



# BUILDING COMPETENCY IN UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF: A CASE STUDY OF BELLS UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, OTA, NIGERIA

Chris O. AJILA, Ph.D

College of Management Sciences

Bells University of Technology, Ota, Nigeria

cajila@bellsuniversity.edu.ng; cajila2002@gmail.com

## Abstract

*This paper presents a perspective for managing human resources with a particular focus on Building Competency in University Administrative Staff with the Bells University of Technology, Ota, Nigeria as a Case Study. This paper x-ray issues on building competency among the administrative staff of Bells University of Technology (Bells Tech). It looks at qualities sought in an administrative officer, skills for an administrative role, and tips for improving the skills. The paper further presents the Career progression of administrative officers' cadre in Bells Tech, the Organogram of the Registry of Bells Tech, and functions of the three Units of the Registry. It also presents Tips for becoming a competent administrative officer as well as the characteristics of a competent/productive administrative officer. The paper concludes that administrative officers in Bells Tech who would be regarded as competent must put up a positive "Can-Do" Attitude. He/she must be ready, available, and willing to get the job done, and done well.*

*Keywords: Competent, Building Competency, Administrative Staff, Administrative Officer, Bells Tech*

---

## OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Bells Tech** simply means Bells University of Technology, Ota, Nigeria. It is the first private university of Technology in Nigeria. It was granted an operational license on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2005 and commenced operation on 1<sup>st</sup> July of the same year.

**Administrative staff/officer** means a staff/worker or an officer of Bells Tech that is responsible for providing administrative support excluding Secretarial/typing duties in an organization. They are staff /officers of the University Registry, which is the central point of the University administration. Administrative staff in this paper falls into two categories/cadres: Administrative officers' cadre and Executive officers' cadre.

## INTRODUCTION

Competence refers to the integrated knowledge, skills, and attributes that people need to perform a specific job effectively (Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, 2022). Having competence means having sufficient/adequate knowledge and skills to carry out a task and also the appropriate attitude to perform a certain work effectively and sufficiently. Competence in a task means having the ability to think and behave which will lead to the successful execution of that task. It is having the capacity to function or develop in a particular way.

What can we do to build competence among administrative staff at the Bells University of Technology?

- Regular On-the-job training is an important way of developing competence
- Participate in working groups at the workplace;
- Find a mentor;
- Use time wisely;
- Attend short courses/ seminars/ conferences/ workshops in and outside the University;
- Study for another complementary degree or pursue a higher degree.
- Read and study on your own, use e-learning possibilities.

As administrative officers when you develop competence in areas important to you, the benefits include:

- more self-confidence,
- completion of tasks quicker or more efficiently,
- making fewer mistakes,
- become more knowledgeable and informed,
- improve your chances of taking advantage of opportunities.

To increase your level of competence in administrative duties, you will have to develop soft skills which include attributes and personality traits that help you to interact with others and succeed in the workplace. It (soft skills) also includes:

- the ability to communicate with prospective clients,
- mentor your co-workers,
- lead a team,
- follow instructions, and
- get a job done on time.

## SKILLS FOR AN ADMINISTRATIVE ROLE

A skill is a learned power/developed aptitude or the ability to do something competently. Several skills are needed to carry out administrative work with flying colours. Administrative positions rely primarily on administrative skills. The following administrative skills are therefore necessary: (Olaleye, 2013; Careerbuilder,2021; Keiling, 2021).

**Communication skills** – are all of the abilities that help Administrative Officers share information with others, both inside and outside of the University. Strong communication skill is the lifeblood of any business and is at the core of every human interaction; whether verbal or written. There are countless reasons why this skill is important; administrative officers need to pass on information to co-workers. He/she may need to book appointments, transfer calls, speak with suppliers, clients, and other external agencies. A lot of things can go wrong without a good grounding in this skill. This also includes Customer service skills which include active listening and setting expectations.

**Interpersonal Skills** – are the tactics administrative officers use to interact with others effectively. Interpersonal skills that will make an administrative officer perform at his/her job include self-confidence; positive attitude; empathy; listening skills; openness to feedback; reliability; respectfulness; negotiation skills; conflict resolution; assertiveness; leadership skills and sense of humour.

**Well-developed filing skills and attention to detail** – Strong filing skills also speak to your ability to stay organized. Administrative professionals must file physical or electronic documents so that they are easy to find.

**Self-initiative/Decision Making** – Working as an administrative officer doesn't make you a yes-man (or woman). Many situations will call for quick decisions to be made (smart ones by the way). Employers lookout for candidates who will hit the ground running, people who can think, and who can work with less supervision. The ability to logically draw conclusions and make decisions in different circumstances makes the work of an administrative officer easier.

**Organisational skills** - help you arrange your physical and digital space as well as your time, resources, and mental bandwidth so that you can complete tasks as efficiently as possible. Having the responsibility to complete tasks on time and in a quality manner without much oversight is crucial. You need to aptly recall information or know how to source for it. Beyond the paperwork, nearly all the tasks that an administrative officer would perform would entail putting things together in the shortest time possible, which means he/she would need to plan and prioritize what's important, be proactive, and generally ensure operational activities run smoothly.

**Time management skills** – are a subset of organizational skills. Time management skills help you plan your time, be more efficient, and accomplish everything you need to at work. They also ensure that everyone on a team or in an office is respecting the time of others. Some examples of administrative time management skills are deadline management, calendar management, delegation, goal setting, prioritization, scheduling, task management, and time estimation. Administrative professionals must use time efficiently and ensure appointments never overlap.

**Technical skills** – are the knowledge and ability to perform specific tasks, especially those that require computers or other equipment or software.

**Problem-solving skills** – are skills that allow you to identify and define a situation that needs changing. They help an individual figure out what to do next. Once you identify what needs changing, problem-solving skills also enable you to identify the best outcomes, define potential processes for achieving the best outcomes, and evaluate how the process achieved the desired outcome.

#### **Tips for improving administrative skills:**

- Set personal career goals: get to know what is required of you to move from one position to the other. Setting specific, measurable goals to increase some or all of the above administrative skills can help you improve over time.
- Identify your weak points. Ask yourself questions to figure out which skills you need to improve. What tasks give you the most difficulty? What parts of your work have gotten the most negative feedback from past supervisors or co-workers?
- Ask for help: Is there someone you know well who excels at the skill set you want to improve? See if they are willing to help you out, but be clear in what you are asking for.
- Practice. Improving almost any skill requires that you actually use that skill, so find ways to practice your skills.
- Get organized: Take time to make a clean, organized workspace for yourself that can help you prioritize tasks, manage your time well and respond quickly to others who need the information you have.

#### **CAREER PROGRESSION OF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICERS IN BELLS TECH**

At the Bells University of Technology, the career progression of an Administrative Officer or Executive officer (Administration) starts from being an Administrative Officer II or Administrative Assistant respectively. All appointments are made concerning basic qualifications and experience considered essential for the performance of the jobs assigned to each position

(Bells University of Technology Staff Information Handbook - Condition of Service for Senior Non-Teaching Staff)

The career progression of the two cadres (Administrative Officers and Executive) is presented below:

#### **(A). Administrative Officers Cadre**

##### **Progression from**

1. Administrative Officer II **to** Administrative Officer 1 (By Promotion),
2. Administrative Officer 1 **to** Assistant Registrar (By Promotion)
3. Assistant Registrar **to** Senior Assistant Registrar (By Promotion)
4. Senior Assistant Registrar **to** Principal Assistant Registrar (By Promotion)
5. Principal Assistant Registrar **to** Deputy Registrar (By Appointment subject to vacancy)
6. Deputy Registrar **to** Registrar (By Appointment subject to vacancy)

Note: All officers in this category must be computer literate.

#### **(B). Executive officers' Cadre**

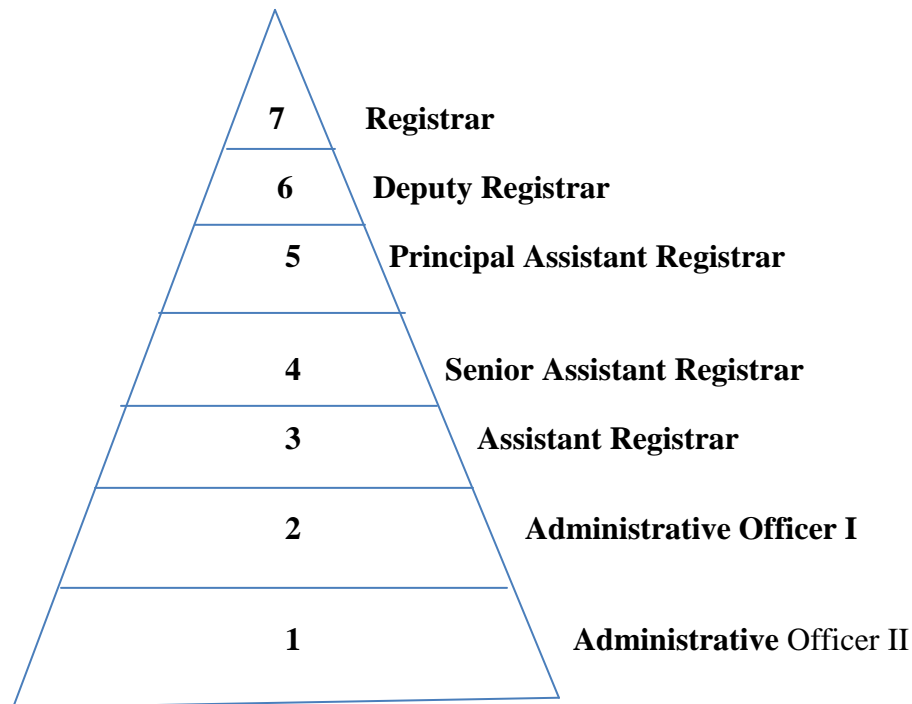
##### **Progression from**

1. Administrative Assistant to Higher Administrative Assistant (By Promotion)
2. Higher Administrative Assistant **to** Senior Administrative Assistant (By Promotion).
3. Senior Administrative Assistant **to** Principal Administrative Assistant II (By Promotion).
4. Principal Administrative Assistant II **to** Principal Administrative Assistant I (By Promotion).
5. Principal Administrative Assistant I **to** Assistant Chief Administrative Assistant (By Promotion)
6. Assistant Chief Administrative Assistant **to** Chief Administrative Assistant (By Appointment).

Note: All officers in this category must be computer literate. Staff in the Executive officers' cadre can convert to Administrative officers' cadre if he has the requisite qualifications and experience. It is however not automatic and it is not a right.

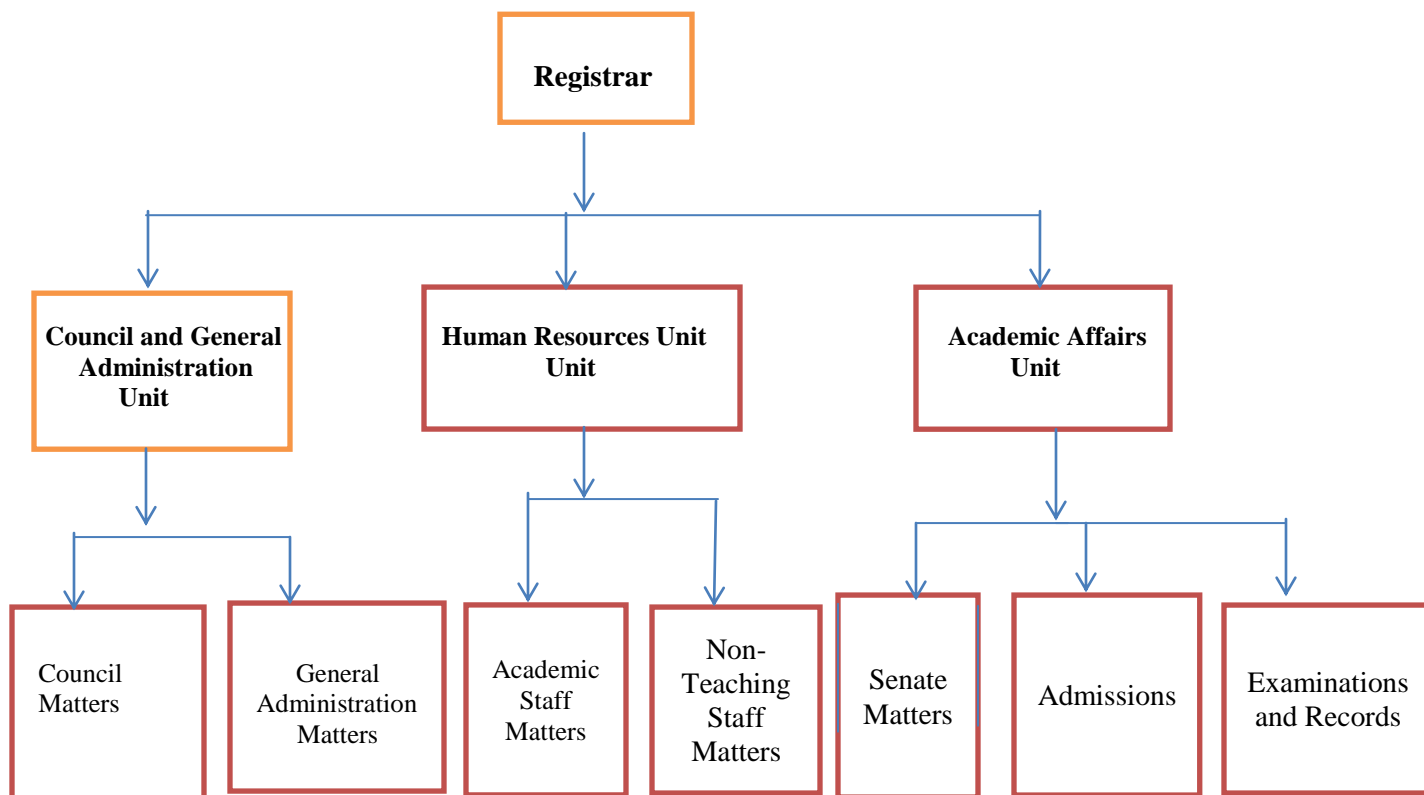
Career Progression for Administrative Officers at Bells University of Technology is shown in a Pyramidal structure below:

## Pyramidal Structure Of The Career Progression Of Administrative Officers Cadre In Bells Tech



An Administrative Officer within Bells Tech is responsible for providing administrative support to the Institution, while the Registrar, the Chief Administrative Officer is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor for the day-to-day administrative work of the University. He, the Registrar accomplishes the administrative job through officers and staff of the Registry. The Registry, therefore, is the central point of the University administration. In Bells Tech like in other universities, the head of the administrative department (Registry) is the Registrar under whom there are three main Units, viz: Human resources; Academic Affairs; and Council and General Administration. See the Organogram of the Bells University of Technology Registry below:

## Organogram Of Bells University Of Technology Registry



Note: Deputy Registrar heads each of the three Units in the Registry.

### Functions Of The Council And General Administration Unit

- It serves as the Secretariat for the Governing Council of the University;
- Its major function is to cater for the welfare of the Governing Council members;
- It is the Secretariat of all Council standing Committees including Finance and General Purposes Committee (F&GPC) and other Committees of Council;
- It is the Secretariat for Tenders Board and Council Procurement Unit;
- The Unit processes papers for final assessment of Officers for Appointment and Promotions;
- Administration and Coordination of activities of Council;
- Maintenance of Council records;
- General Administration matters;
- Follow-up actions and ensuring implementation of policies and Council decisions;
- Any other duties as assigned by the Vice-Chancellor and Registrar.

### **Functions Of The Human Resources Unit**

- Appointments of both Academic and Non-Academic Staff;
- Promotions of both Academic and Non-Academic staff;
- Provides secretarial support for the Academic Staff Appointments and Promotions Committee (ASA&PC) and Non-Teaching Staff Appointment and Promotions Committee (NTSA&PC) and other Committees and Panels within the University;
- Leave Matters;
- Transfers;
- Disciplinary issues;
- Retirement;
- Staff welfare and development;
- The Unit services Core and Expanded Management meetings;
- Keeps staff records;
- Responsible for general staff matters including pension, death benefits, goodwill, commendation, and provision of information on staff statistics for an informed decision.

### **Functions Of The Academic Affairs Unit**

- Is in charge of academic matters which is the very essence of the University;
- Responsible for Admission of students into the University;
- Arranges for examinations as well as keeping of students' records;
- Handling of Senate and Committee of Deans and Directors (CODD) matters;
- Issuance of transcripts and other academic records;
- Convocation and matriculation matter;

### **TIPS FOR BECOMING A COMPETENT ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER**

Administrative officers keep the office running smoothly, handling everything from routine office work to staff hiring/recruitment, record-keeping, managing executive schedules, discipline enforcer and looking for ways to streamline efficiency, inventory management, invoicing and customer service, secretaryship to university committees and panels, custodian of university rules and regulations, a signatory to university legal documents, initiating and implementing best and effective practices in administrative functions and directing and mentoring administrative staff to achieve maximum output (Ogunruku, 2019; [www.greatsampleresume.com/job-responsibilities/administrastive/officer](http://www.greatsampleresume.com/job-responsibilities/administrastive/officer); [glassdoor.com/job-description/administrative-officer.htm](http://glassdoor.com/job-description/administrative-officer.htm)).



Competent administrative officers possess excellent communication and other skills. They are frequently tasked with handling correspondence, speaking to clients, and dealing with the public, business partners, and vendors. Most often, they are the face and voice of the Institution. By being personable and charming, administrative officers put people - both inside and outside of the Institution – at ease with their professionalism and efficiency.

Administrative officers require professionalization that emphasizes core values of confidentiality, neutrality, loyalty, and integrity. Below are some of the most sought-after qualities of an administrative officer:

- **Attention to detail**

The work of the administrative officer must be done conscientiously. There is a great deal of correspondence to be done in various departments, which requires attention to a lot of detail,

- **Good level of English**

An administrative officer should be able to express him/herself in a correct English.

- **Proactivity**

The administrative officer must be able to anticipate the organization's needs and take initiatives to effectively move issues forward.

- **Independence**

In the course of his work, he needs to be self-sufficient, whether in taking notes or preparing a procedure specification, without constantly asking for approval.

- **Communication skills**

The administrative officer helps his/her colleagues in all sorts of tasks. H/she must have strong verbal and written communication/interpersonal skills.

- **Adaptability**

Since the administrative officer has many and varied tasks, he/she must demonstrate an ability to adapt to any challenge.

- **Diligence**

Diligence is essential in this job. An Administrative Officer must offer a continuous quality of work and be accurate daily.

- **Stress management**

An Administrative Officer must be able to manage his/her stress effectively.

- Develop effective methods for keeping everything in order.
- Excel at time management.
- Anticipate the needs of others in the office. They are involved in job requirements, job analysis, staff needs, etc.

- Demonstrate resourcefulness. The ability to think out of the box is one of the more important traits practiced by a good administrative officer.

As administrative officers in Bells Tech, we need to improve our attitude to work. What can we do to achieve this? Our beliefs and feelings about our work will surely affect what we do and how we do it. Administrators should foster a close working relationship with every subordinate on an individual basis through effective communication (Ajila, 2015).

Give your time and ask co-workers how you can help them out if you have a free moment. Volunteer to take the lead on new assignments. Be kind to everyone and be genuine. Do not gossip constantly or spread rumours.

No matter how hard you work or how many brilliant ideas you may have, if you cannot connect with the people who work around you, your professional life will suffer. Do your best to be friendly.

Have you ever thought about yourself in a work process? Has it always been the other person, your boss, co-workers, or customers? How about you?

As long as you continue to shift blame or externalize issues. That is, all problems are caused by external factors, you will never get at the root of the problem. What have you contributed to the problem? You don't know how to blame yourself for something that you have done wrong. You are always praising yourself for success and blaming others for your failure (Ajila, 2014). You must be up and doing. He who comes to equity must come with clean hands.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF A COMPETENT ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER**

The following are the characteristics of a competent/productive administrative officer?

- 1) They think about the skills they need for the next job.
- 2) They dress well in the office. They are always punctual. They arrive at work early
- 3) They don't allow their domestic problems to interfere with their work schedule.
- 4) They know how to communicate with others.
- 5) They take Charge.
- 6) They plan their time. They obey all organizational policies.
- 7) They work hard to impress everyone.
- 8) They give people their full attention. Share knowledge and be willing to assist others.
- 9). They control their anger. They are honest and calm at all times.
- 10) They do not miss deadlines; they do not forget to answer E-mails.
- 11) They show up on time on all occasions.
- 12) They focus on results, not just activities. Ensure you prepare your to-do list for the day and strive to achieve them.

- 13) They do not compare themselves to others.
- 14) They stay positive and listen to feedback.
- 15) They pay attention to body language and steer clear of gossip.
- 16) They own up to their mistakes.
- 17) They are not afraid to ask for help; because asking for help is not a sign of weakness. It's a sign of strength.
- 18) They do not say 'yes' to everything:
- 19) They constantly think about their careers. Upwardly mobile people do not let a couple of years go by without really thinking about moving up - where their career is headed is regularly on their mind. Every year or two, spend some time thinking about your career.
- 20) They always know what they need to work on. Do you know the timing of your next review and the timing of promotions?
- 21) They like their jobs.

## CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

Administrative Skills are important to administrators in any level (Sonsaard & Darbavasu) In Bells University of Technology, Administrative Officers who would be regarded as competent must put up a positive "Can-Do Attitude". He/she must be ready, available, and willing to get the job done, and done well. He must be courteous and friendly, feel excited to go to work with other co-workers, consistently meet deadlines, gladly takes responsibility, and be punctual at work. Conversely, an administrative officer who would be seen as not being competent and possesses a negative attitude towards his or her work will show this in absenteeism, lateness to work, lack of concern for his or her work or colleagues, and Institution, unhappiness, labour turnover, uncooperative attitudes, low job involvement, lack of interest in the job, rude to superiors, improper dressing to work, accepts responsibility grudgingly, frowning faces and complain all the time.

Koonts & Donnel (2008) pointed out that Administrative leader is the cornerstone of creative administrative processes. And, concerning the correlation between the personal and administrative skills and the creativity of the manager, Amina & Alhakem (2015) pointed out that many studies have confirmed the importance of a number of personal skills and managerial skills of manager and that there is a positive correlation between those skills and administrative creativity. Jezycki (2005) confirmed that there are many interrelated factors that affect the process at work including an abundance of positive management. Based on his observations, Katz stated that the level of importance of each set of skills (technical, human and conceptual) was directly correlated with the level that the person has in the organization (Katz, 1974).

An Administrative Officer's facial expression says much about his/her inner state. If you like your job, you will not like anything bad to happen to it. When you like your job, you will automatically like your co-workers and the job environment. A positive attitude is always shown in a happy worker. He comes to work early and punctually. He obeys instructions and accepts responsibility willingly. He who seeks equity must do equity.

## REFERENCES

- Administrative Officers' Job Responsibilities. (2022, February). <http://www.greatsampleresume.com/job-responsibilities/administrative/officer>
- Ajila, C.O. (2014). People and Organisations: The Dynamics of Workplace Behaviour. An Inaugural Lecture Series 261 delivered at Oduduwa Hall, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, 11th February.
- Ajila, C.O. (2015). "Managing Human Resources in the 21st Century University System: Challenges and Prospects." 2nd Registry Lecture Series of the Bells University of Technology, Ota.
- Amina, A. & Alhakem, A. (2015). The Relation Between Component & Obstacles of Administrative Creativity in Sudan Organisations, Economic Science Magazine, Issue (16).
- Bells University Technology Staff Information Handbook - Condition of Service for Senior Non-Teaching Staff.
- Career Builder (2021). Administrative Skills. Retrieved from <http://www.careerbuilder.com>
- Job Description of an Administrative Officer. (2022, February). <http://www.glassdoor.com/job-description/Administrative-officer.htm>.
- Jezycki, A. (2005). An Analysis of the Correlation between Creativity Style and Leader Behaviour in Elementary, Middle And Secondary Schools. Unpublished Ed.D Dissertation, Submitted to the University of San Francisco.
- Keiling, H. (2021). Administrative Skills: Definition and Examples for your Career". Retrieved from <http://indeed.com/career-advice/development/administrative-skills>, November 24.
- Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary (2022). "Competency." Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/competent>. Accessed 20 February.
- Ogunraku, A.O. (2019). "Registry: The Hub of University Administration and Management." Paper presented at the ANUPA National Workshop for Administrative Officers and Assistant Registrars in Nigerian Universities held at the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria, Topo, Badagry, Tuesday, April, 2.
- Olaleye, L. (2013). "Skills for an Administrative Role." Retrieved from <http://www.jobberman.com/discover/administrative-skills>.
- Koonts, H. & Donnel, C.O. (2008). Principles of Management, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co.
- Sonsaard, S. & Darbavas, S. (2019). Administrative Skills of Modern School Administrators. The European Proceedings of Social & Behavioural Sciences. <https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2019.08.52>. p . 522-529.