

ASSESSMENT OF EMPLOYERS' PERCEPTION OF SECRETARIAL SKILLS POSSESSED BY OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT GRADUATES IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated assessment of employers' perception of secretarial skills possessed by Office Technology and Management graduates employed in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Three research questions guided the study. The population of the study consist of 156 chief executives/Director who have confidential secretaries in the civil service of Ekiti. The simple random sampling technique was used to select 103 chief executives/Directors who have secretaries. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Employers' Perception of the Secretarial Skills Possessed Questionnaire" (EPSSPQ). The instrument was validated by three experts in Business Education Unit of Vocational and Technical Education Department, Ekiti State University, and one in Test and Measurement Department of the Faculty Education, Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti. Test-retest method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The findings of the study revealed that the three secretarial skills were moderately possessed by OTM graduates for job performance. It was concluded that practicing secretaries in the Ekiti State civil service moderately employable as they possess secretarial skills needed for job performance. However, digital and technical skills are least possessed. Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, it was recommended that Office Technology and Management (OTM) graduates should be exposed to training in digital and technical skill aspects to enable them meet the challenges of automated office, among others.

Key words: Employers, Secretarial Skills, Office Technology and Management, organization Skills, Digital Skills, Technical Skills

Introduction

The establishment of both private and public organizations is to achieve some specific objectives. Private establishments are to provide services for human development to make profit while public establishments are regulated and controlled by government to achieve

set objectives with little or no consideration for profit. For these organizations to achieve their goals and objectives, there is need to engage different categories of personnel in different cadres and professions who will work together as a team for goal attainment. Among the personnel

employed in any organization are the secretaries.

There are different types of secretaries such as Administrative Secretary, Executive Secretary, Professional Administrative Assistant, Confidential Secretary, Personal Secretary, Parliamentary Secretary and Hospital Secretary, just to mention few. For the purpose of this study, confidential secretary is the focus. Confidential Secretaries are graduates of Office Technology and Management programme who are expected to perform secretarial jobs. They are those who are trained in the art of record keeping, office procedure and correspondences with good knowledge of office skills such as keyboarding, shorthand, filing and human relations in order to assist their bosses in achieving the goals of the organization. They are expected to possess some skills and attitudes that can make them indispensable in any organization.

The word secretary is derived from Latin word 'Secretarius' meaning confidential officer, (Udeh, 2011). Thus, confidential secretary can be described as a skilled personnel who is specialized in secretarial duties/office administration. Therefore, a confidential secretary is defined as a "high level administrative assistant who provides administrative support to senior executive, managers or high ranking official in an organization, in which they possessed, mastery of office skills and ability to assume responsibilities without direct supervision, who displays initiatives, exercises judgment and makes decisions within the scope of his/her authority".(IAPP,2022). It implies that a secretary is regarded as a "confidant", one who is entrusted with the secret matters of the chief executives or a keeper of secrets, whose work are confidential in nature. A secretary's work is multitasking

which allow her to have direct contact with visitors or customers who are coming to the office for one reason or the other and their contact with the secretary is expected to bring positive relationship to the organization. The secretary, therefore, is expected to be an indispensable companion to top management staff in facilitating administrative and business transactions. Secretaries working closely with top management are expected to be highly involved in promoting the efficiency and effectiveness, reduce the bulk load of her boss routine work, ensuring the smooth running of the office by providing vital information for easy decision making.

In the past, before the advent of Information and Communication Technology, most of the secretarial duties were done manually by secretaries through the use of typewriters memo, letters, manuscripts, circulars, invitations which involving note taking in shorthand and transcribing it into mail able correspondence which are at once dispatched to their destinations. The duties of these secretaries include filling of records are done in alphabetical order in the file tray, keeping petty cash book for the boss, recording of incoming and outgoing mails in mail register for monitoring of files, attending to visitors and callers for official purposes, keeping of vital information for easy retrieval. In addition, preparation for meeting and other logistics for positive deliberation, requisition for stationeries for smooth running of the office, supervision of junior staff for effective performance among others are some of the duties performed manually which made their work slow and strenuous. With the development of information and communication technology, Office Technology and Management

Education students are expected to be equipped with the competencies that will ensure their good job performance, after graduation. By this, Ahukannah (2018) noted that Office Technology and Management programme should be able to produce graduates who can:

- produce office documents and reports using word processing,
- produce numerical information using spreadsheet,
- Produce office data in graphic form, manipulate access and retrieve information from computer based system,
- Access a wealth of information on internet through the knowledge of web pages

The advent of information, communication and technology has brought transformation to all human aspects of life, in which secretarial profession is not left out. It has made today's secretarial work environment more attractive, provide sophisticated office equipment, and a more interesting place to work. It has increased secretarial efficiency tremendously and easy accessibility of information for quick decision making. For instance, electronic typewriters that have replaced the manual ones, Word processing with multi-purpose facilities, computer and other office machines are provided for modern secretaries.

Today, the duties of secretary vary from one organization to another but there are some common duties such as keyboarding, receiving mails, receiving visitors and preparing daily itinerary for the boss among others. Uchechi, et. al (2022) stated that the minimum educational qualification for a secretary should be Diploma/National Diploma/Higher National Diploma with minimum of

two years of studies and four years for Degree and coupled with an industrial training experience in between the years of studies. Graduates of Office Technology and Management are produced from Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and Government Secretarial Training Schools. Florence, (2022) opined that graduates of Office Technology and Management programme are called Office Technology Managers, Professional secretaries or Professional Administrative Assistant Officers, Executive assistant, Front Managers, Confidential Secretaries, Office Manager, Office Coordinators and so on.

In today's office, automation has taken over the traditional duties of record keeping, reprography and other clerical duties. The focus now is shifting from the usual traditional secretarial skills to digital secretarial practice. Based on the foregoing, there are some skills that are expected to be possessed by the office technology management graduates in order to enhance their official duties. These include the demonstration of expertise on digital skills, organization and content skills in order to enhance the growth of their organizations.

Digital Skills are defined as the ability to find, evaluate, use, share and create using electronic device such as computer, smartphone and so on for job performance. The relevance of digital skills in the 21st century cannot be under estimated. Thus, possession of digital skills that are highly valued now, will likely continue in the future for modern workplace and employment recruitment. Digital skills are very vital skills required in meeting the need of customers and organizational growth. Digital skills enable people to be self-reliant, create, share information, collaborate, and solve problems without much stress,

convenience, and self-fulfillment in life learning, work and social activities at large (Yvonne, 2022). Modern office workers make use of digital skills like view web pages, staying save online, communication online, online banking, e-commerce, booking of hotel accommodation for boss online and use of internet, computer programme, which make work easier and knowledge more accessible through the use of I-phone and internet services. Possessing Digital Skills in 21st century workforce has increased the use of electronic information system and helped managers in modern organization to direct, control, communicate, plan, formulate policies and make quick decisions (Nwangwu & Okeke, 2022). The possession of digital skills may likely promote quick transfer of information, storage, arrangement, management of meetings and retrieval of documents within and outside organizations.

Apart from possession of digital competencies, organization skill may also have its contribution towards enhancing secretaries' performance. Organizational skills are referred to as skills that allow employees to use his/her ability and office resources efficiently and effectively. It is regarded to as a strong ability to organize, keep a clear track of essential files or documents before its deadline. To be organized can be conceived as the ability to manage someone's time, energy and workspace well and able to achieve the set objective successfully. Organization skills that may enhance one's job performance include, time management, setting goals, delegation, self-motivation, decision making to mention few. These are called soft skills, which are personal abilities and transferable to any type of job and help employees to succeed in a wide range of different tasks or job (Fritz & Arthur, 2017).

Also, Technical skills are also known as content or employability skills, job specific, vocational skills include those that relate specifically to your line of work, (Andres, 2022). They are referred to as tools and knowledge used in solving problems in ones area of field work or study. In fact, many fields, industries have level of technical skills required in accomplishing their work such as cloud computing in Google Drive and navigating social media platforms, key skills, core skills. Also known as hard skills which involve the practical knowledge used in order to complete tasks such as Data analysis, Web development, computer programing language, financial management, Bookkeeping, UX design, Graphic design, such as construction of views and display in the use of word processing, financial spreadsheet maintenance and presentation creation. Proper use of office machines such as fax machine, photocopier and multiline telephone. In addition, he/she must serve as the information technology desk officer for his boss.

These skills are expected to be of great help to secretaries in Ekiti State but it seems reverse is the case. For example, some secretaries in Ekiti State seem not to be familiar with the use of ICT in their place of work, they seem to live in the traditional orientation because they are unable to operate and manipulate high-tech-equipment, software packages that can protect their work from hackers, boost their morale and give them job satisfaction. Also, they seem not well organized at work as most of them continue to search for records and document for long because of their inability to keep proper records. Their bosses do at times complain about their abilities to produce error-free and mail able documents. By this, some

executives in Ekiti State seem to prefer processing their mails by themselves, instead of giving their secretaries to type. In view of the foregoing, the researcher is worried and thus interested in the study in order to find out employers' perception of the secretarial skills possessed by the secretaries in public organizations in Ekiti state, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

There has been complaints from executives about the inability of their secretaries to cope and perform official duties to their expectations. Some chief executives seem to prefer carrying out their secretarial work by themselves instead of involving their secretaries despite the advantages embedded in office technology and management programme which has increased efficiency, effectiveness on job performance of secretarial personnel.

Secretaries in public organizations in Ekiti State seem not to have acquired needed skills that can make them to be more proficient and more current in discharging their duties. This is observed in the way by which some secretaries find it difficult to produce error-free documents on computer without wasting papers and other office stationeries, poor image making, inappropriate use of words in oral and written communication, misplacement of important documents due to poor filing system, poor organization skills leading to unnecessary delay.

In view of the above, the researcher is in doubt whether this category of officer possessed the required skills that will make them fit into the ICT compliant office work environment. It is on this note that the researcher investigated whether the secretaries in today's office environment possess adequate

secretarial skills needed by their employers in Public Organizations of Ekiti State, Nigeria

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to find out employers' perception of secretarial skills possessed by secretaries in public organizations in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Specifically, the purpose of the study are:

- (a) To find out the level of digital skills possessed by the secretaries in Public Organizations in Ekiti State, Nigeria
- (b) To investigate the level of organization skills possessed by the secretaries in Public Organizations Ekiti State, Nigeria.
- (c) To examine the level of technical/content skills possessed by the secretaries in Public Organizations Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

- (a) What is the level of digital skills possessed by secretaries in Public Organization Ekiti State?
- (b) What is the level of organization skills possessed by secretaries in Public Organizations Ekiti State ?
- (c) What is the level of technical skills possessed by secretaries in Public Organizations Ekiti State/?

Methodology

Descriptive survey design was used for the study. It is a design which describes what exists or reveal the present position of what is being investigated (Ali, 2023). The goal here is to obtain and describe the opinion of the Chief Executives on the secretarial skills possessed by OTM graduates employed in Ekiti State. The population of this study consists of 156 Chief executives/ Directors who have confidential secretaries and their

Secretaries in the civil service of Ekiti State in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State. Simple random Sampling technique was used to select 103 Chief Executives/Directors from Ekiti State Civil service as the sample for the study.

Validity of the instrument was carried out by three experts in Business Education, Department of Vocational and Technical Education, Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti and one from Test and Measurement from the same institution. Their corrections and comments were incorporated into the final copy of the instrument which enhanced the validity of the instrument. Test-retest method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. A total number of 20 respondents who are directors with secretaries in the civil service in Ekiti State who were not part of the sample were used for the test. The instrument was administered on them twice within two weeks. The data collected were analyzed using Pearson product Moment Correlation. The correlation coefficient of 0.70, was obtained, which was high enough to ensure validity.

A self-designed research instrument containing 31 items was

used for collection of data. The instrument was titled “Employers’ Perception of Secretarial Skills Possessed Questionnaire (EPSSPQ)” which was administered on the respondents by the researcher with the help of two research assistants. They were engaged in the distribution and retrieval of the instrument. The instrument was divided into four sections – section A, B, C and D. Section A sought for information on bio-data of the respondents while section B to D sought for information on questions raised for the research questions base on 4 points rating scale of Highly Possessed (HP) = 4, Moderately Possessed (MP) = 3, Rarely Possessed (RP) = 2, Not Possessed (NP) = 1. In taking decision, any mean response value of 2.5 and above was regarded as highly possessed while any mean response that is below 2.5 point was regarded as not possessed.

Data Analysis

This section discussed the analysis of data collected on the research questions.

Research Question 1: What is the level of digital skills possessed by secretary in Ekiti State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Analysis of Digital Skills Possessed by Secretaries in Ekiti State

S/N	Items	X	SD	Decision
1.	My Secretary makes use of various computer software like word and excel packages	4.50	0.59	highly Possessed
2.	My secretary makes use of other electronics digital gadgets for effective communication	4.90	0.63	highly Possessed
3.	Secretary in my office organizes Zoom meeting and goggle meetings for effective job performance	3.13	1.25	highly Possessed
4.	Secretary in my office access internet facilities with ease	3.35	1.48	highly Possessed
5.	My secretary makes use of dictating machine when necessary	2.49	1.05	highly Not Possessed
6.	My secretary do link other websites for information while searching	3.25	1.48	highly Possessed
7.	My secretary has good knowledge of electronic filling for easy retrieval of information	4.49	0.68	highly Possessed
8.	My secretary uses storage devices such as flash drive, for storing information well	4.59	0.87	highly Possessed
9.	My secretary organizes, sorts, calculates, Analyzed data electronically, competently.	1.95	1.22	Not Possessed
10.	My office secretary uses electronic security tools effectively in discharging office duties	4.40	0.63	highly Possessed
11	The projector in my office is operated by my secretary effectively and efficiently	2.40	1.02	Not Possessed
Grand Mean		3.59	0.99	highly Possessed

From the table above, four items (1, 2, 6, and 8) were rated by the employers to be highly possessed. Out of 11 items. Items (3, 4, 7, 9 and 10) were rated moderately possessed, Items (5), (9) and (11) were rated as not possessed with a mean rating of less than 2.50. The employers agreed

that digital skills possessed by secretarial secretaries in their respective organizations were moderately possessed.

Research Question 2: What is the level of organization skills possessed by Secretarial Practitioners in Ekiti State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Analysis of Organization Skills Possessed by Secretaries in Ekiti State

S/N	Items	X	SD	Decision
12	My secretary prepares notice of meeting correctly	4.48	0.92	highly Possessed
13	My secretary prepare meeting's agenda in conjunction with me to time	4.54	0.32	Possessed
14	My secretary takes minutes of meeting well	3.49	1.45	Possessed
15	My secretary communicates fluently in official language	4.68	0.57	Possessed
16.	Secretary in my office has good telephone manner	4.59	1.04	Possessed
17.	My secretary can works independently without supervision	4.74	0.45	Possessed
18	My secretary displays good initiative	4.59	1.04	Possessed
19	My secretary can works under pressure without offending others	4.34	0.28	Possessed
20	Secretary in my office display spirit of team work	4.61	0.68	Possessed
21	My secretary supervises both human and material resources appropriately	4.66	0.62	Possessed
22	My secretary is a very time consuming in achieving targets.	3.48	1.12	Possessed

Grand mean:	4.02	0.77	highly Possessed
Table 2 above shows that the mean ratings of the respondents' responses on four points scale indicate that respondents highly possessed organization skills in the discharged of their duty. This is because all the mean scores exceeded the cut-off point of 2.5 and above. Displaying a spirit of team work, preparation of agenda of meetings, working without supervision, ability to adapt to new situation, ability to display initiative are well possessed by secretarial practitioners in Ekiti State, Nigeria.			
Research Question 3: What is the level of technical/content skills possessed by Secretaries in Ekiti State, Nigeria?			

Table 3: Analysis of Technical Skills Possessed by Secretaries in Ekiti State

S/N	Items	X	SD	Decision
23.	My secretary use clock alarm as a reminder for daily important appointment	2.54	1.05	highly Possessed
24.	My secretary is versatile in keyboarding skills	4.11	1.22	Possessed
25.	My Secretary is good at Note taking (Shorthand writing)	2.54	1.05	Possessed
26.	My secretary has ability to use business law for organizations' operations	4.34	0.53	Possessed
27.	My Secretary has ability to use office technological equipment with repair of minor faults	4.34	0.53	Possessed
28.	My secretary has ability to do multi-task activities at once to solve organization critical problem	4.10	0.62	Possessed
29.	My secretary has ability to integrate new Experience/idea	4.40	0.68	Possessed
30.	My Secretary has ability to determine appropriate form for office use	2.40	1.08	Not Possessed
31.	My secretary has ability to forecast Future occurrences	2.54	1.13	Possessed
Grand mean		3.47	0.87	Possessed

Table 3 above shows the responses of the employers of secretarial practitioners in Ekiti State, Nigeria on the technical skills possessed. The result of the analysis revealed that items 24,25,27, were highly possessed while item 30 was not possessed. Items 23,26,28,29 and 31 were moderately possessed by secretarial practitioners. The grand mean on the level technical skills possessed was 3.47. Thus, it can be revealed that these skills are possessed by most of the secretaries in the public Service in Ekiti State.

Discussion

The findings of the study regarding the first research question indicated that Office Technology and Management Programme has greatly influenced the students acquisition of digital skills for enhanced of job performance secretaries in the modern office workplace. The result of the study showed that 8 out of 10 items such as use of computer skills, electronic filling system skill, electronic communication skills, electronic security tool, access internet facilities, software applications listed as the digital skills are highly

possessed by office technology and management graduates and secretarial practitioners which has improved their organizational efficiency in public sector in Ekiti State. This finding corroborates with the findings of Chaouchi, (2020) where the scholar reported that digital skills are hottest skills highly possessed in recent time by employees to remain relevant in their chosen career and to boost their business activities like share content information online, using online platform.

The finding in respect of the second research question showed that the respondents agreed on all the 10 items that Office Technology and Management personnel highly possessed of organization skills for efficient and smooth running of modern offices. The finding is also in support of Arthur and Jr.'s (2023) when they observed that skills are the abilities to effectively sending messages, organizing meeting, physical and electronic filing systems, handling sensitive information with discretion and maintaining privacy, time management.

The findings on research question three showed that the respondents agreed that Office Technology and Management personnel in Ekiti Public Service possessed technical skills to a high extent level as only one out of nine items was not highly possessed. This finding is in line with Nwokike & Eya (2023) who identified shorthand skills, keyboarding skills, technological skills, and knowledge in business law, and organization legal law possessed by OTM graduates/secretaries have made them relevant in the business world. Technical skills in today's office have helped the business organizations to achieve the aims and goals, hence, the need for office technology and management graduates to possess

relevant and necessary skills to meet the challenges of modern secretarial practice and employability.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is established that Office Technology and Management (OTM) graduates are well equipped with the skills studied as majority of the skills are highly possessed to ensure effective job performance in the Public Service of Ekiti State Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are made

1. Secretaries should always advance their knowledge of digital skills as technological invention on office equipment are being advanced.
2. Office Technology and Management personnel in the Public Service of Ekiti State should maintain the level of organization skills possessed in order to further enhance their productivity
3. It is also recommended that secretarial professionals in the Public Service of Ekiti State should improve on their technical skills by attending conferences and seminars as well as learn from their senior professional colleagues in order to enhance their job performance

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