

SECRETARIAL TRAINING AND THE NEEDS OF EMPLOYERS IN THE NIGERIAN LABOUR MARKET

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The secretarial training has gone beyond typewriting or computer appreciation/application that is offered in the formal schools to the use of sophisticated modern equipment to perform work and many others. The changing trend, in the labour market profile have increased the complexity of skills required by today's workforce and threatened the positions of graduate secretaries. It is against this backdrop that the paper examined Secretarial Training and the needs of employers in the Nigerian Labour Market'. The paper discusses the concept of the secretarial profession, concept of training, purpose of secretarial training, characteristics of secretarial training, The Nigerian Labour Market, the needs of the employer, challenges of secretarial training in the Nigerian Labour Market. It concludes that the curriculum should dwell more on preparing the secretarial graduates on present realities of life in the workforce. The paper recommends among others that there is need for institution – industry collaboration in the training of secretaries. This is in view of the fact that the training environment for secretarial training is a work environment itself or a replica of the work environment. This can be achieved through redirecting government policies towards removing obstacles such as the unwillingness of industrialist to cooperate with the SIWES programme in the training institutions.

Keywords: Secretary, Secretarial Training, Employer, labour Market

INTRODUCTION

The use of technology has increased greatly in this modern dispensation. Technology on itself has moved or shifted base from manual operational procedures to full automation of most of the teaching and learning methods. In the modern office today, there is now new technology or terms as word processing reprographics, micrographics, data processing etc that now are common languages used to describe many technological processes that have evolved from the traditional office occupation.

The advent of technology according to Adeshina, & Aliyu (2012) has brought about faster and more efficient ways and means of handling office procedures and decision making processes based on accurate information, hence most business organizations and even government agencies are not adopting office automation – which is also referred to as e-office in their routine operation. He further stated that the skills they have so acquired while in school may not fit approximately with the current demands in the world of work. Secretarial education has gone beyond typewriting or computer appreciation/application we offering the formal schools to the use of sophisticated inter connected computers, computerized telephone systems, tele-conferencing, dictating machine, modern reprographic equipment to perform

work and many others helped lot facilitate the quality efficiency of the work of the secretary. Consequently, the National Policy on Education (2004) states that the nation's education activities should be centred on the students in order for them to acquire maximum skills acquisition from self development and fulfilment in the labour market. Unfortunately, due to certain impediments, the level of practical skills acquired by these students, compared with the demands of the labour market and technological advancement, is nothing to boast about. This explains why most employers of labour in the nation consider the graduates as half baked and unstable without further training (Ado 2014). These graduates too cannot be self employed because they are not able to practice what the studied in the tertiary institution. The trust of this paper is to look into what these needs of employers are, and how they can be addressed in the process of training these graduate.

Concept of Secretary

There is no profession that is as dynamic as the secretarial profession. The Institute of Certified Secretaries and Reporters (1999) in Wannang, Dazan & Nyam (2010) viewed a secretary as a professionally trained and qualified information technologist and psychologist with mastery of office and administrative management processes of institutions for instantaneous comprehension of ideas and issues in human and organisational behaviours. In the same vein, the National Secretary Association (International) in Wannang, Dazan, & Nyam (2010) defines the secretary as 'an assistant to an executive, who possesses the mastery of office skills and ability to assume responsibility without direct supervision, one who displays initiative, exercises judgment, and makes decisions within the scope of his authority'. This implies that the secretary is a person who has acquired the basic secretarial skills with the mastery of office and administrative management processes of an organisation so as to cope ably with work in a modern office environment.

Generally, a professional secretary performs tasks similar to an executive or administrative assistant. She/he coordinates the daily routines of an office and organizes the office schedules and paper work. As an office professional, the secretary has the responsibility to organize the work flow so that the employer will feel that everything is under control, withal projects completed when needed.

Concept of Training

Training constitutes a basic concept in human development. It is concerned with developing a particular skill to a desired standard by instructions and practice. Training is a highly useful tool that can bring a student or an employee into a position where they can do their job correctly, effectively and conscientiously. Training is the act of increasing the knowledge and skills of an employee for doing a particular job.

Today, the use of manual/electronic typewriters by qualified secretaries has become unfashionable yet; there are scores of trained secretaries who so not know how to operate the simplest keyboards of an electronic typewriter or word processor. The question is, when they will be exposed to modern office automation. According to Stubbe in Mohammed and Kachalla (2012), the changes that computer has brought into the office today is so profound that it can be referred to as the second industrial revolution. There is nowhere also that revolution could be felt more seriously than in an office setting. It is not enough having the basic knowledge of doing the job, but also the application of skills and knowledge in handling modern equipment/machines in doing the job. The professional secretary in a modern age needs to be trained in the effectiveness and operation of modern office machines.

A number of strategies have been identified as relevant and expedient for secretaries to enhance their professional growth and status. These strategies include:

- a. In Service Training: This is a type of training designed to help one achieve a high degree of competency in one's job. It is a method which is common in industries and organizations, civil service, agricultural sectors, marketing companies etc
- b. On The Job Training: This is a training method which enables the trainee to learn on the job. In other words, it is a strategy by which the trainee is guided by his or her immediate supervisor or an experienced worker to enable the trainee learn the basic skills as he or she performs the normal job
- c. Conferences: This is a training and development technique in which participants are drawn from different organizations to deliberate on a selected theme or topic, for the purpose of getting detailed information on the selected theme.
- d. Workshop: According to Ndu in Mohammed and Kachalla (2012) a workshop is a program designed to give an opportunity to participants to work and deliberate on a common problem affecting them under the guidance of an expert in the same field. It is a means of acquainting participants with possible solutions to common problems with the assistance of are source person or persons
- e. Off on the Job Training: This is a type of training which a secretary receives while away from his or her duty post. It is aimed at acquiring further training or skills that will improve the secretary's knowledge

Purpose of Secretarial Training

The aim of secretarial training is to train youths and unemployed persons for jobs and help workers update their skills. It is meant to prepare individuals for jobs in the business world:

The National policy on education (2004) identifies three broad goals of secretarial training (Secretarial Education includes) namely:

- (I) Provides trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly of craft, advanced craft and technical levels
- (ii) Provides the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agriculture, commerce and economic development
- (iii) Give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically

A look at these goals emphasized the self reliant nature of secretarial education and training as it fits perfectly well into two of the National Education Goals NPE(2004)

- The inculcation of the right type of values and attitude for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society
- The acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and several abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society.

Characteristics of Secretarial Training

Datom (2008) observes that any job which is utilitarian in nature and posses any of the follow characteristics, will be classified as an occupation work in the realm of secretarial education (Secretarial Education Institution)

- The training environment is the working environment itself or replica of the work environment
- The training jobs are carried on in the same way is in the occupation itself
- The trainee is trained specifically in the manipulative habits and thinking habits

- required in the occupation itself
- The training helps the trainee to capitalize his interest and abilities to the highest possible degree
 - The training is given to those who need it, want it and can profit by it.
 - The instructor is himself a master of the skills and knowledge he teaches
 - Adequate repetitive training in experiences from the occupation forces right habits of doing and thinking to the degree necessary for employment
 - Thinking is carried out to the extent where it gives the trainee of productive ability with which he can secure employment or hold employment
 - Training meets market demand for labour
 - Training is given on actual jobs and not in exercises or pseudo jobs
 - The content of the training which is taught is obtained from masters of the occupation

The Nigerian Labour Market

The changing trend in the labour market profiles have increased the complexity of skills required by today's workforce and threatened the position of graduates that are ill-equipped with knowledge of modern technology. Graduate employability skills are set of understanding and personal attribute that make graduate more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupation (Yorke 2008). Present employers at the national and global economies tend to recruit graduates with high soft skills competencies. No wonder, Winterbotam, Adams & Kuecheli (2001) affirmed that serious employers are less demanding of academic excellence and technical skills, and consider them trainable if candidates are able to demonstrate positive attributes and soft skills.

Also, owing to the changes in labour market need, changes in technology, there is the need for secretarial studies curriculum to be reviewed in order to meet these current societies' needs. These programs provide the necessary skills and knowledge needed for employment in the areas of business in the office. Each of these areas has experience different types of innovation or the other with the advent of information technology. These innovations are all aimed at preparing and equipping the individual with present realities of life in the workforce

What Does The Employers Need?

Employers are getting worried over the competency of the graduates that do apply in their chosen field. Employers want the graduate's recruits to be professionally competent in their chosen fields. They want them to be equipped with complementary life styles skills, such as problem solving, reflective and critical thinking, interpersonal and teaming skills, effective communication character, integrity, self esteem, self discipline, organizing skills, leadership skills and the ability to translate ideas into action. (Sodipo 2014) She also noted that employers needed employability skills that are necessary for getting, keeping and being successful in a job. These are the skills and attitude that enable employers to get along with their colleagues, to make critical decisions, solve problems, develop respect and ultimately become strong ambassador to the organization.

Such employability skills are as follows:-

- a. Interpersonal Skills:- These are used to interact with people, participate effectively as members of a team, negotiate, satisfy customers, make decisions, manage time and work effectively with colleagues.

- b. Communication Skills:-These are verbal and in writing, writing clearly and succinctly, demonstrates good vocabulary and listening actively.
- c. Critical Thinking Skills:- This is the ability to solve problems and make decisions and which is a huge asset to employers. It is the ability to effectively plan and organize creative thinking are innovative and inventive and are more likely to devise new ways of doing things that add value to the work environment
- d. Personal Development:- Having the right attitude towards work and the organization you work for. Employers look for people who are open to learning and embrace change. Such a person will be more successful than the person who is afraid of learning and resistant to changes in the organization.
- e. Self Management Skills:- Self motivation, self confidence, self control skills that are used to manage personal feelings land how people react to challenges and problems that work and in their private lives.
- f. Presentation Skills:- Needed for presentation information clearly and clearly and effectively in the work place. This includes business plans, reports, minutes etc
- g. Leadership Skills:- Ability to influence others towards the achievement of a goal
- h. Numeracy:- It involves understanding of numerical data, statistics and graphs. It is also a part of making decisions and reasoning.
- i. Information Technology Skills:- Acquiring basic Information Technology skills and being familiar with the computer open a wide range of employment opportunity and increase marketability in work place (www.skillsyouneed.com)

Employers are also looking for skill with reflex

- Personal attitude or character
- Positive attitude i.e. 'can do' approach, good work – ethics and the willingness to learn
- Good personal presentation
- Honesty and integrity
- Reliability
- Time keeping and personal organization
- Team working, collaboration and cooperation

- Flexibility
- Commercial awareness and customer focus
- Business etiquette skills
- Communication –oral and written
- Numeracy
- Computer literacy/information Technology Skills(www.ukccs.org.uk)

Challenges of Secretarial Education/Training

The need for a change in the mode of training of secretarial professionals has been necessitated by the dynamics of the Nigerian Labour Market. Despite the fact that some reasonable improvements have been recorded in the programme, there are still challenges facing the programme, there are still challenges facing the programme, some of which includes the following:

- Lack of institution – industry collaboration: there is no policy or conscious effort to cement firm relationship between the generators of knowledge and skills (educational institutions) and the users (industry) thereby creating a missing link between the quality of graduates produced and the expectation of employers
- The students industrial work experience scheme (SIWES) as presently structured and partially funded by Industrial Training Fund is highly limited in scope and does not provide enough interface between formal training institutions and industries. The training institutions have also not made any efforts on their part to bridge the gap between institutional training and industrial requirement, which is unfortunate.
- Lack of research funding from industries, communities, government, nongovernmental organisations and experienced entrepreneurs for use in teaching the entrepreneurship content of secretarial education. This is because secretarial education curriculum more or less only scratches the programs on the surface; hence it cannot be taught in such a way that we can have graduates of secretarial education specializing in entrepreneurship.
- Poor and non sustainable funding of education, largely due to problem of dwindling government revenue, mismanagement of funds allocated for education from which secretarial education would be funded, and absence of an active private sector involvement in funding secretarial education. This has contributed to secretarial education not being able to progress beyond what is available on ground at the moment with the accompanying negative implications.
- Insincerity on the part of schools, departments and lecturers of secretarial studies during accreditation. A situation where schools and

departments of secretarial training parade staff and equipment that are not properties of the school or department for accreditation purposes is not helping the students, thereby affecting the quality of graduate produced.

Conclusions

The success or failure of any organization depends on the capability and the calibre of employees that are employed into a particular organization. From this study, it is noticed that there is a serious disconnect that exists between the graduates of secretarial studies and the needs of the employers in the Nigerian Labour Market. It concludes that the curriculum should dwell more on preparing the secretarial graduates on present realities of life in the workforce.

Recommendations:-

Based on the foregoing conclusions, the following recommendations are hereby made

- There is a need for institution – industry collaboration in the training of secretaries. This is in view of the fact that the training environment of secretaries is the working environment itself or a replica of the working environment. This can be achieved through redirecting government policies towards removing obstacles such as the unwillingness of industrialist to cooperate with the SIWES programme in the training institutions.
- The legal framework establishing the Industrial Training Fund must be amended to facilitate the re-designing and delivery of a curriculum that meets the demands of the industry for secretarial graduates
- Educational institutions should endeavour to build strong linkages with successful entrepreneurs, enterprises and support promotion agencies. This will help in sustaining and keeping the secretarial graduates in touch with the realities of the Nigeria Labour Market
- Schools, departments and lecturers should develop the will and sincerity to parade and show only staff and equipment that belongs to the department for accreditation purposes.
- Lecturers should be encouraged to use more life cases analysis that brings real work problems to life in teaching.
- Institutions have to be properly funded by their proprietors to ensure that quality graduates that can compete with their counterparts globally and are employable. Funding the institutions would ensure that the physical facilities are adequate, laboratories and libraries are up to date and well equipped, staff are well remunerated as at and when due
- Government should help in improving social services like electricity generation and distribution, good road network, easy access to credit for the graduate to be self employed

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