office environment to enhance the efficiency of administrative processes and support organizational goals.

Oral Skills

Oral skills encompass both speaking and listening abilities which are fundamental components of effective communication.

Communication is an evolving process that involves the exchange of information between two or more individuals, specifically the sender and the receiver, with the primary aim of conveying thoughts and perspectives. Oral communication proficiency in English refers to the ability to express one's thoughts and ideas clearly and fluently in spoken English. Achieving this requires a strong command of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and familiarity with the subject matter being discussed. It encompasses both receptive and productive skills, such as listening and speaking (Bhatti & Shaikh, 2021). Herrera-Díaz and González-Miy (2017) defined oral skills as the capacity to effectively express and interpret thoughts, feelings and information through spoken language. Velásquez-Jaramillo (2021) emphasized the role of metacognitive strategies in developing oral skills, suggesting that explicit training in planning, monitoring and evaluating can enhance learners' speaking abilities. Oral skills are often associated with the development of communicative competence, which includes fluency, accuracy and the ability to use language appropriately in various contexts. The cultivation of these skills is essential for learners to engage effectively in both academic and real-world interactions. The ability to engage effectively in oral presentations, meetings, discussions and conversations is critical to success in these fields (Kakepoto et al.,

2012). Paneerselvam and Mohamad (2019) also emphasised that oral communication is a core competency required for new employees. Moreover, oral communication skills are vital in both personal and professional settings, playing a significant role in career advancement and interpersonal relationships (Alsaleem, 2018; Chan, 2021). In the 21st-century business environment, oral communication skills have become increasingly vital due to the rapid integration of technology and the evolving nature of workplace interactions. Despite advancements in digital communication tools, the ability to convey ideas effectively through spoken language remains a cornerstone of professional success. Thus, oral skills encompass the abilities to articulate thoughts clearly and comprehend spoken language effectively. These skills are integral to successful communication and are crucial in the 21st century automated office.

Oral Skills in the 21st Century Automated Office

In today's workplace, oral communication skills play a crucial role in ensuring smooth interactions, fostering collaboration and enhancing productivity. The modern office relies heavily on effective verbal exchanges, whether in face-to-face meetings, virtual conferences, or daily workplace conversations (Musheke &

Phiri, 2021). Effective oral communication encompasses both verbal and nonverbal elements. Proficient communicators not only articulate their thoughts clearly but also employ appropriate body language and active listening skills to enhance understanding (Tanbunan et al., 2023.). These competencies are essential for engaging in discussions, negotiations and presentations, which are integral components of modern business operations. Employers recognize the importance of these skills and increasingly seek candidates who can navigate complex communication scenarios. The demand for media training and the development of communication competencies has risen significantly, as organizations aim to equip their staff with the necessary tools for effective information exchange (Gordon, 2021). Furthermore, oral communication is one of the "Four Cs" of 21st-century skills, alongside critical thinking, creativity and collaboration. These skills are deemed essential for adapting to the dynamic demands of the modern workplace, enabling professionals to convey ideas succinctly and collaborate effectively with diverse teams (iCEV, 2022). Several key oral communication skills are essential for employees to function effectively in an automated office environment. These include clarity and precision, active listening, adaptability and the use of non-verbal cues (Time, 2024).

a. **Clarity and Precision:** Clarity and precision in speech ensure that messages are understood without ambiguity. Employees who communicate clearly reduce misunderstandings, improve workflow and enhance team collaboration (Indeed, 2023). According to Time (2024), clear communication fosters better workplace relationships and increases overall efficiency. Moreover, organizations benefit from precise communication, as it leads to fewer errors and improved decision-making processes.

b. **Active Listening:** Active listening involves fully concentrating on what others are saying, understanding the message and responding thoughtfully. It is a vital skill in meetings, negotiations and teamwork (Tewal, 2017). Research indicates that workplaces where employees actively listen to one another experience higher levels of productivity and job satisfaction (Tambunan et al., 2023). Effective listening not only improves relationships but also reduces workplace conflicts, creating a more harmonious and efficient environment.

c. **Adaptability:** The ability to tailor language, tone and communication style based on the audience is crucial in professional settings. Employees interact with different stakeholders, including clients, colleagues and management and must adjust their speech accordingly (Rohayatin, 2017). Time (2024) emphasizes that adaptability in communication is essential for professionalism and leadership development.

d. **Non-Verbal Cues:** Non-verbal communication, such as eye contact, gestures and facial expressions, significantly influences the effectiveness of spoken messages (Time, 2024). In virtual meetings, body language and tone of voice play a critical role in maintaining engagement and professionalism (Musheke & Phiri, 2021). Employees who master non-verbal cues enhance their ability to connect with others, which ultimately improves workplace interactions and productivity.

Role of Oral skills in Enhancing Workplace Productivity in Automated Office

In today's fast-paced, technology-driven business environment, the automation of office processes has significantly transformed workplace dynamics. Automated offices rely on advanced digital

tools and artificial intelligence to streamline administrative tasks, improve efficiency and reduce manual workload. Even within highly automated office settings, oral communication skills remain integral to enhancing workplace productivity. They facilitate collaboration, boost employee engagement, reduce errors, aid in technological adaptability and strengthen workplace relationships. Organizations should continue to prioritize the development of these skills to ensure sustained productivity and success in an increasingly automated world.

1. **Facilitating Collaboration and Teamwork:** Oral communication serves as the foundation for collaboration within teams. Effective verbal interactions enable employees to share ideas, provide feedback and coordinate efforts efficiently, leading to improved accuracy and speed in task execution (Biryanto et al., 2018). This collaborative environment fosters a holistic view of organizational processes, breaking down silos and promoting shared success.

2. **Enhancing Employee Engagement and Motivation:** Strong oral communication skills contribute significantly to employee engagement and motivation. When employees feel heard and valued through open dialogues, their commitment to organizational goals intensifies, resulting in higher productivity levels. Implementing feedback mechanisms and recognition programs further enhances engagement, as individuals feel more connected to their work and colleagues.

3. **Reducing Misunderstandings and Errors:** This clears and concises verbal communication, minimizes misunderstandings and confusion in the workplace. By ensuring that instructions and expectations are articulated effectively, employees can execute tasks more accurately and efficiently, reducing the likelihood of errors (Musheke & Phiri, 2021). This clarity is crucial in automated offices, where the seamless integration of human input and technological processes depends on precise communication.

4. **Adapting to Technological Advancements:** As offices become more automated, the ability to communicate effectively about technological tools and processes becomes essential. Employees with strong oral communication skills can better understand and convey

information regarding new technologies, facilitating smoother transitions and integrations. This adaptability ensures that technological advancements enhance productivity rather than hinder it.

5. **Building Stronger Workplace Relationships:** Effective oral communication fosters stronger relationships among employees, creating a more cohesive work environment. These relationships are vital for teamwork, as trust and mutual understanding enhance collaboration and productivity (Biryanto et al., 2018). In automated offices, where human interaction might be less frequent, the quality of communication becomes even more critical to maintain a connected workforce.

Conclusion

Automation has completely changed office operations in the modern workplace, boosting productivity and lessening the workload associated with human labor. With the use of cutting-edge digital technologies, oral communication abilities are still essential for increasing efficiency at work. Collaboration, problem-solving and decision-making are all facilitated by effective verbal communication, which

guarantees that workers can work together harmoniously in an automated setting. Effective communication, attentive listening and meaningful dialogue promote collaboration and increase organizational effectiveness. Furthermore, as workers must express instructions, offer feedback and settle disputes in a digital workplace, oral communication abilities are essential for adjusting to technological advancements. Therefore, even while automation improves operational efficiency, human contact is still crucial for fostering workplace productivity and organizational success.

Recommendations

The authors made the following recommendations based on the review:

* Employers should conduct frequent training sessions to improve staff members' oral communication abilities, emphasizing nonverbal cues, active listening and clarity.
* Businesses should embrace digital communication technologies like voice-assisted platforms and video conferencing to facilitate seamless verbal interactions in automated workplaces.
* Management should encourage an atmosphere where employees feel free to voice their opinions, provide feedback and engage in discussions

* in order to enhance workplace collaboration.
* Employers should incorporate oral communication assessments into hiring processes and employee performance reviews to ensure continuous improvement.

* Organizations should provide leadership and public speaking opportunities through workshops, mentorship programs and professional development activities to boost staff members' self-esteem and communication abilities.

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