



FUOYE JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

PUBLICATION OF THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Volume 3 No.1

ISSN: 2705-4187

June 2020

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FUOYE Journal of Education

Publication of the Faculty of Education, Federal University, Oye Ekiti, Nigeria.

Vol 3 No. 1 June 2020

Oye Ekiti, Nigeria.

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Federal University Oye Ekiti,
Ekiti, Nigeria

Published 2020

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Published by the Faculty of Education
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ICT Skills Required of Trainee-Secretaries for Promotion of a Paperless Office in Kwara State

Dr. Felicia Kikelomo OLUWALOLA
Department of Educational Management
Faculty of Education
University of Ilorin, Nigeria
doctoroluwalola@gmail.com

Abstract

The study examined Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills required of trainee-secretaries for promotion of a paperless office in Kwara State. One research question and three hypotheses guided the study. A survey research designed was adopted for the study. The population of this study comprised 365 respondents. Multi-stage sampling techniques were used for the study. A validated questionnaire with reliability coefficients of 0.72 was used for data collection. Mean and standard deviation was used to analyze research question while t-test for testing the hypotheses. The findings revealed that the level of ICT skills required of the trainee-secretaries for the promotion of paperless office is too high, there is a significant difference on ICT skills required by trainee-secretaries based on school type, there is a statistical difference between lecturers and students perception on the ICT skills required of trainee-secretaries, also there was no statistical difference between male and female perception on the ICT skills required of trainee-secretaries. It was recommended among others that institutions should provide adequate and competent lecturers with ICT skills to make the students acquainted and knowledgeable on how to promote a paperless office.

KEYWORDS: Information and Communication Technology Skills, Trainee-Secretaries, Paperless Office

Introduction

In the world today, technological explosion is felt greatly by individuals, business organization, government parastatals, institutions, and the economy of the country at large. Nigeria is not an exception despite the fact that technological development has affected virtually every area of the economy, individuals and the entire business environment within the nation. As a result this increased in the rate of research and also a significant development in individuals, business and economic growth both locally and globally cannot be jettisoned. Therefore, it is pertinent to note that there are numerous benefits that attributed in the rapidly changing market place if technology is applied as a necessity to business operation at a required percentage. Thus, the level of technology an organization chooses to employ will be a determinant factor to its competitive position in the market where it operates.

Technology have revolutionized the traditional role of secretaries in almost every spheres of the activities performed in their day to day organization such as, areas of typing, taking shorthand dictation, answering of telephone calls and processing of mails, virtual office just to mention but few. For some years back, the secretaries' functions are performed manually such that documents and records were maintained on papers, stored in files and drawers (Otta, 2015). As a result of modern office equipment, secretaries require to increases their skills for effectiveness and efficiency. Method of operation in today's office has experienced drastic change. The secretaries need to shift from traditional way of operation to modern method. Atakpa, (2010) opined that secretarial functions everywhere in the world have undergone a lot of technical changes. He explained further that because of these diversities office technologies require the secretaries to possess

new skills to enable them to be relevant in modern offices. Modern business organizations have come to appreciate the role and importance of the secretary as well as the need to providing the needed and necessary office machines and equipment for the efficacy of the secretarial functions (Akpomi & Ordu 2009). Professional secretaries with modern innovative office skills are highly indispensable in any establishment since secretarial duties are the pivot of office activities.

Yakubu and Ugwu (2015) advocated that the efficiency and effectiveness of the secretary in every business organization depends largely on the availability of office technologies as well as the skills of the secretary to handle these office technologies for promotion of a paperless office in an organization. Information and Communication Technology skills are essential tools for modern day secretaries to work with, for them to be relevant in this dispensation. Traditionally, the professional skills acquired by secretaries are now obsolete in view of the current technological office innovations. There is serious re-designation in secretarial profession. The new innovations in the modern day offices have altered the nature, method, work environment, equipment, and have challenged the skills of professional secretaries. There is technological skills gap between the traditional and the modern day secretaries.

According to Azih in Ottan (2015), a secretary is an assistant to an executive who has the mastery of office skills and ability to assume responsibility without direct supervision. The secretary displays initiative, exercise judgment and takes decisions within the scope of his or her authority. Notably, a secretary is known as a person who takes shorthand dictation from a senior member of staff and turns the notes into typed correspondence but today the work of secretary have gone beyond that level. As noted by Edwin in Aliata and Sam (2014), the roles of secretaries in contemporary times have changed tremendously from the traditional roles. The modern day secretaries must be abreast and be versatile with the

modern office technology such as the internet, word processing, database management, desktop publishing, micrographic, reprographic, office application skills, and office communication skills for effective operations in this era of paperless office. Therefore, proper utilization of appropriate ICT skills leads to the effectiveness and efficiency in information processing, storage and disseminating of information in local government. Skill as a concept is the ability to use human knowledge effectively in carrying out a given task by the secretary.

Information and Communication Technology is the application of computers and telecommunications gadget to store, retrieve, transmit, and manipulate data often in the context of business enterprises. Introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in paperless offices would make secretarial work more interesting and more productive. The potential of Information and Communication Technology to provide business enterprise in this world of work has been a topic of interest to both practitioners and academics over the five decade. This interest is reflected in the large number of studies that have examined the strategic value of information and communication technology and it impacts on firm's and institution's performance due to the skill of its secretary. Information and Communication Technology sounds strange to most people include those who are already directly and indirectly enjoying it benefits reason being that many are ignorant of the technological advancement in the world (Alter 2002). As noted by Nwaokwa and Okoli in Aliata and Sam (2014), the introduction of ICT has changed the roles of secretaries. They opined that ICT has influenced the performance of secretaries in delivery of information, accuracy and effectiveness at the work place. Nonye (2013) said that secretaries should be abreast of the use of modern office technology and recommended the need for periodic training programmes to be organized for secretaries to update their knowledge on modern office skills. As a result of this technological change the use of paper is

eliminated or greatly reduced in the office today

A paperless office is a concept in which usage of paper is greatly reduced or eliminated totally in an office environment. It is also means a change in how the technology industry, for information and management, is a new way of working in the company. In addition, not only environmentally friendly, but also increases the rate of productivity and efficiency of day to day activities. This also improves method of saving money, making work processes easier and more convenient as digital documents can be easily shared between users. Orantes-Jiménez, Zavala-Galindo, and Vázquez-Álvarez (2015) described paperless office as a new concept that is difficult to understand in a world that still uses paper as a support for multiple social, communications, advertising, financial, and educational uses. For centuries men have tried using different methods and tools to carry out their work, to make it more efficient and faster, thus for more than four decades we have spoken of the concept of the paperless office. The paperless office should be seen as an immediate project within organizations and constitutes a great interest for the application of new technologies in an organization, and good practices can contribute to sustainable development of the nation. This undoubtedly brings other considerations, paradigms and feature works which ultimately impact the labor in all areas of business.

Furthermore, there are many benefits attributed to a paperless office in this technological age Hattingh (2001) highlighted several advantages of paperless office as follows:

- a) Environment friendly: The paperless office reduces the amount of paper produced and used, saving money for the organization as well as making a tangible contribution towards protecting the environment. Large storage rooms filled with files can be eliminated, provided legal obligations are adhered to;
- b) Process efficiency: Method of converting to an electronic system provides the opportunity of analysing

and identifying flaws in manual processes in order to implement improved electronic business processes and new business rules (Sharma 2000);

- c) Process management: Electronic workflow has built-in control mechanisms like the triggering of activities, automated notifications and escalation as well as an audit trail to measure processing time and the quality of process output. The automated process allows tracking against predefined rules. The control over document updating and circulation ensures more accurate information, as employees will be using the most up-to-date version available;
- d) Resource efficiency: Automated workflow sends the work to the employees and efficiency is achieved by assigning tasks according to, for example, workload. Electronic templates furthermore eliminate repetitive administrative tasks, improving productivity by allowing the employee to concentrate on the more intellectual tasks at hand;
- e) Standardization: Consolidated electronic forms, working documents, templates and procedures ensure standardization;
- f) Sharing and collaboration: A central database or repository of documents and information on the network, such as provided by intranets or extranets ensures the sharing of information from distributed locations, which encourages collaborative business processes and functional integration (process chains);
- g) Market efficiency: This allows for quicker response times to customer inquiries. The automated procedures enable transparent communication with customers (uniform interface), the prediction of delivery times and adherence to deadlines. Better service delivery improves customer's perceptions of the organization and provides a competitive advantage;

- h) Information delivery: Electronic documents can be stored and delivered in various forms and formats, and delivered as a package to the user when and how required and
- i) Unlocking information: Information sources previously 'locked' away and unknown might become available to the end-user in electronic format. Examples are fragile documents or those of which only a single copy exists. Provided the information professional has applied his/her expertise in identifying and organizing (indexing) documents or records, better retrieval results will be obtained.

Paperless systems are implemented within organizations for the purpose of improving the effectiveness and general efficiency of day to day activities. Fisher and Kenny (2000) suggested that organizations and institutions infuse Information and Communication Technology into their operations so as to enhance a paperless office and facilitates business growth and success. Laudon and Laudon (2001) opined that Information and Communication Technology are embedded in organization as a result of standard operating procedures, workflows, politics, organizational culture and structure. The current automated offices have made the work of secretaries more relevant and functional in their office occupation but must possess technological professional skills in the areas of manipulative technology, communication and professional skills. Amoor (2010), Okoro and Ojianaegbu (2012) contended that the manipulative skills expected of secretaries in the modern automated offices are visible in the areas of internet connectivity, digital photocopier, electronic paper trimmer, computer operation, information management, scanner and paper shredders. Proper acquisition of these modern manipulative skills should make professional secretaries highly relevant and more efficient in their office occupation.

In the world of work, employers are obviously expecting secretaries to acquaint themselves with these manipulative skills. In the modern offices, secretaries should learn to

make effective use of communication facilities. Ejeka (2019), Olayanju (2015) and Edwin in Yakubu and Ugwu (2015) explained that the following communication technologies such as telex, electronic mail (e-mail), fax, telephone, intercom are used in modern offices to send messages. Secretaries should be fully aware of demands of these modern communication facilities and try to avail themselves opportunities to get acquainted with them. These modern facilities are very simple, easy and fast in sending messages. In organization where automated machines are used by the secretary office records greater efficiency, higher productivity, faster and better quality work at low costs. By using automated equipment there is a standardized procedure to produce communication quickly, accurately and inexpensively. Therefore, in an office where automated machines and equipment are used, tasks are generally organized according to work specialization (Ejeka, 2019). Secretaries are to acquire these technological skills so as to be technologically acquainted with innovations in the modern offices. The study therefore sought to find out the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills required of trainee-secretaries for promotion of a paperless office of in Kwara State

Statement of the Problem

The advents of modern technologies have rendered the works of secretaries' redundant. For this reasons, most organization have laid off the post of secretaries, forgotten that secretaries work is much more than typing and taken shorthand dictation. The modern day secretaries need to possess technological skills that will enable them to be more relevant and functional in their office endeavors. Atakpa (2013) opined that innovations in office information technologies demand new skills, professional and intellectual concept among secretaries. In view of this, secretaries should acquaint themselves with new knowledge, and skills for effective performance in the modern day offices.

As a result of these rapid changes in technology that has affected almost every areas of business enterprise, the modern day

offices, and secretaries are not functional, acquainted with a paperless office and are no longer efficient in the discharge of their professional duties. Thus, this work tries to clarify Information and Communication Technology skills required of trainee-secretaries for promotion of paperless office in the wider context. It is on that premise, that the study tends to find out (ICT) skills required of trainee-secretaries for promotion of a paperless office of in Kwara State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills required of trainee-secretaries for promotion of a paperless office in Kwara State. Specifically, the study sought to:-

1. Investigate the level of ICT skills required of trainee-secretaries for the promotion of a paperless office as perceived by lecturers;
2. Examine difference in the perception of lecturers and students on ICT skills required of secretaries-trainees based on school type;
3. Establish difference between lecturers and students perception on the ICT skills required of secretaries-trainee;
4. Identify the difference in perception of lecturers and students on ICT skills required of secretaries-trainee based on gender.

Research Question

One research question was raised to guide the study:

1. What is the level of ICT skills required of the trainee-secretaries for the promotion of paperless office?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were test at 0.05 level of significance

1. There is no significant difference in the perception of lecturers and students on ICT skills required of secretaries-trainees based on school type.
2. There is no significant difference between lecturers and students on the ICT skills required of secretaries-trainee.
3. There is no significant difference in

perception of lecturers and students on ICT skills required of secretaries-trainee based on gender.

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study was descriptive survey. The population of this study comprised 365 respondents. Multi-stage sampling techniques were used for the study. At the stage 1, simple random sampling technique was used to select 7 lecturers (both permanent and temporary) and 315 students of the Office Technology and Management (OTM) Department of the Kwara State Polytechnic and also 10 lecturers and 33 students of the Department of Office Technology Management (OTM) of Kwara State College of Education, Oro, Kwara State. At the stage 2, stratified random sampling technique was used to stratify the lecturers and students based on gender. At the stage 3, proportional sampling technique was adopted using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table to select the sample size of 365 which represented 186. But, 140 copies of the instruments were retrieved for data analysis and this made of one hundred and forty (140) respondents that participated in the study comprising lecturers and students. The final year trainee-secretaries and lecturers are chosen because they are directly involved in processing, storage, retrieval and presentation of information for the promotion of a paperless office in the day to day activities office areas. An instrument was used for the study and entitled "Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Skills Required of Trainee-secretaries Questionnaire (ICTSRTQ) on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SD), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), with corresponding weights of 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. Face and content validity was ascertained for the study by given it to four experts in related study. The reliability coefficient was established using Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient. The instrument yielded a reliability index of 0.74 and 0.75 for each of the clusters. The copies of ICTSRTQ were administered to the lecturers and students of Kwara State Polytechnic, and Kwara State

College of Education, Oro, Kwara State. The research question raised for the study was answered using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation while the formulated research hypotheses were tested using inferential statistics of t-test at 0.05 level of significance. The t-test was used in order to

determine the significant difference between two different means or variables.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the level of ICT skills required of the trainee-secretaries for the promotion of paperless office?

Table 1

Level of ICT skills required of the trainee-secretaries for the promotion of paperless office

Levels	N
Low	0
Moderate	6
High	134
Average Mean	140

Decision Rule: Low = 0-13, Moderate = 14-26, High = 27-40

Table 1 revealed that high level of ICT skills is required of the trainee-secretaries to promote a paperless office based on the respondents from the sampled institutions in Kwara State. This means high level of ICT skills is required of secretary trainees to achieve a paperless office in the 21st century.

Hypotheses Testing

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the perception of lecturers and students on ICT skills required of secretaries-trainees based on school type.

Table 2

Differences on ICT Skills Required of Secretaries-trainees Based on School Type

Respondents	N	Mean	SD	SEM	t	Df	p	Decision
College of Education	26	2.85	.20	2.24	1.39	138	.167	Accepted
Polytechnics	114	2.79	.21	2.53				

Significant @ $p > 0.05$

Table 2 indicated that there was not statistical significant difference between responses of College of Education and Polytechnics on ICT skills required of secretaries-trainees $\bar{x} = (2.85; 2.79)$, $t(1.39) = .167$, $p < .05$. Since the p-value was greater than .05 thresholds, the hypothesis was therefore accepted. It is

evident from the perception of lecturers and students of the two institutions offering related courses that there is variation in the ICT skills required of secretaries-trainees.

HO2: There is no significant difference between lecturers and students' perception on the ICT skills required of secretaries-trainee.

Table 3

Difference between Lecturers and Students on perception of ICT Skills Required of Secretaries-trainee

Respondents	N	Mean	SD	SEM	t	Df	P	Decision
Lecturers	8	2.71	.09	.03	2.54	138	.025	Rejected
Students	132	2.81	.20	.01				

Significant @ $p, < 0.05$

Table 3 indicated that there was not statistical significant difference between the lecturers' and students' perception on the ICT skills required of secretaries-trainee. $\bar{x} = (2.71; 2.81)$, $t(2.54) = .025$ $p > .05$. Since the p-value was less than .05 thresholds, the hypothesis was therefore accepted. It implies that the

lecturers and students varies in their perception ICT skills required of secretaries-trainee.

HO₃: There is no significant difference in perception of lecturer and students on ICT skills required of secretaries-trainee based on gender.

Table 4

Difference on perception of ICT Skills Required of Secretaries-trainee based on Gender

Respondents	N	Mean	SD	SEM	t	Df	P	Decision
Male	60	2.78	.09	.03	1.52	138	.131	Accepted
Female	80	2.83	.20	.02				

Significant @ $p > .05$

Table 4 indicated that there was not statistical significant difference between the Males and female perception on the ICT skills required of secretaries-trainee. $\bar{x} = (2.78; 2.83)$, $t(1.52) = .131$ $p > .05$. Since the p-value was less than .05 thresholds, the hypothesis was therefore accepted. It implies that the male and female are not different in their perception on ICT skills required of secretaries-trainee.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from research question one proved that the level of ICT skills required of the trainee-secretaries for the promotion of paperless office is too high, that is ICT skills is required of trainee-secretaries to achieve a paperless office. The study is in line with the view of Agbo (2006) who said that the world is changing rapidly as a result of technological development. He went further that the impact of technological improvement in the office demands that the development of a successful secretarial career today depends upon the secretary in training to acquire Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based skills and expertise as well as skills required for each category of staff technological changes in our environment coupled with competition within a particular organization or in the society are the reasons why organizations engage in training and development of their secretarial staff. In agreement with the view of Eze (2000) who depicted that any office staff of today that is lacking in Information and Communication

Technology would find the work boring and uninteresting.

The findings also revealed that there was a significant difference on ICT skills required by trainee-secretaries based on school type. This also implies that there is a variation in the ICT skills required of secretaries-trainees based on the type of institution. This study is akin to as observed by Ezenwafor (2012) who noted that secretarial education, which is an option in business education, is concerned with producing graduates who can quickly access data or information, process, disseminate, store and retrieve for future use as demanded by their employers or supervisors. The secretary's role in ICT is indispensable because the employer in the organization often depend on her to get requisite information promptly for effective managerial decision. Azih and Igboke (2014) asserted that the programme changed the nomenclature of secretarial studies to be Office Technology and Management programme. Consequently N.C.C.E. equally introduced some ICT courses into the business education programme for Colleges of Education. Also, it is expected that at the end of each programme, the recipients will be proficient in secretarial that can either help them to pick gainful employment and to be self reliance.

The study also found that there is a statistical difference between lecturers and students' perception on the ICT skills required of trainee- secretaries. That is the population

of lecturers to students is very low and therefore the perception of lecturers and students vary on the ICT skills required of secretaries-trainees. Notwithstanding the population of lecturer to students does not affect the acquisition of ICT skills required by secretary trainee for the promotion of the desired paperless office but the attitude that is involved in the teaching and learning process. Bongotons (2010) reported that availability and adequacy of ICT resources for both human and material recourses implies they are easily, readily, publicly, and generally found and enough in quantity and quality for use. Obviously, the availability and adequacy of these ICT resources is a necessary precondition for its use in the teaching process. This implies that resource availability and adequacy enhances the acquisition of knowledge and technical skills required in one or more areas of office technology and management.

The result of hypothesis three tested also revealed that there was no statistical difference between male and female perception on the ICT skills required of trainee-secretaries that male and female counterpart having the same perception on the ICT skills required of secretaries-trainees to promote the paperless office. Several investigations, especially Whitley (2007), Onwvegbuzie (2001) have reported that gender has no significant effect on any of the dimension of required ICT skill acquisition.

Conclusion

In synopsis, ICT skills have influenced the content and quality of the secretaries operations in the promoting of the paperless office. From all indications, ICT skills present great potential for trainee-secretaries in the process reengineering of the activities in the office. A paperless office can strengthen document security and confidentiality, create an easy way of accessing data, automated data retention and digital backups, less expensive and facilitate transactions in an organization. It is imperative for institutional management to intensify investment in ICT equipment to facilitate speed, accuracy, convenience, and effectiveness' for any organization to record success.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made;

1. The institutions should provide adequate and efficient lecturers with ICT skills to encourage the students in the acquisition of the competency and skills required to promote a modern office.
2. Also, there should be adequate provision of fund for the procurement of needed facilities and equipment that will aid speedy skill acquisition by the trainee-secretaries for the promotion of the paperless office.
3. Workshops, seminars, and comprehensive training and re-training programmes on ICT resource utilization for the promotion of a paperless office should be organized by institutions for Office Technology and Management Lecturers at the Polytechnic and the Colleges of Education to enable them gain current knowledge of the resources and also positive attitude to enhance the teaching and learning process.
4. Students should be encouraged to own their personal computers and orientation programmes should be regularly organized by the institution on the need for the acquisition of computer knowledge and skills for the promotion of a paperless office and also create awareness on gender equality in the secretarial discipline.

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