The Challenges and Prospects of Secretarial Profession in this Modern Technology Era in Oyo State Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the challenges and prospects for the secretarial profession in this modern technology era in Oyo State, Nigeria. Four (4) research questions guided the study. The study employed descriptive survey design. One hundred and twenty (120) secretaries were randomly selected in Oyo State senatorial district which consist of four local governments (Afijio, Oyo East, Oyo West, and Atiba local government areas of Oyo State, Nigeria).

A self-structured questionnaire titled: Challenges and Prospect for Secretarial Profession in this Modern Technology Era Questionnaire (CPSPMTEQ) was validated by three experts in the field of Business Education. The instrument was tested for reliability using Cronbach alpha reliability. The coefficient of 0.84 was obtained. The research questions were answered using frequency count, percentages, mean, and standard deviation. The results revealed among others, that technology skills are highly required by secretaries in this modern technology era and that high cost of modern technological tools and facilities, lack of trained personnel on the usage of these modern devices, lack of funds to purchase the devices and facilities required to automate offices, high cost of maintenance of these devices and facilities, and vulnerability to health hazards are the challenges of secretarial profession in this modern technology era.

It was recommended, among others, that employers of labor should engage secretaries that are experienced with technology competencies and skills in order to achieve administrative effectiveness in the organization.

INTRODUCTION

The office is typically a part of a business that handles the information dealing with various operations within an organization that are performed to meet certain objectives. Such operations include accounting, payroll, billing, etc. Various activities that come under office work are document preparation, filling, performing simple computations, checking information, intra-office communication, and external communication. The office can be viewed as a mechanism that maintains the state of the business by means of a series of activities that cause a change in state by a qualified secretary.

A secretary is an executive assistant who has mastery of office skills, demonstrates the ability to assume responsibility without direct supervision, exercises initiative and judgment, and makes decisions within the scope of assigned authority (Akinleye, 2015). A secretary is as an officer, who is in charge of records, correspondence, minutes of meetings, and related affairs of an organization. A secretary assists his/her boss and equally acts for the boss when directed. The secretary must accurately think and act rapidly, especially in an automated office.

Adewale (2009) saw a secretary as one who can think on behalf of an executive, act for an executive, anticipate the executive's whims, and increase an executive's output. According to Abdul-Kahar (2015), any institution, primary;

secondary or tertiary; large or small; rural or urban; government or state owned and privately sponsored; gather data to expedite action and to furnish information about office activities.

In the early days, the secretarial profession was limited to typing, writing, and transcribing of shorthand only. But today, it goes far beyond this, it involved functions as sorting and retrieving of information, passing on information and so on with the help of electronic equipment. It means that a qualified secretary should have a wide knowledge of business acumen, versatile knowledge in accounting, personnel, office practices, communications, and inside knowledge of the operation of all departments within the organization where he/she works, unlike an older version of a secretary who possesses only knowledge of shorthand, typewriting and basic office practices. Therefore, secretaries, irrespective of their gender and where they work, are required to possess electronic records modern technology skills in order to cope with the increasing use of electronic information technologies.

Modern technology skills such as word processing, computer skills, internet skills, data processing skills, and others are essential and are required to be possessed by secretaries because an organization cannot exist without records which have to be created, captured, and retained for the period as specified by the organization's retention schedule. Finally, when records become inactive, they have to be disposed appropriately. All these are anchored on the secretary.

Duniya (2018) observed that due to the introduction of sophisticated technological (electronic) office equipment into today's office and the role secretaries need to play in ensuring accuracy and efficiency in their jobs, the secretaries need to meet the challenges by acquiring new skills and competencies for efficient operations in the electronic office. There is continuous advancement in technology which has affected the secretarial profession in terms of the quality, speed and accuracy of works performed. This has led to the introduction of various electronic facilities to ensure adequate secretarial practice in organization. It is essential that secretaries are properly trained on the usage of these modern facilities to enhance their level of productivity.

Before the advent of modern technology, professionals in the field of Office Technology Management deal a lot with paper work and the typewriter serves as the working tool. In recent time, modern technology has introduced a new dimension to the field through computer and other electronic devices that give the profession a day to day transformation. Moreover, modern technologies also known as information communication technology and New Technologies are the new technological inventions by scientists to enhance communication. It involves all the sophisticated machines and equipment invented around 21st century for easy gathering, processing and transmission of information across the globe and for easy communication between people (Chidobi 2015). Chidobi stated further that Communication Technologies are equipment such as: computers, audiovisuals, internet facilities, multimedia computers, e-mail, electronic bulletin board etc. that enables information to be transferred from the sources to the users which tried to overcome natural barriers to information transferred like speed and distance. In some cases, these communication technologies may be available but not well utilized by the secretaries due to lack of knowledge and skills of modern technologies gargets.

The use of modern technology tools falls into four major categories which includes: constructing knowledge and problem solving (through the internet, e-mails CD ROMs, data bases, video conferencing); using process skills; aiding explanation of concept; and communicating ideas (power point, desktop publishing) (Afolabi 2018). Ayelotan (2012) stated that secretarial functions everywhere in the world have undergone a lot of technical changes. As a result, modern office equipment which gives the secretary the opportunity to increase her efficiency abound. Many office functions and secretarial duties which were previously done manually have been mechanized. Thus, the diversities of these office technologies require the secretary to possess new skills and sub-skills to enable him/her to be relevant in the modern office. A secretary must be well versed in the following specific automated office equipment training: the concept and theory of specific automated office equipment, knowledge of the categories of equipment and their intended uses and differences, the skill to use resource or reference materials properly, hands-on equipment training and others among all.

However, a secretary as an office-staff who combines the mastery of secretarial skills of typewriting and shorthand with office routine functions faced a lot of challenges in this modern technology era which include: inadequate modern facilities, poor power supply, inadequate knowledge based, and skills needed to cope with this present world. In other word, in the contemporary work environment, employers are in search for secretaries who possessed knowledge, skills and competencies that would enhance better job performance. As such the development of high level of efficacy in modern technology facilities and skills will affect the success of the secretary's job performance in the ever increasing information-based environment.

As opined by Okoli (2019) many secretaries lack the modern technology skills required in the various offices and this has greatly affected their performance. The effect of office automation is to increase the organizational productivity by redefining the office work, improve the quality and accuracy of output. For an office secretary, office automation reduces the stress of role overload/identification; it affects the perceived status and job satisfaction and it has a significant influence on the workers' feelings towards the organizational goals. Therefore, there is need to examine the challenges and prospect for secretarial profession in this modern technology era in Oyo State Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Modern communication technologies are new innovations in offices that enable the discharge of office functions more rapidly and efficiently. The emergence of modern office technologies in modern day organizations has challenged the occupational skills of the employees including the secretaries. Hence, these communication technologies have recently revolutionized office skills and rendered some skills such as transcription skills, typing on the manual typewriter obsolete and has also given rise to previously unknown skills such as webpage design, desktop publishing, networking, internet skills and others among all in modern organizations. This development has obviously challenged the skills and functions of secretaries. Again these advancements in communication technologies has led to the need for secretaries to reposition themselves in other to continue to be relevant in their performance of office functions as

well as cope with the trend of technological changes in today's modern offices.

The modern world of high technology could not have come about except for the development of computer. Information technology has opened up a new era in managing of information and communication through the techniques of automation and this has enhanced communication systems. Information technology has made secretarial job more competitive. One of the main causes of poor performance among secretaries in most organizations is their abject lack of modern technology skills as highlighted above. Many of them do not possess modern technology skills required in the various offices and have continued to negatively affect their general performances. Lack of skills in the area of webpage design, desktop publishing, office application, networking, proficiency in accessing the internet, etc., among secretaries in government offices have often been a source of worry to the management of such organizations.

Also, despite the introduction of these emerging technologies to organizations, some secretaries are still being subjected to old methods of handling office tasks. In actual fact, some organizations engage the services of fresh graduates who are knowledgeable in handling modern technology packages such as internet facilities, networking, etc. Such old methods of operation leads to ineffectiveness and unproductivity among the office workers.

Secretaries have to get themselves acquainted on how to operate new office automation such as information storage systems, the internet and other new software packages. In view of the aforementioned problems the researcher tends to study those modern technology facilities and skills required by secretaries in their various offices, the challenges and the prospect for secretarial profession. The ineffectiveness of some secretaries in handling modern technologies in today's ever-changing techno-office seems conspicuous. Therefore, the need for this study: challenges and prospects for secretarial profession in this modern technology era in Oyo State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the challenges and prospect for secretarial

profession in this modern technology era in Oyo State Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine various technology facilities use by secretaries in this modern technology era in Oyo State,

2. Ascertain technology skills required by secretaries in this modern technology era in Oyo State,

3. Determine the challenges of secretarial profession in this modern technology era in Oyo State Nigeria,

4. Examine the prospect for secretarial profession in this modern technology era in Oyo State.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the technology facilities use by secretaries in this modern technology era in Oyo State?

2. What are the technology skills required by secretaries in this modern technolog era in Oyo State?

3. What are the Challenges of secretarial profession in this modern technology era in Oyo State Nigeria?

4. What are the prospect for secretarial profession in this modern technology era in Oyo State?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of this study comprised 120 secretaries in Oyo state senatorial district which consist of four local governments (Afijio, Oyo East, Oyo West and Atiba local government areas of Oyo State, Nigeria) and due to the small number of the respondents, the whole population was used meaning that purposive sampling techniques was adopted.

A self-structured instrument tagged: Challenges and Prospect for Secretarial Profession in this Modern Technology Era Questionnaire (CPSPMTEQ) validated by three experts in the field of Business Education, Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu Ode, Nigeria was used for the study.

The instrument was designed on 4-point scale of Always Utilized (AU), Sometimes Utilized (SU), Rarely Utilized (RU) and Not Utilized (NU) for research question one, Highly Required (HR), Required (R), Rare Required (RR), Not Required (NR) for research question two and Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD) for research question three and four with numerical values of 4, 3, 2 and 1, respectively. Cronbach Alpha reliability co-efficient was used to determine the reliability index and the instrument yielded a reliability co-efficient of 0.84 which was high enough for the instrument to be considered reliable. Frequency count, percentage, mean and standard deviation was used to answer the research questions. Any item equal or above 2.50 was considered Utilized, Required and Agreed while any item below 2.50 was considered Not Utilized, Not Required and Disagreed.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What are the technology facilities use by secretaries in this modern technology era in Oyo State?

Results in Table 1 showed that the mean ratings and standard deviation on the various types of technology facilities used by secretaries this modern technology era with mean ratings ranging from 3.00 to 3.38 and weighted average of 3.25. The respondents however in table 1 indicated that all the items are closely related and based on the findings, the standard deviation of all items were ranged from 0.67 to 0.93 meaning strongly disagreed.

Research Question 2: What are the technology skills required by secretaries in this modern technology era in Oyo State?

Table 1: Frequency Count, Percentage, Mean and Standard Deviation on Technology Facilities use by Secretaries in this Modern Technology Era.

S/N	Items	AU (%)	SU (%)	RU (%)	NU (%)	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1.	Electric typewriters	36 (30.00)	72 (60.00)	11 (9.17)	01 (0.83)	3.80	0.74	SA
2.	Electric calculators	55 (45.83)	50 (41.67)	12 (10.00)	3 (2.50)	3.86	0.93	SA
3.	Shredding machines	49 (40.83)	53 (44.17)	17 (14.17)	01 (0.83)	3.25	0.78	SA
4.	Telephone equipment	63 (52.50)	42 (35.00)	07 (5.83)	08 (6.67)	3.34	0.73	SA
5.	Franking machines	60 (50.00)	45 (37.50)	14 (11.67)	01 (0.83)	3.37	0.69	SA
6.	Filling Equipment	43 (35.84)	54 (45.00)	22 (18.33)	01 (0.83)	3.16	0.81	SA
7.	Duplicating Machines	20 (16.67)	50 (41.67)	40 (33.33)	10 (8.33)	2.67	0.67	SA
8.	Perforator	40 (33.33)	31 (25.83)	44 (36.67)	05 (4.17)	2.88	0.72	SA
9.	Scanning machines	55 (45.83)	50 (41.67)	12 (10.00)	3 (2.50)	3.30	0.81	SA
10.	Cassette players	36 (30.00)	69 (57.50)	13 (10.83)	2 (1.67)	3.16	0.87	SA
11.	Personal Computer	25 (20.83)	80 (66.67)	14 (11.67)	01 (0.83)	3.08	0.92	SA
12.	Tape recorders	42 (35.00)	57 (47.50)	12 (10.00)	09 (7.50)	3.10	0.89	SA
Weighted Average						**3.25**	**0.80**	**SA**

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 2: Frequency Count, Percentage, Mean and Standard Deviation on Technology Skills Required by Secretaries in this Modern Technology Era.

S/N	Items	HR (%)	R (%)	RR (%)	NR (%)	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1.	Word processing skills	43 (35.84)	54 (45.00)	22 (18.33)	01 (0.83)	3.16	0.81	HR
2.	Spreadsheet operation skills	15 (12.50)	50 (41.67)	45 (37.50)	10 (8.33)	2.59	0.73	HR
3.	PowerPoint skills	46 (38.34)	54 (45.00)	19 (15.83)	01 (0.83)	3.20	0.71	HR
4.	Internet surfing and networking skills	20 (16.67)	50 (41.67)	40 (33.33)	10 (8.33)	2.67	0.67	HR
5.	Data base management skills	40 (33.33)	31 (25.83)	44 (36.67)	05 (4.17)	2.88	0.72	HR
6.	Blackboard teaching skills	80 (66.67)	25 (20.83)	10 (8.33)	5 (4.17)	3.50	0.96	HR
7.	Computer related storage device skills	86 (71.67)	20 (16.67)	13 (10.83)	01 (0.83)	3.59	0.99	HR
8.	Website design skills	117 (97.50)	03 (2.50)	-	-	3.99	0.78	HR
9.	Computer graphic skills	24 (20.00)	75 (62.50)	20 (16.67)	01 (0.83)	3.01	0.51	HR
10.	File management and window explorer skills	47 (39.17)	53 (44.17)	19 (15.83)	01 (0.83)	3.22	0.61	HR
11.	Keyboarding skill and accuracy	40 (33.33)	31 (25.83)	44 (36.67)	05 (4.17)	2.88	0.72	HR
12.	Grammatical and communication skills	55 (45.83)	50 (41.67)	12 (10.00)	3 (2.50)	3.30	0.81	HR
Weighted Average						**3.17**	**0.75**	**HR**

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 3: Frequency Count, Percentage, Mean and Standard Deviation on the Challenges of Secretarial Profession in this Modern Technology Era.

S/N	Items	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	$\overline{x}$	SD	Remark
1.	High cost of modern technological gadgets and facilities	60 (50.00)	45 (37.50)	14 (11.67)	01 (0.83)	3.37	0.69	SA
2.	Lack of trained personnel on the usage of these modern gadgets	43 (35.84)	54 (45.00)	22 (18.33)	01 (0.83)	3.16	0.81	SA
3.	Lack of fund to purchase the gadgets and facilities required to automate office	15 (12.50)	50 (41.67)	45 (37.50)	10 (8.33)	2.59	0.73	SA
4.	High cost of maintenance of this gadget and facilities	46 (38.34)	54 (45.00)	19 (15.83)	01 (0.83)	3.20	0.71	SA
5.	Vulnerability to health hazard	20 (16.67)	50 (41.67)	40 (33.33)	10 (8.33)	2.67	0.67	SA
Weighted Average						3.00	0.72	SA

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 4: Frequency Count, Percentage, Mean and Standard Deviation on the Prospect for Secretarial Profession in this Modern Technology Era.

S/N	Items	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	$\overline{x}$	SD	Remark
1.	Exposure to modern information technology	24 (20.00)	75 (62.50)	20 (16.67)	01 (0.83)	3.01	0.51	SA
2.	Promote office activities	47 (39.17)	53 (44.17)	19 (15.83)	01 (0.83)	3.22	0.61	SA
3.	Enhances confidentiality of information	40 (33.33)	31 (25.83)	44 (36.67)	05 (4.17)	2.88	0.72	SA
4.	Contributes to operational productivity	36 (30.00)	72 (60.00)	11 (9.17)	01 (0.83)	3.80	0.74	SA
5.	Reduces cost of paperwork	55 (45.83)	50 (41.67)	12 (10.00)	3 (2.50)	3.86	0.93	SA
Weighted Average						3.35	0.70	SA

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Result in Table 2 showed that the mean ratings and standard deviation on technology skills required by secretaries in this modern technology era with mean ratings ranging from 2.67 to 3.99 and weighted average of 3.17. The respondents however in table 2 indicated that all the items are closely related and based on the findings, the standard deviation of all items were ranged from 0.51 to 0.99 meaning Highly Required.

Research Question 3: What are the challenges of secretarial profession in this modern technology era in Oyo State Nigeria?

Results in Table 3 showed the frequency count, percentages, mean ratings and standard deviation on the challenges of secretarial profession in this modern technology era with mean ratings ranging from 2.67 to 3.37 and weighted average of 3.00. The respondents however in Table 3 indicated that all the items are closely related and based on the findings, the standard deviation of all items were ranged from 0.67 to 0.81 meaning strongly agreed.

Research Question 4: What are the prospect for secretarial profession in this modern technology era in Oyo State?

Results in Table 4 showed the frequency count, percentages, mean ratings and standard deviation on the prospect for secretarial profession in this modern technology era with mean ratings ranging from 2.88 to 3.86 and weighted average of 3.35. The respondents however in table 4 indicated that all the items are closely related and based on the findings, the standard deviation of all items were ranged from 0.51 to 0.93 meaning strongly agreed.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings as shown in Table 1 revealed that electric typewriters, electric computer, shredding machines, telephone equipment, franking machines, filling equipment, duplicating machines, scanning machines, cassette players, personal computer, electric calculators and tape recorders are various types of technology facilities used by secretaries in this modern technology era. The findings of this study agreed with that of Afolabi (2018) who asserted that personal computer, facsimile, telex, mobile phone, printer and projectors are information and communication technology facilities use for accessing information, promoting globalization and equip users' knowledge in the labour market.

Moreover, the findings as shown in Table 2 revealed that word processing skills, spreadsheet skills, PowerPoint skills, Internet surfing and networking skills, Data base management skills, Blackboard teaching skills, Computer related storage device skills, Website design skills, Computer graphic skills and File management and window explorer skill are highly required secretaries in this modern technology era. The findings of this study agreed with that of Ezenwafor (2014) who contended that for efficient and effective office activities, information and communication technology skills such as spreadsheet, digital cameras knowledge, computer security knowledge and network skills application are paramount importance to office secretaries.

In addition, result in Table 3 showed that high cost of modern technological gadgets and facilities, lack of trained personnel on the usage of these modern gadgets, lack of fund to purchase the gadgets and facilities required to automate office, high cost of maintenance of this gadget and facilities and vulnerability to health hazard are the challenges of secretarial profession in this modern technology era.

This study is in consonance with the findings of Abdul-Kahar (2015) who affirmed that Secretaries face a lot of challenges in their effort to carry out the onerous tasks and responsibilities conferred on them by the profession part of which include lack of fund for purchasing modern facilities and lack of skilled secretaries to handle modern technologies. As opined by Nwaokwa and Okoli (2012), many secretaries lack the communication technology skills required in the various offices and this has greatly affected their performance.

The information showed in Table 4 revealed the prospects of secretarial profession which include among others explosion of secretaries to modern information technology, promotion of office activities and enhancement of confidentiality of information. This study is in agreement with the finding of Dosumu, Bukki and Akintola (2017) who noted that the effectiveness of a secretary in an organization strongly depends on the available office technology as well as the skills and competencies of such secretary to perform office duties. They further stated that secretarial profession promotes office production, enhance confidential of information and strengthening business activities.

CONCLUSION

In the contemporary work environment, employers are in search for secretaries who possessed knowledge, skills and competencies that would enhance better job performance. Also, the development of high level of efficacy in this modern technology era affect the success of the secretary's job performance in the ever increasing information-based environment. Information technology has drastically changed the office function and secretarial profession hence; jobs are now done in a new way. For an office secretary, technology has reduced the stress of role overload/identification; it affects the perceived status and job satisfaction and it has a significant influence on the workers' feelings towards the organizational goals.

The introduction and development in modern technology facilities and skills have changed the methods and procedure of doing office work by the Secretarial staff. It is imperative that any organization that wishes to achieve its aims and objective must be modern technology compliant. The employees must be versatile and competent in handling office facilities and equipment that would enhance their job effectiveness, most especially, the professional secretaries who are the core centre of the organization's information processing activities. The effectiveness of a secretary is a modern technology era strongly depends on the availability of office technologies as well as their skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

1. There should be provision of computers and accessories by office manager in business organization.

2. Secretaries should attend seminars, conferences and workshops to develop them in the areas of information technologies and Microsoft office packages.

3. Employers of labour should engage secretaries that are vast with technology competencies and skills in order to achieve administrative effectiveness in the organization.

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