

Bridging the Gap: A Conceptual Framework for Academic Progression from HND Office Technology and Management to University-Based Office and Information Management in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Nigerian polytechnic graduates in Office Technology and Management (OTM) face significant uncertainty in advancing their education because there is no nationally coordinated articulation pathway that connects the Higher National Diploma (HND) in OTM to the university discipline of Office and Information Management (OIM). This paper set out to examine the current positioning of the Nigerian Polytechnics' OTM and university-based OIM, to identify the academic progression barrier faced by OTM graduates seeking further study as well as to propose a policy framework for structured academic progression. A conceptual document analysis approach was employed, drawing on National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and National Universities Commission (NUC) curriculum documents, university programme descriptions, postgraduate admission materials, and peer-reviewed literature published between 2016 and 2026. Document analysis revealed that OTM is an established, NBTE-approved technical and professional programme with a competency profile that substantially overlaps with OIM. It was also found that OIM is a recognized NUC-listed university discipline that evolved from the same secretarial and office education tradition. The study found that the barriers facing HND OTM graduates are not academic in origin, but are the product of institutional failures. A five-step progression framework was proposed covering formal equivalence recognition, a transparent direct entry guide, structured bridging courses, postgraduate admission clarity, and regular inter-regulatory curriculum dialogue. Coordinated implementation would open a clear and nationally recognized academic pathway for OTM graduates and strengthen office management education as a field of scholarly importance in Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: Academic Progression, Higher National Diploma, Nigerian Polytechnics, Office and Information Management, Office Technology and Management, Postgraduate Education.

I. INTRODUCTION

Office Technology and Management (OTM) is a programme through which Nigerian polytechnics prepare students for office administration, information processing, records management, professional communication, and the application of office technologies. The programme carries a recognizable professional identity: the National Board for Technical Education describes the HND in OTM as a four-semester programme designed to equip students with secretarial and office skills for employment (NBTE, 2004a), and the National Diploma (ND) curriculum presents OTM as a two-year course providing skills for work across multiple sectors (NBTE, 2004b). Despite this institutional standing, OTM graduates encounter a poorly defined academic road once the HND is completed. In the polytechnic system, the field carries the name Office Technology and Management. In the university system, the related discipline appears as Office and Information Management (OIM), listed by the National Universities Commission under the Administration and Management cluster in its Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (NUC, 2026). The two fields share historical roots and overlapping course content, yet Nigeria has produced no nationally coordinated arrangement that formally links one to the other. No joint NBTE-NUC equivalence statement designates HND OTM as a recognized feeder qualification into B.Sc. OIM or postgraduate OIM programmes, and university admission requirements typically resort to broad “relevant discipline” language that leaves OTM graduates uncertain of their standing.

This matters for three reasons. First, students who invest time and resources in ND and HND programmes reasonably expect those credentials to open further academic doors, when the path is unclear, some repeat unnecessary coursework, others enter unrelated disciplines such as Business Education at PGDTE level, and others abandon postgraduate ambitions entirely. Secondly, for OTM as a field, the absence of a progression route risks positioning the programme as terminally occupational, which reduces its attractiveness to prospective students and limits the pipeline of future OTM lecturers, researchers, and curriculum developers. Third, at the national level, the failure to connect TVET credentials to university pathways conflicts with internationally recognized principles of lifelong learning, which hold that technical education should not become an educational dead end (Field et al., 2018). This paper was guided by four specific objectives:

- (a). To establish how OTM is positioned in Nigerian polytechnic education;
- (b). To establish how OIM is positioned in Nigerian universities;
- (c). To identify the academic barriers facing HND OTM graduates seeking further study; and
- (d). To propose a structured and evidence-based framework for bridging the OTM-OIM gap.

The paper contributed a five-step conceptual progression framework as a policy starting point, grounded in document analysis and situated within international TVET literature, while acknowledging that empirical validation through stakeholder engagement is a necessary next step.

II. RELATED WORKS

A. OTM in the Nigerian Polytechnic System

OTM occupies a recognized space within the Nigerian polytechnic system as an active, NBTE-approved technical and professional programme. Its curriculum combines general education, foundation courses, professional office subjects, and supervised industrial work experience (NBTE, 2004a), and the programme continues to appear in the 2026 NBTE brochure of approved curricula (NBTE, 2026). However, the primary curriculum document dates from 2004, a period

that predates cloud-based office systems, artificial intelligence tools, remote collaboration platforms, and data-driven administrative workflows. This currency gap has attracted consistent scholarly attention. OTM occupies a recognized space within the Nigerian polytechnic system as an active, NBTE-approved technical and professional programme. Its curriculum combines general education, foundation courses, professional office subjects, and supervised industrial work experience (NBTE, 2004a), and the programme continues to appear in the 2026 NBTE brochure of approved curricula (NBTE, 2026). However, the primary curriculum document dates from 2004, a period that predates cloud-based office systems, artificial intelligence tools, remote collaboration platforms, and data-driven administrative workflows. This currency gap has attracted consistent scholarly attention.

Okoli, (2020) found that government and regulatory bodies needed to review the OTM curriculum and integrate modern ICT facilities and entrepreneurial courses into it. Ukata and Nmehielle, (2024) extended this concern specifically to Rivers State tertiary institutions, finding OTM curriculum development inadequate and noting that emerging trends such as artificial intelligence had not yet received sufficient attention. Ezechukwu et al., (2021) assessed career readiness among graduating OTM students in South-East Nigerian polytechnics and found high ICT and socio-psychological skill levels alongside relative weaknesses in office management, managerial, entrepreneurial, and communication competencies. This profile suggests that OTM already develops competencies relevant to OIM-level study, while also identifying areas where academic strengthening would support upward progression. Ejeka and Mgbonyebi, (2016) connected the quality assurance question directly to programme credibility, arguing that achieving quality in OTM programmes requires deliberate attention to both instructional inputs and graduate outcomes. Nosakhare (2023) further said that business education curricula connected to OTM must adapt to modern office technologies and provide experiential learning that equips graduates for contemporary workplaces. Taken together, this body of work confirms that OTM is a living but evolving field that is steadily converging with the competency profile of university-level OIM.

B. OIM in the Nigerian University System

Office and Information Management has gained institutional visibility in the Nigerian university system through NUC recognition and departmental presence at several universities. The NUC Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards describes B.Sc. OIM as a programme whose philosophy centres on quality education that develops theoretical and practical knowledge, computer skills, and competencies for the technology-driven corporate environment, with the aim of producing graduates equipped for further academic programmes, careers, and research locally and internationally (NUC, 2026). Ignatius Ajuru University of Education specifies that its B.Sc. OIM prepares professionals who can serve as office administrators, information managers, and executive secretaries (Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, n.d.). Rivers State University records that its OIM department evolved from Secretarial Administration following the expansion of ICT in administrative work, and currently offers MSc, MPhil, and PhD programmes in the field (Rivers State University, n.d.; Rivers State University, 2023). Lead City University similarly lists OIM among its postgraduate offerings (Lead City University, n.d.). Alabi (2025) linked OIM competence directly to job performance and information technology application, providing empirical support for the argument that OIM graduates possess capabilities that extend beyond secretarial preparation into higher-level information and organizational management. These departmental histories and competency profiles collectively

confirm that OIM did not emerge as a new and unrelated discipline; rather, it represents an academic development of the same tradition from which OTM also grew.

C. The Gap: Articulation between TVET and University Education

International scholarship on TVET progression provides the theoretical frame for understanding the OTM-OIM gap as a structural rather than academic problem. UNESCO identifies the absence of clear articulation pathways as a structural barrier that prevents technically trained graduates from accessing higher education and lifelong learning (Field et al., 2018). Articulation frameworks in other national contexts typically include formal equivalence agreements between vocational and academic awarding bodies, credit recognition mechanisms, and bridging provisions that close academic gaps without requiring the repetition of completed learning. The absence of these mechanisms in Nigeria's OTM-OIM space places the country out of step with best practice in TVET-to-higher-education progression. The Nigerian regulatory landscape compounds this structural problem. The NBTE governs polytechnic programmes including OTM, while the NUC governs university programmes including OIM. In 2023, NBTE announced a one-year online top-up arrangement for HND holders, and NUC responded with a public warning that NBTE had acted outside its mandate (The Punch, 2023a, 2023b). NBTE's website continues to carry a link to an HND Top-up Programme Portal (NBTE, n.d.), indicating the matter remains unresolved. This regulatory tension adds institutional uncertainty to an already unclear academic pathway and has so far prevented the kind of coordinated inter-agency action that would produce a national articulation framework. The literature reviewed does not identify any existing study that has specifically mapped the OTM-OIM articulation gap or proposed a structured progression framework for it; this paper addresses that absence directly.

III. METHODOLOGY

This paper employs a conceptual document analysis approach. Conceptual document analysis is appropriate when the primary research task is to examine the policy and institutional basis of a problem before primary data collection, and when the documents themselves constitute the principal evidence of how institutions have acted or failed to act (Bowen, 2009). In this case, the central question which is whether a formal academic link exists between OTM and OIM, can be answered, at least at the level of policy documentation, without surveying individuals. The approach is explicitly conceptual rather than empirical; its findings are inferential and are presented as a foundation for future empirical research rather than as verified conclusions. Source selection followed two criteria: institutional authority and topical relevance. Institutionally authoritative sources include the NBTE HND and ND curricula for Office Technology and Management (NBTE, 2004a, 2004b), the 2026 NBTE brochure of approved curricula (NBTE, 2026), and the NUC Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards for Administration and Management (NUC, 2026). The NBTE and NUC documents cited as 2026 editions represent the most recently issued curriculum and accreditation publications from those bodies at the time of writing, confirmed by their listing on the respective official agency portals. University-level sources include departmental and programme pages from Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State University, Lead City University, and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and postgraduate admission materials where publicly available (Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, n.d.; Lead City University, n.d.; Rivers State University, n.d., 2023; University of Nigeria, Nsukka, n.d.). Topically relevant sources include peer-reviewed studies

on OTM curriculum content, career readiness, quality assurance, technology integration, and TVET progression published between 2016 and 2025.

The analysis was organized around four guiding questions: (1) How is OTM positioned in Nigerian polytechnic education? (2) How is OIM positioned in Nigerian universities? (3) What academic barriers arise when HND OTM graduates seek further study? (4) What practical framework can bridge the OTM-OIM gap? These questions are treated as interconnected because programme naming, curriculum content, admission recognition, and postgraduate access together constitute the academic environment that OTM graduates must navigate. The conceptual document analysis method was chosen over survey or interview methods specifically because the regulatory and policy questions at the heart of the study are amenable to documentary evidence, and because the paper is intended to provide a conceptual framework that can inform and focus future empirical research designs.

Proposed OTM-OIM Progression Framework

Based on the findings above, this paper proposes a five-step progression framework designed to bridge the gap between HND OTM and university-based OIM. The framework is a conceptual first-order proposal requiring empirical validation through future stakeholder consultation and piloting before national adoption. Table 1 presents the framework in full.

Table 1: Proposed Five-Step OTM-OIM Progression Framework

Step	Action	Lead Responsibility	Expected Outcome
1: Equivalence Recognition	NBTE and NUC jointly declare HND OTM a relevant feeder qualification for B.Sc. OIM, subject to specified grade and course requirements.	NBTE and NUC	Consistent recognition of OTM across university admission systems.
2: Direct Entry Guide	Universities offering OIM publish a clear statement on OTM entry level (200 or 300), minimum grade, and any required supplementary courses.	Individual universities / NUC	Reduced confusion at the point of application; transparent admission criteria.
3: Bridging Courses	Short bridging modules in research methods, academic writing, information systems theory, and organizational behaviour offered to qualifying OTM entrants.	Receiving universities	Academic gap closed without requiring full repeat of completed coursework.
4: Postgraduate Admission Clarity	Universities explicitly state whether HND OTM holders may apply for PGD in OIM, and whether a PGD route leads to MSc admission.	Universities / NUC	OTM graduates have a visible, named route into postgraduate study and academic careers.
5: Curriculum Dialogue	NBTE and NUC conduct periodic joint reviews to align OTM and OIM curricula around emerging office technologies and shared competence standards.	NBTE and NUC	Inter-system curriculum coherence; easier credit recognition over time.

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed academic progression pathway from ND/HND OTM through the five steps to postgraduate study in OIM.

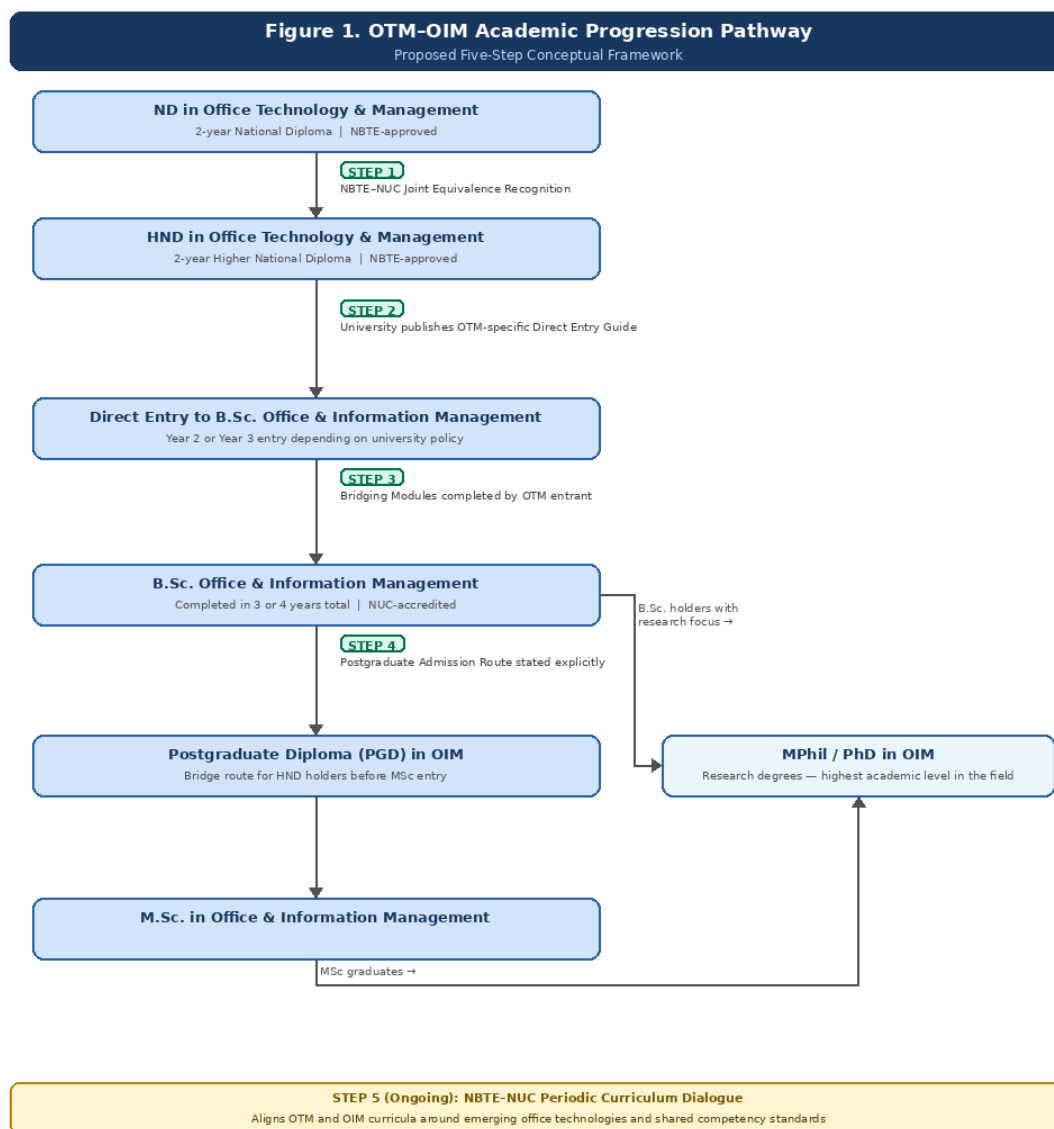


Figure 1: Visual Model of the Proposed OTM-OIM Academic Progression Pathway

This framework avoids two extremes that would both be difficult to defend. It does not propose that HND OTM should automatically equate to B.Sc. OIM in all cases, since differences in academic depth, research training, and graduation requirements would make such a claim academically unjustifiable. Equally, it rejects the position that OTM graduates should restart their education from scratch, which would disregard prior learning and create unjustifiable barriers for technically trained graduates. The defensible position is to recognize relevant OTM learning, identify the gaps, and build a fair academic bridge. The framework also separates curriculum reform from progression planning: addressing progression does not require waiting for OTM curriculum revision, though Steps 1 through 4 and Step 5 should proceed in parallel rather than in sequence where institutional capacity allows.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Document analysis across all reviewed sources produced three interconnected findings. First, no joint NBTE-NUC equivalence statement linking HND OTM to B.Sc. OIM or to postgraduate OIM programmes exists in any of the authoritative documents reviewed. The NBTE approves OTM in the polytechnic system and the NUC approves OIM in the university system (NBTE, 2026; NUC, 2026), but the two bodies have not jointly published an equivalence statement, a progression guide, or a formal credit recognition framework that enables students, departments, and admission officers to understand how the two fields connect. The NUC Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards does provide for direct entry into OIM degree programmes, noting that students admitted through direct entry can complete the programme in three years compared to four years for UTME entrants (NUC, 2026), but this provision does not name OTM as a qualifying route and does not specify the grade or course requirements that would apply to OTM applicants. Second, where university admission requirements address HND holders, the language is generically inclusive rather than specifically affirming. References to “relevant disciplines” and “cognate fields” leave OTM graduates uncertain of their standing and expose them to inconsistent treatment by individual admission officers. This is not necessarily discriminatory in intent, but its practical effect is to make recognition dependent on the familiarity of each admissions decision-maker with OTM content and level. Third, the unresolved regulatory dispute between NBTE and NUC over the HND top-up arrangement (The Punch, 2023a, 2023b) has deepened the institutional uncertainty already created by the absence of a formal articulation framework. These findings are consistent with Field et al.’s (2018) characterization of TVET articulation gaps as structural barriers rather than academic ones; the problem is not that OTM graduates lack relevant learning but that the institutions responsible for managing the interface between the two systems have not done so.

Despite the institutional gap, the content comparison between OTM and OIM does not support the view that the two fields are fundamentally incompatible. The HND OTM curriculum includes Management Information Systems, office practice, and professional development alongside general and foundation studies (NBTE, 2004a). The OIM university curriculum emphasizes computer skills, core competencies, and the technology-driven corporate environment (NUC, 2026). The institutional histories of Rivers State University and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education further confirm that OIM evolved from the same secretarial and office education tradition that produced OTM (Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, n.d.; Rivers State University, n.d.). The divergence between them is therefore one of naming, regulatory location, and academic level, not one of fundamentally different subject matter. This finding is directly consistent with Alabi’s (2025) evidence that OIM competencies support job performance and information technology application, and with Nosakhare’s (2023) argument that office technology management and university-level business education curricula are converging around the same professional and technological competency expectations. The implication is that a formal articulation framework between OTM and OIM is not only administratively desirable but academically defensible, since shared content already provides a legitimate basis for credit recognition and direct entry. The consequences of the articulation gap extend beyond individual students. When OTM graduates cannot access OIM degree and postgraduate programmes through a clear and consistent route, the pool of potential university-level students in the field is reduced, and the pipeline of future OIM lecturers, researchers, and curriculum developers narrows. This contributes to what Ejeka and Mgbonyebi (2016) identified as a broader quality assurance challenge in OTM, where the professional credibility of the field

depends partly on its capacity to produce graduates who can progress into academic and research roles. The manpower dimension is significant beyond the field itself: administrative and information work supports almost every sector of the Nigerian economy, and higher-level expertise in office and information management is a national human capital asset, not merely a narrow disciplinary interest.

Table 2: Summary of Research Questions and Document Analysis Findings

Research Question	Finding from Document Analysis
1. How is OTM positioned in Nigerian polytechnic education?	OTM is an active, NBTE-approved technical and professional programme with consistent institutional presence, though its 2004 curriculum predates many current office technologies and the field remain partly associated with secretarial rather than management functions.
2. How is OIM positioned in Nigerian universities?	OIM is a recognized NUC-listed university programme with postgraduate provision at some institutions; it shares disciplinary origins with OTM but occupies a different regulatory space and academic level.
3. What academic barriers arise when HND OTM graduates seek further study?	No NBTE-NUC joint equivalence statement exists; university Admission language is generically inclusive rather than OTM-specific; and an unresolved regulatory Dispute between NBTE and NUC adds institutional uncertainty.
4. What practical ridge can be constructed between OTM and OIM?	A five-step progression framework is proposed covering equivalence recognition, a direct entry guide, bridging courses, postgraduate admission clarity, and sustained curriculum dialogue

LIMITATIONS

This study was limited by its reliance on publicly available policy documents and peer-reviewed literature. No primary data was collected from OTM students, graduates, lecturers, or admission officers, and the findings from document analysis remain necessarily inferential. The institutions examined, primarily Rivers State University, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Lead City University, and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, constitute an illustrative rather than a nationally representative sample, and institutional practices across the full range of Nigerian universities offering OIM may vary beyond what this analysis captures. The five-step progression framework proposed in the next section has not been subjected to expert validation or stakeholder consultation; it represents a first-order conceptual proposal that requires empirical testing before it can be recommended for national policy adoption.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper set out to clarify the academic relationship between HND OTM and university-level OIM in Nigeria and to explain why that relationship has not produced a workable national progression arrangement. All four research objectives were addressed and it was found that OTM is an established, NBTE-approved technical and professional programme with a competency profile that substantially overlaps with OIM. OIM is a recognised NUC-listed university discipline that evolved from the same secretarial and office education tradition. The barriers facing HND OTM graduates are not academic in origin; they are the product of three institutional failures: the absence of a joint NBTE-NUC equivalence statement, admission language that names OTM graduates only generically, and an unresolved regulatory dispute between the two governing bodies. The five-step framework proposed here makes three contributions to the field.

First, it is the first structured articulation framework specifically designed for the OTM-OIM transition in Nigeria, filling a gap that the existing literature has not addressed. Second, it grounds the progression argument in both documentary evidence of shared disciplinary content and in the international TVET articulation literature, providing a stronger basis for policy advocacy than anecdotal institutional evidence alone could support. Third, it separates the progression problem from the curriculum reform problem, making it actionable without waiting for the resolution of the longer-term OTM curriculum update challenge. For practical application, this paper recommends that NBTE and NUC initiate a joint technical working group with an explicit mandate to produce an OTM-OIM equivalence statement and a national direct entry guide within a defined timeline. Universities offering OIM programmes should, in the interim, review their admission language and publish OTM-specific entry criteria. Future empirical research should test the framework's steps through stakeholder consultation with OTM graduates, admission officers, university OIM departments, and NBTE and NUC officials, and should include a national survey of OIM admission practices to document the actual range of institutional responses to HND OTM applicants.

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