

Exploring the Role of Lifelong Learning in Enhancing Research Competence for Polytechnic Educators in Nigeria

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Abstract

As part of the author's role as a PhD educational research and development student at the University of Lincoln, this research explores the role of lifelong learning strategies in enhancing the research competence among polytechnic educators in Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigates these strategies within the Office Technology and Management (OTM) profession in government-owned polytechnics southwest, Nigeria. Employing a qualitative research design, the study explores the lifelong learning perception, ongoing barriers, and strategies employed by the OTM educators in enhancing research competence. Data was gathered using semi-structured interviews thematically analysed using Braun and Clarke's framework (2006). The findings show that educators engage in professional activities while also striving to achieve their personal learning objectives through obtaining certifications, engaging in reading, and engaging in reflective practice. Despite this trend, the study highlights key challenges to long-term involvement in lifelong learning activities, such as lack of finance, time, and work-life balance. Additionally, the findings revealed that OTM educators adopt lifelong learning strategies such as

professional advancement, self-directed learning and individual development, technological and digital media involvement, time management, and work-life balance. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) is applied to explain how important it is for polytechnics to encourage policy initiatives and programmes that can foster a culture of lifelong learning among educators. The study recommends that both the polytechnics management and the government set aside funds to provide support programmes that can help educators to learn and participate in lifelong learning activities. This financial support should include research grants, professional certification sponsorship, and provision of other incentives to motivate educators to keep learning and doing academic research in general.

Keywords: Lifelong Learning Strategies, Research Competence, Educators, Office Technology, and Management

Introduction

This paper reflects the author's professional learning and experiences within the context of the Nigerian polytechnics particularly in the Office Technology and Management (OTM) profession. As a current PhD student at the University of Lincoln, the author, through this new lens, develops and critically examines these experiences. This paper therefore provides a transnational, comparative and reflective approach to understanding research competence by way of lifelong learning practices at the University of Lincoln. In today's evolving academic landscape, the importance of research competence of teaching staff in the Nigerian polytechnics is considered a required skill that can foster overall research performance as well as promote institutional goals. It demonstrates an individual's capability to solve difficult problems by integration of their ideas, skills, social and emotional values, and cognitive capacities (Waskito, 2020). This capability includes being able to learn new topics, recognize difficulties in education, use the right methods, and understand and share

results correctly. It combines different technical and methodological skills, empowering educators to significantly contribute to academic debate and institutional advancement (Güven, 2020).

Research competence is an essential characteristic of an individual, signifying their readiness and capacity to autonomously address contemporary issues, thereby converting knowledge, skills, intellectual capacities, and socioeconomic values (Waskito, 2020). It can be used to measure the academic performance of educators in the field of OTM at government-owned polytechnics in Nigeria. When teaching staff in the OTM programme are research-competent, their institutions benefit from improved teaching quality and reputation, while Nigeria gains a more skilled and innovative workforce, driving socioeconomic development. However, sustaining an advanced level of research competence requires more than just technical skills; there is a need to be willing to learn and adapt to change. This is particularly so for educators in the OTM field at government-owned polytechnics, in the face of unique structural challenges that impede the enhancement of their research competence. Research has shown that most educators within these polytechnics have not exhibited the necessary skills nor devoted time to improving research competence (Usman & Inuwa 2021; Waskito 2020). This report thus suggests the need for enhanced research competence for these polytechnic educators in meeting the evolving demands of a competitive, higher educational landscape through the acquisition of lifelong learning.

Lifelong learning, according to Guven (2020), is referred to as an ongoing, voluntary, and self-directed pursuit of knowledge for personal or professional growth. It also helps people adjust to new situations, stay relevant on a global scale, and make a real difference in the progress of society. Lifelong learning includes a list of strategies to promote learning, creativity, confidence, and the ability to use information in higher educational settings. These strategies are not only parts of lifetime learning; they are ways that are set aside to put the idea of lifelong learning into practice to help people improve professionally and become involved in research (Yousef, 2022). Therefore, lifelong learning strategies are crucial within the polytechnic context for overcoming barriers to learning.

Self-directed learning, collaborative engagement methodologies, and reflective scholarly writing are examples of lifelong learning strategies. Self-directed learning is often an intentional, reflective, and flexible learning approach that individuals employ to continuously enhance their knowledge and skills (Umezulike & Anozie, 2022). On the other hand, Tobin et al (2024) described collaborative engagement methodologies as a crucial practice that is central to lifelong learning for educators. Additionally, Alt et al (2022) argue that reflective scholarly writing for educators serves as a tool for enhancing lifelong learning. Existing studies have summarized that self-directed learning, collaborative engagement methodologies, and reflective scholarly writing can also improve academic success and research proficiency (Alt et al., 2022; Yousef, 2022). These previous studies emphasized that, for OTM educators to stay informed about conducting quality research, they must engage in these strategies, combining their knowledge of technology with new teaching methods and innovative approaches.

This discussion cannot overlook some challenges within the OTM profession in the Nigerian government-owned polytechnics. Educators face challenges at these institutions, including inadequate research competence, limited supervision capacity, insufficient time from academic obligations and continuous learning, and the absence of clear academic research education strategies and outcomes (Umezulike & Anozie, 2022). These challenges, if not investigated, can significantly impact the ability of OTM educators to gain diverse educational experience as well as share research knowledge with students enrolled in the programme. Previous studies reveal that a lack of lifelong learning coupled with these challenges can lead to outdated knowledge and skills, which could worsen the decline in research competence (Benavot et al., 2022; Power & Maclean, 2012). In addition, research has examined educators' ability to write, conduct, and publish research; academic performance; and mentoring dynamics. Nonetheless, limited empirical findings have concentrated on the OTM profession and have scientifically established the link between lifelong learning and research competence (Adenekan & Babalola, 2022; Umezulike & Anozie, 2022).

The above discussion underscores the necessity to investigate the role of lifelong learning experiences in enhancing research competence among OTM educators.

Therefore, this paper will examine the process by which educators transform their experiences into effective lifelong learning strategies for enhanced research competence among OTM educators in government-owned polytechnics in southwest Nigeria. This paper is organized into different sections, such as the literature review, which integrates existing research, pinpointing gaps, and divergent perspectives regarding research competence in higher education. The methodology section describes the approach used in the research, such as sampling methods, data-gathering instruments, and analytical methods used to explore the study's variables. A theoretical explanation is provided in the study to contextualize the results and link them with relevant learning theory that facilitates a broader understanding of the observed phenomena. Finally, this paper ends with a conclusion and provides recommendations for Nigerian polytechnics, policymakers, and educators in the OTM field in Nigeria. The recommendation from this study is informed by the first author's ongoing PhD research in educational research and development at the University of Lincoln which offers a unique transnational perspective on research competence in higher education.

Review of Relevant Literature

The attainment of academic distinction in higher education is inextricably linked to the ability of educators to engage in teaching and research with proficiency, thereby enhancing research skills, particularly for faculty members in polytechnic institutions. Self-directed learning, reflective practice, and collaborative engagement are methodologies that facilitate the maintenance of current knowledge, enhancement of abilities, and adaptation to evolving academic requirements (Alt et al., 2022; Yousef, 2022). Academic staff must assume responsibility for their learning to improve their research capabilities and overall performance. Existing research has found that there exists a positive correlation between effective lifelong learning strategies and enhanced research competence and academic achievement (Said & Abdallah, 2024). There is a tension here between the individual responsibility and the institutional/structural factors which enable or constrain individuals in their pursuit of

lifelong learning. Therefore, it is crucial to enhance and promote lifelong learning among polytechnic educators. Polytechnic educators need to strengthen and promote lifelong learning among themselves. This need has informed the author's decision to pursue another PhD

Evidence from China confirms such a correlation and shows institutional and psychological factors, including organisational learning culture, management effectiveness, and psychological empowerment, which have links to lifelong learning and thus research engagement (Zhou & Tu, 2021). Lifelong learning within the UK context is currently undergoing a policy shift with the ambition to create an effortless, inclusive prioritization of skill needs within the educational sector. The government aims to launch the lifelong learning entitlement scheme, which indicates a transformative evolution with the post-18 educational initiative. According to the Department of Education (2025), the government is set to provide students with a loan for tuition fees of up to £38,140 within four years of study (Department of Education, 2025). The provision of such benefits will not only ease the burden of tuition fees, but the scheme will also create an enabling educational environment for learners who are willing to relearn and upskill their knowledge while working (CIPD, 2025; Egglestone & Marren, 2025). In addition, this strategy shows the importance of continuous learning for individuals to adapt and remain relevant. Egglestone and Marren (2025) argue that lifelong learning serves as a strategy to address inequalities in accessing quality education. This paper further suggests that lifelong learning can increase the possibility of being gainfully employed; hence, government should align lifelong learning with well-being and economic and social policy goals.

There are ongoing issues with the skills demonstrated by polytechnic educators in Nigeria, as evident in literature. A study conducted in Northeastern Nigeria revealed a disjunction between teaching and research obligations, as lecturers faced difficulties in reconciling both due to institutional limitations (Usman & Inuwa, 2021). This situation requires targeted professional development programs that utilize lifelong learning principles to enhance researcher engagement. Furthermore, research indicates that lifelong learning influences the professional identity and perspectives of educators

(Zhou & Tu, 2021). For example, a study in Turkey found that pre-service teachers with strong lifelong learning skills were better in their jobs and more likely to enjoy teaching (Sultan, 2023). Additionally, the connection between lifelong learning and ideas of epistemology has been examined (Aytac et al., 2022). Such evidence is an indication that encouraging lifelong learning may improve personal and career development, which are important in long-term research participation.

Lifelong learning approaches can be used as catalysts of change, without which individuals will no longer be able to remain competitive within the global context (Agbovu & Georgewill, 2025; IseOlorunkanmi et al., 2021; Kuzior, 2023). Given the ongoing drive for technological innovation, national and individual competitiveness and sustainable growth particularly among the Nigerian youth in the age of artificial intelligence and the evolving labour demand in the global space, polytechnic educators must position themselves to fit in. Lifelong learning practices ought to mix innovativeness with the knowledge and experiences of the educators in higher education. This practice could be attributed to various focuses on lifelong learning interventions and the emerging understanding that higher educational institutions are to play an essential role in the process (Benavot et al., 2022; CIPD, 2025). This reflects the contemporary changes in higher education in Nigeria and other part of the world.

Different procedures for applying lifelong learning strategies have given rise to different measures of lifelong learning strategies. These strategies emphasize attributes that define great teachers, including having further problem-solving abilities, being inclined to settle on the predicament at hand, being able to react to various categories of learners, and being conscious of the circumstances. (Benavot et al., 2022; Yousef, 2022). According to the need for lifelong learning approaches introduced by Kolb (2014), concrete experience, abstract conceptualization, reflective observation, and active experimentation, the lifelong learning approaches are discussed in educational literature. Existing research describes concrete experience as an active, transparent involvement in individual experience, as well as the translation of information into logical, compact representations (Yousef, 2022). This shows that those who believe in empowerment and the power of learning are more likely to want

to learn for life. This fact demonstrates the significance of attitude in terms of educational development (Ocak & Karakuyu, 2022). Such concepts apply especially to OTM educators, who will always have to adapt to changes in technology and pedagogical innovations. The pace of change in their industry necessitates an ongoing commitment to learning.

Despite the emphasis on the importance of lifelong learning strategies to research competence in the evolving global trend, there remains a gap in understanding the experiences of polytechnic educators. Research quality and teaching in the polytechnics in Nigeria have received less attention. Existing literature tends to focus more on university lecturers, yet the polytechnic educators who are more concerned with vocational and technical education are overlooked (Usman & Unuwa, 2021; Waskito, 2020). Addressing this gap will not only boost their research competence, but it will also position polytechnic education with a global standard. Based on this discussion, the study as part of the author's doctoral programme explores how OTM educators transform their experiences into effective lifelong learning strategies for enhancing research competency in government-owned polytechnics in southwest Nigeria. In pursuit of this study's objective, we formulated the following research questions:

- How do educators in the Office Technology and Management (OTM) perceive lifelong learning in enhancing their research competence?
- What are the barriers to lifelong learning for OTM educators?
- Which lifelong learning strategies do OTM educators commonly adopt to enhance their research competence?

Methodology

The study explores the role of lifelong learning strategies in enhancing the research competence of OTM educators in government-owned polytechnics in southwest Nigeria. A qualitative interpretative methodology was employed to explore the level of

research competence of office technology and management educators in polytechnics located in southwest Nigeria. Additionally, the study examines the role of lifelong learning strategies in their research competence. Qualitative methodology was utilized to provide a comprehensive understanding of participants' perceptions of the world, their experiential background, and the contextual factors that shape their research competence and professional development (Cohen et al., 2018). The study is of an interpretative paradigm that emphasizes the subjective interpretations individuals ascribe to their experiences and the social realities they create. Purposive sampling was used to select educators with over 10 years of teaching experience who are actively involved in academic or professional development activities within the selected polytechnics. This criterion indicated sufficient exposure for participants to lifelong learning approaches and engagement in research. In total, 11 heads of department, which include seven females and four males, were selected from polytechnics where OTM programmes are offered in the southwest region of Nigeria. All participants serve as the current heads of department at their respective polytechnics with more than 15 years of teaching experience and are above 45 years old. The selection of these polytechnics in the southwest region is to guarantee diversity and generalizability across institutional contexts while maintaining depth in data collection.

To achieve the study's objective, data was gathered via semi-structured interviews, facilitating a thorough examination of participants' responses while maintaining consistency in the interview approach. The interviews were conducted; participants were categorized based on their availability and date of choices. Each interview lasted 45–60 minutes and was conducted online using the Microsoft Teams virtual platform. With the participants' permission, interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim for analysis purposes. The qualitative data was analysed by thematic analysis. The researcher adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase technique to gain familiarity with the data, generate initial codes, identify themes, review them, define and label them, and compose the final report. A manual coding technique was utilized to ensure consistent sorting and coding of the data (Saladana, 2021). Inductive data analysis revealed themes, patterns, and insights that mirrored the participants'

experiences. Peer debriefing meetings with academic colleagues improved the accuracy of data interpretation, thereby ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings. The researcher sent the study institution's ethical approval to the heads of each department in all the selected polytechnics. Participants were informed of the study's objective and their right to withdraw at any moment while being assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Before data collection, participants gave consent, and all data were made anonymous to safeguard their privacy.

Findings

Thematic Explanation

The study explores the perceptions of Office Technology and Management educators regarding lifelong learning in enhancing their research competence. The data obtained from this study underwent a comprehensive process, encompassing manual categorization of the narratives and the interpretation of lifelong learning. After the coding phase, data revealed three primary themes, which are characterised as the lifelong learning perceptions, contextual barriers, and strategies employed by the OTM educators in government-owned polytechnics in Nigeria as explained below.

Lifelong Learning Perceptions of OTM Educators in Enhancing Research Competence

The first research question revealed how OTM educators perceive lifelong learning as enhancing their research competence and the meanings they assign to it in their research journey. Their perception of lifelong learning involves three subthemes: continuous learning practice, acquiring certifications, and embracing research opportunities. As stated by participant one in the continuous learning practice subtheme, "lifelong learning is believed to be a beneficial way to stay current, improve skills, and help others grow." Participant two echoed that "learning is a continuous process... as you continue to learn, you continue to refresh your knowledge." In addition to this, four participants said, "Lifelong learning... can sharpen your research competence, especially in the field of OTM." Participant two, on the other hand, said

that "setting personal learning targets... engaging in professional development... participating in research activity" were all ways that teachers become better in teaching research."

Another subtheme pointed out the need to acquire more certificates in the lifelong learning journey. As stated by participant four, who said, "continuous reading, certifications, collaborative research... and reflective thinking are things that can help educators engage in continuous learning in polytechnics. According to participant two, who quoted an adage, "the moment you stop learning, you start dying." This paragraph describes their perceptions of lifelong learning as a continuous way to acquire more knowledge through certifications. The third subtheme centers on broadening academic horizons perceived by OTM educators. Participants seven described academic engagements such as "traveling to conferences, setting personal goals, undertaking research with others, and being open to both formal and informal learning as research activities." Engaging in these lifelong learning activities by the OTM educators could enhance their understanding of research. The theme on the perceptions of educators in the OTM field emphasizes that lifelong learning is important for developing their research knowledge.

Lifelong Learning Barriers Identified by OTM Educators for Research Competence

The second research question focus on the barriers identified by the OTM educators in their lifelong learning journey within the Nigeria southwest polytechnics. Emerging subthemes include lack of institutional support, limited research exposure, institutional incentives encouraging local journals, lack of funding and limited digital knowledge. For instance, participant one stated that "programmes with master's or PhD holders are research-oriented degrees." This aligns with participant three's assertion, where it was said that "many lecturers do not possess the required knowledge on how to conduct research, and they do not show much interest in getting trained." This limited exposure is a challenge that may be responsible for low research skills. Although participant four said that the "notion of low level of research competence is in the past... many are now publishing and upgrading their knowledge." Participant five still pointed

out that "the area of institutional support needs to be looked into" to enhance their skills. This shows that limited exposure, lack of institutional support and a tendency to promote local journals above those that are more relevant to a worldwide audience are of concern within the polytechnic settings.

Furthermore, participant five mentioned barriers such as "combining work with family" and "adult learners facing more responsibility" as challenges to a seamless lifelong learning experience. In addition, Participant six mentioned that "funding... affects teaching staff who desire to publish in reputable international journals." As participant three stated, "If you do not have resilience... you cannot go far in the lifelong learning journey", this shows how they strive to achieve research competence. Participant one, on the other hand, pointed out that educators "should schedule regular time for reading and enhancing research skills to stay abreast of artificial intelligence development globally." In summary, the most significant barriers center around not having enough time, money, or support from their institutions and having to balance their personal lives with their professional development.

Lifelong Learning Strategies Adopted to Enhance Research Competence

The third research question focused on the lifelong learning strategies employed by the OTM educators to enhance research competence. As the third theme, OTM educators revealed four subthemes for strategies employed such as, professional advancement and networking, self-directed learning and networking, technological involvement, and digital media as well as time management and work-life balance. Participants emphasized that when you 'attend and participate in conferences and seminars as well as team collaboration in research, these activities help in advancing professional careers' (participant 2). This conclusion supports the idea that professional development can help people become better researchers.

Another subtheme identified by the OTM educators is self-directed learning and individual development. The participants agreed that "strategies should involve setting some personal learning targets and being intentional about growth." Participants

expressed the formulation of individual learning goals, their engagement in continuous reading, and the attainment of additional qualifications. Reflective writing behaviour, such as using digital tools and managing study time, rather than abstract or theoretical pursuits, were also mentioned as ways to enhance the research competence of educators.

The sub-theme on technological and digital media involvement emphasized the opportunity for effective teaching among OTM educators. Participants acknowledged the growing importance of digital literacy and technological tools in research and education. As a technical programme, participant one emphasized that when they “focus on adopting technological and digital tools as part of lifelong learning, it helps them stay updated with current trends and research methodologies.” These stress real-world professional development, personal growth, and digital technology, which promote a dynamic firsthand approach to lifelong learning. As stated by participant eleven, “with the high level of digital literacy required today, we have to strategise as lecturers to remain relevant in research.” This involvement can assist educators in keeping up with digital skills, which can be applied to research.

The subtheme on professional growth emerged as OTM educators mentioned reemphasised the importance of research skills in academia. Attaining competency in research is important for learning, developing curriculum, teaching pedagogy, and career growth. Participant five corroborated this, adding that “research competence... cultivates critical thinking... and the capacity to apply this concept... to current situations.” Also, participant one stated that “research competence can lead to innovative teaching and enhance classroom experience.” Participant two described further that, “the curriculum of OTM is centered on research for final-year students and without research teaching, the graduate will be unable to write their dissertation.” According to participant six, “research competence will enable lecturers to guide and inspire students... guide their mentees, colleagues, and students.” A key theme echoed that ‘research makes teaching more effective, makes sure the curriculum is relevant, and imparts students with the skills they need to confront global problems’ (participant ten).

Prioritising time management and work-life balance is another subtheme that emerged from the gathered data as participants voiced out the importance effective time management. For example, participant eight mentioned that 'time is a big concern in academics. Addresses the challenge of balancing professional responsibilities and personal commitments while dedicating time to continuous learning. Participants reported significant challenges in balancing work responsibilities with personal life while dedicating time to continuous education (participant seven). The findings indicated that participants reported their jobs necessitated observation, discussion, and learning from others, particularly senior colleagues. These findings stressed that pressure with tasks can hinder their ability to deliver effective teaching.

Discussion

The results of the investigations reveal that lifelong learning approaches are crucial in improving the research competence of those who teach OTM in Nigerian polytechnics. All these identified themes and subthemes illustrate the aspirations for professional growth. This study aligns with the Experiential Learning Theory of Kolb (2009), in that instructors are actively involved in the process of direct experience (i.e., going to conferences, seminars and workshops), reflecting on it, conceptualization through new certifications, and putting new knowledge into practice through conducting research and teaching. The present investigation is a cyclical process that leads to adaptability and critical thinking in research proficiency. The present study revealed the status quo in the Nigerian context with evidence that there are obstacles in the government-owned polytechnic systems within the studied areas. Nevertheless, the fact that they continue to contend with notable obstacles, i.e., lack of sufficient funding, high workloads, and weak institutional support, reaffirms that the gap between personal motivation and institutional support still exists.

The study explains its findings using David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory which postulates that all learning is fundamentally based on experience and active participation (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2009). Although critiqued by Kerschner et al.

(2006) who argued that experiential learning required direct instructional guidance to be effective. Other studies corroborate with Kolb's framework to strengthen the importance of lifelong learning for educators (Molapo & Malatji, 2024; Saoualih et al. 2025; Viet, 2022). Experiential learning theory identifies four developmental stages of learning: concrete experience, abstract conceptualization, reflective observation, and active exploration, which are essential for OTM educators in developing lifelong learning. Riding on this, OTM educators in government-owned polytechnic setting interprets their learning experience through perceptions, identified barriers and adoption of different strategies.

Office technology and management (OTM) educators perceive lifelong learning as a continuous way of staying relevant and effective in the evolving academia landscape. The adoption of experiential learning framework as a theoretical lens describes the conceptualization and reflective cycle of experience which forms the lived realities of educators within the polytechnic context. This resonates with their responses during the interview sessions as they perceive the need for an in depth understanding of research, actively involved in continuous learning, being self-motivated and engaging in innovative teachings. Literature that applied experiential learning theory to examine the influence of lifelong learning on research competence found significant relationships between these two (Demir et al., 2022; Landberg & Partsch, 2023; Said & Abdallah, 2024; Ugbheoke & Egele, 2022). Indicating that educator's perception of lifelong learning is aimed at nurturing knowledge generation as a dynamic tool that encourages continuous learning practice (Ocak & Karakuyu, 2022). By attending conferences, engaging in academic seminars, and involving themselves in various academic activities, they develop both divergent and convergent knowledge and learning. Further, OTM educators in the polytechnic settings move from one level of knowledge to another and apply theoretical knowledge to their real-life situations when they participate in experiential learning (McCune, 2018; Morris, 2019). By involving themselves in academic-related rigours/activities such as the ability to conduct quality research, this increases their motivations and foster professional growth.

Challenges within OTM profession in the Nigerian government-owned polytechnics on the other hand are important aspects that cannot be overlooked in this discussion. Educators face challenges at these institutions including inadequate research competence, limited supervision capacity, insufficient time from academic obligations and continuous learning, and the absence of clear academic research education strategies and outcomes (Ibironke & Alison, 2024; Umezulike & Anozie, 2022; Tight, 2019).

Lifelong learning and research skills are essential for educators since they enhance teaching effectiveness, facilitate professional growth, and improve students' academic experiences. They are crucial for OTM educators, as it markedly improves the quality of their instruction. This continuous engagement in research cultivates critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, enabling educators to address educational challenges more efficiently. Moreover, continuous learning generates innovative teachings and ideas, updates knowledge and assist in the acquisition of more relevant skills for the OTM educators in southwest polytechnic in Nigeria. Applying the experiential lens involves the stage where educators observe and reflect on the acquired experience. This is referred to as the stage of the learning circle called the reflective observation such that educators reflect on their experiences from different perspectives. The lack of lifelong learning couple with these challenges can lead to outdated knowledge and skills, which could worsen or decline their research competence (Benavot et al., 2022; Power & Maclean, 2012). Therefore, the adoption of lifelong learning strategies is crucial and can be used as catalysts of change within academia. As a result, this understanding has fuelled the author's aspiration to further deepen educational research engagement by enrolling in a PhD at the University of Lincoln to understand inclusive and skill-driven strategies for academic growth.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The study explores the perception of office technology and management (OTM) educators in government-owned polytechnics in Southwest Nigeria regarding research competence and lifelong learning strategies. Our study reveals that OTM educators

have a personal motivation to incorporate lifelong learning; however, the findings in the present study show that optimal utilization of the concepts cannot be achieved without a backup of organizational culture and policy. Further, we found in our study that a symbiotic process requires institutional support among OTM educators. This institutional support facilitates an enabling environment toward sustainability in research and advancement in academia. Therefore, the present study advocates lifelong learning rather than imposing sole responsibility on OTM educators.

This study explores the role of lifelong learning strategies in enhancing research competence among OTM educators in government-owned polytechnics in southwest Nigeria. The study provides recommendations and highlights actions to strengthen the higher education sector in Nigeria, particularly in government-owned polytechnic. First, the study recommends setting continuous professional development should be institutionalised by polytechnic management through regular organised workshops, seminars, and conferences. In addition, government and institutions need to save funds that can sponsor programmes to enable educators to participate in lifelong learning activities. This entails providing research grants, financing certification, and the provision of incentives to lecturers to pursue professional development and research. Additionally, the study suggests that polytechnics invest in network and digital infrastructure, research systems, analysis software, and emerging technology. Initiatives like this can help educators to familiarise themselves more with technology and render quality research and teaching.

Currently, there are twelve government-owned polytechnics in the southwestern region of Nigeria. The present study covered all polytechnics, making the results of this study generalisable to only the southwestern region. Although the research was limited in scope, further studies should be conducted to cover more different polytechnics, universities, and colleges in a broader part of Nigeria. Additionally, further studies should discuss how different forms of digital technologies might enable more access to lifelong learning or help with work-life balance among educators in the government-owned polytechnics in Nigeria.

This study contributes to knowledge by revealing the status quo of the Nigerian polytechnic context, which revealed a lack of funding and proposed that lifelong learning is essential for career progression for educators. While literature exists on research competencies at the university level, our understanding is crude about lived experiences and the relevance of lifelong learning for improving the research competence of educators at the polytechnic institutions in Nigeria. This study therefore fills this gap.

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Oluwakemi Ibironke is currently a year one PhD educational research and development candidate at the University of Lincoln. Having completed her MA Education programme in 2024, she has published an extract from her dissertation after the completion of her master's degree. Currently, Oluwakemi is affiliated to Lead City University where she served as a lecturer in the department of information management and embarked on her first PhD in the same university in 2021. The present paper is an extract from her recently concluded doctoral programme in office and information management department at Lead City University Ibadan, Nigeria. This present study serves as a pilot study of a broader investigations into the importance of lifelong learning strategies in enhancing research competence of educators. With her current research in the post-study trajectory of the Nigerian international students, it is hope that this study will provide support for professional development of international students currently studying in the UK higher educational sector.