

# **TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF THE MARKETABILITY OF THE SECRETARIAL PROFESSION IN MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE PRESENT DAY NIGERIAN LABOUR MARKET**

**FRANK OKORO (Ph.D)**

and

**CECILIA IFESI**

Department of Office Technology and Management,  
Federal Polytechnic, BAUCHI

## **Abstract**

The secretarial profession has become highly oriented towards computer literacy. Following technological development in this digital age, several other business and office related professions, also emphasize computer literacy. Competency in computer literacy, therefore, is no longer the exclusive reserve of any profession. This apparently implies that the secretarial profession is under the threat of either extinction or unemployable as the marketability of the profession is now in question. This research work examined Teachers' perception of the marketability of the secretarial profession in meeting the needs of the present day Nigerian labour market. A twenty nine item questionnaire, validated by three experts, was utilized for the study. No sample was taken in view of the manageable size of the population as all the identified teachers in the study area were considered. Five point Likert Scale was used for data analysis. The findings revealed that Secretarial Studies tagged the product, its price and promotions were highly attractive, indicating that the profession is quite viable and marketable. It was, therefore, recommended among others, that those specific subjects that distinguish the profession be retained and that teachers should make concerted efforts towards rejuvenating those skills that make the profession unique in order to continue to retain its marketability.

**Keywords:** Profession, Labour, Secretary, Market

## **Introduction**

There is hardly any organization in the world where secretaries do not hold sway. This assertion emanates from the fact that all organisations must keep records, administer correspondences and humanly relate with their internal and external environments amidst other commitments. The secretarial profession is a profession that had existed over the ages. At the inception of the Nigerian polytechnic system of education, Secretarial Studies as a course was one of the courses that were initially mounted and a

course specification and guideline of the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) guided the implementation. The course had a pride of place and was quite attractive. However, with current changes in contemporary business offices occasioned by ever changing technology, the NBTE effected a curriculum change in the Secretarial Studies. The change was in line with one of the functions of the NBTE which requires that the Board advises and coordinates all aspects of technical and vocational education falling outside the universities and to make recommendations on the national policy necessary for the full development of technical and vocational education for the training of technicians, craftsmen and other middle-levels and skilled manpower (NBTE, 1991). The change in the new programme affected the nomenclature of the course and the contents of the programme.

The new Office Technology and Management (OTM) programme was designed by the National Board for Technical Education to replace the Secretarial Studies programme which has been in operation since 1989 (NBTE in Okoro, 2009). The new OTM programme was designed to equip secretarial and office students with vocational skills in Office Technology and Management and socio-psychological work skills for employment in various fields (NBTE, 2006). Amidst other changes, the new programme incorporates courses in Information and Communication Technology as against a few courses in Word Processing in the old programme.

The change in nomenclature of Secretarial Studies coupled with the fact that the programme is now oriented towards the study of several Information and Communication Technology courses make the programme quite volatile. A study undertaken by Okoro and Asogwa (2012) examined the nomenclature of the Secretarial Studies programme. Its place of domicile among the disciplines is at the front burner as the arguments go on and on whether the programme will be domiciled in technology or in business. Sometimes, academic pundits contemplate on placing the course side by side with Mass Communication. Another serious issue is the fact that computer studies and communication technology are no longer the exclusive reserve of any profession. All professions study Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and some to a very high degree. The fact that several professions now offer ICT courses is a development which has placed the secretarial profession in a capricious position in its marketability. It follows that the uniqueness of the secretarial profession is under threat as any Dick and Harry can now assume the position of a secretary. The secretary is now faced with the threat of unemployment or underemployment.

Unemployment is a state of joblessness or idleness of one with labour requirements, potentials, skills, attitudes and competence (Agomuo, 2015). Agomuo also defined under-employment as a state where one does not have enough work to do, or not having work that makes full use of one's skills and abilities. The present day Nigerian labour market is no longer as viable as it used to be in view of the fact that the labour

market is characterized by unemployment. Agomuo (2015) stated that one serious result of the Nigerian economic problem is unemployment and underemployment. He observed that unemployment has reached an endemic stage. This includes underemployment of labour and capital resources. Unemployment has become a common phenomenon among graduates of Nigerian tertiary institutions. Osamwonyi (2009) pointed out that in 2003; the Nigeria unemployment rate was 10.8 percent. The current rate, twelve years after, is better imagined than stated. It is a common practice to find Nigerian graduates on the streets, some engage in menial jobs while some do nothing. Osaseri (2010) observed that most of the youth and university graduates are waiting endlessly for the government to provide them with jobs. It is, therefore, no wonder that several people now compete for a few available jobs and where any particular job does not entail uniqueness, it definitely becomes an all comers' affairs, and this is where the secretarial profession has become unduly volatile. The marketability of the secretarial profession, in the present dispensation, has therefore become uncertain.

This study is predicated on marketing mix. Marketing mix is the set of controllable, tactical marketing tools that the firm blends to produce the response it wants in the target market (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006). The marketing mix consists of everything the firm can do to influence the demand for its product. Kotler and Armstrong asserted that the many possibilities can be collected into four groups of variables known as the "four Ps"; product, price, place and promotion. In the context of this study, the marketing mix studied is targeted towards everything the institutions can do to stimulate, sway and encourage the patronage of the Secretarial profession.

Marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational goals (Phillip & Kotler, 2009) and marketability is the aptitude and skill required to market products.

This study, therefore, identified four variables of the marketability of the secretarial profession for examination. The first variable in this study is the product. Product in this context refers to the course and services it offers to the target consumers (employers, service patronages and utilisers of the products and services). The second variable is the price of the profession as it affects the amount of money "customers" have to pay to obtain the product and services which includes the salary, allowances, remunerations and the cost of obtaining the training. Promotion includes the institutional, societal and individual activities that communicate the merits of the product and persuade target customers to seek and hire the services. Place includes all the institutional activities that make the product available to target consumers. This also includes the possibility of the Secretarial profession to be utilised in a multifarious ways.

The study examined the perception of the teachers. Perception is the ability to see, hear or understand things (Hornby, 2006). The perception process involves those

activities by which an individual acquires and assigns meaning to stimuli (Okoro, 2012). Teachers of the Secretarial Studies programme are trained secretaries and most of them are conversant with the intricacies of the secretarial profession. The teachers are thus able to perceive issues with the secretarial profession with the aim of making informed judgments that will guide decisions and policies affecting the profession. It is against this backdrop, therefore, that the researchers sought to ascertain the teachers' perception of the marketability of the secretarial profession in meeting the needs of the present day Nigerian labour market.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The major purpose of the study was to examine teachers' perception of the marketability of the secretarial profession in meeting the needs of the present day Nigerian labour market. Specifically the study sought:

1. To determine whether teachers of the secretarial profession perceive the course in its current form as a marketable product in the present day Nigerian labour market.
2. To determine whether teachers of the secretarial profession perceive the price attached to the secretarial profession as worthy enough for its marketability in the present day Nigerian labour market.
3. To determine whether teachers of the secretarial profession perceive the secretarial profession as offering a place that would ensure its marketability in the present day Nigerian labour market
4. To determine whether teachers of the secretarial profession perceive the promotion of the secretarial profession as attractive enough to ensure its marketability in the present day Nigerian labour market?

### **Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study will be of immense benefit to secretaries, teachers, researchers and curriculum designers. The study will afford them the opportunity of having profound information that will give them understanding of current developments with the secretarial profession.

The secretaries, who are the main target of the study, will be able to have first-hand information of what the market for their profession demands. The secretaries provide service and for one to provide service, the interest of the consumers must be taken into consideration. Prospective secretaries need to be assured that there will be a place for their services when they graduate and this will help them to pursue their studies with vigour.

Teachers of the secretarial profession will have a clearer understanding of the market demand for their products. Such understanding will help them in implementing the curriculum of Secretarial Studies.

Researchers will have a compendium of information through this work and this will give impetus for further research on the profession. Along the same line, curriculum designers will find this study useful as they would now be able to beef up areas that demand further input in the design of the secretarial profession.

### **Research Question:**

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. In what ways do teachers of the secretarial profession perceive the course in its current form as a marketable product in the present day Nigerian labour market?
2. In what ways do teachers of the secretarial profession perceive the price attached to the secretarial profession as worthy enough for its marketability in the present day Nigerian labour market?
3. How do teachers of the secretarial profession perceive the secretarial profession as offering a place that would ensure its marketability in the present day Nigerian labour market?
4. In what ways do teachers of the secretarial profession perceive the promotion of the secretarial profession as attractive enough to ensure its marketability in the present day Nigerian labour market?

### **Methodology:**

The study adopted a survey research design. Gall, Gall and Borg (2003) stated that survey research method uses questionnaires or interviews to collect data from sample that has been selected to represent a population in which the finding of the data analysis can be generalised. Nworgu (2006) substantiated the view that a survey enables the researcher to obtain information from people who are considered to be representative of the entire population. Respondents were chosen from three schools in Bauchi, Nassarawa and Plateau States as follows: Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi (FPTB) – 14; Federal Polytechnic, Nassarawa (FPN) – 13 and Plateau State Polytechnic, Barkin Ladi (PSPB) - 16., making a total of 43 teachers who formed the respondents. A 29 item questionnaire which was validated by three experts was used for the study. The questionnaire contained twenty nine items sub-divided into four sections A,B,C, and D. The questionnaire was formulated based on five point Likert rating scale of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Undecided (U), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD). The response categories were assigned numerical values of 5,4,3,2 and 1 respectively. The data generated from the questionnaire were analysed using Mean with Standard Deviation. Each item was interpreted based on the real

limits of the codes assigned to the response categories. Any mean response below 3.00 was regarded as not accepted while items with mean scores of 3.00 and above were accepted as marketable.

### Results/Highlight

**Table 1: In what ways do teachers of the secretarial profession perceive the course in its current form as a marketable product in the present day Nigerian labour market?**

S/No.	Items	Mean (X)	SD	Remarks
1.	The ICT course contents of the Secretarial Studies programme make the course a viable product.	4.83	0.93	Accepted
2.	The traditional core subjects such as Shorthand are still very attractive and make the course a viable product.	3.50	1.04	Accepted
3.	The duration of training for Secretaries in the Polytechnics makes the course attractive.	4.91	0.86	Accepted
4.	That the graduates of Secretarial Studies secure employments quite easily makes the course a viable product.	4.52	0.89	Accepted
5.	Properly equipped and trained secretaries boost productivity.	3.42	0.73	Accepted
6.	Secretarial Studies graduates can compete favourably with other graduates.	4.74	0.92	Accepted
7.	Secretarial Studies as a course can help to empower youths in the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills.	4.93	0.79	Accepted
8.	Secretarial graduates cannot miss out in the current emphasis on globalization which refers to the growing sense of interconnectedness between all parts of the world	4.23	1.04	Accepted
9.	Other trained professionals can conveniently do the work of confidential and personal secretaries.	1.85	0.63	Rejected

Table 1 shows the mean ratings of the respondents' opinion on the ways teachers of the secretarial profession perceive the course in its current form as a marketable product in the present day Nigerian labour market. The items under serial numbers 1 to 8 had mean scores from 3.42 to 4.92 implying that the eight items were accepted. However, item number nine which states "other trained professionals can conveniently do the work of confidential and personal secretaries" had a mean score of 1.85 implying that the item is rejected. The standard deviation of the items ranged from 0.63 to 1.06



indicating that the respondents were very close to one another and to the Mean.

**Table 2: In what ways do teachers of the secretarial profession perceive the price attached to the secretarial profession as worthy enough for its marketability in the present day Nigerian labour market?**

S/No.	Items	Mean (X)	SD	Remarks
10.	The salary and allowances for secretaries makes the profession attractive	2.41	0.98	Rejected
11.	Welfare packages attached to the secretarial profession is as attractive as that of other professions.	2.32	0.72	Rejected
12.	The Secretarial Studies profession can enhance the standard of living of the practitioners.	3.52	0.82	Accepted
13.	The cost of training of secretaries is enormous and makes the course unattractive.	2.35	0.63	Rejected
14.	Every trainee secretary is expected to have a lap-top and this makes the course costly and unattractive.	2.48	0.57	Rejected
15.	Internet facilities, infrastructure and modern model offices are required for the training of secretaries and the institutions can hardly afford the training infrastructure.	4.48	1.03	Accepted
16.	Human capital development for the teachers is quite costly and the institutions are not doing enough.	3.72	0.94	Accepted

Table 2 shows the mean ratings of the respondents' opinion on the ways teachers of the secretarial profession perceive the price attached to the secretarial profession as worthy enough for its marketability in the present day Nigerian labour market. Item numbers 10, 11, 13 and 14 had mean scores of 2.41, 2.32, 2.35 and 2.48 implying that the four items were rejected. Item numbers 12, 15, and 16 had means scores of 3.52 to 4.48 implying that the three items were accepted. The standard deviations ranged from 0.57 to 1.03 and that indicate that the respondents were not far from one another and to the Mean.

**Table 3: How do teachers of the secretarial profession perceive the secretarial profession as offering a place that would ensure its marketability in the present day Nigerian labour market?**

S/No.	Items	Mean (X)	SD	Remarks
17.	Teachers of the Secretarial profession perceive the profession as versatile; it thus can be utilized in every organization.	4.92	0.84	Accepted
18.	The secretarial graduates are as employable in any work place as any other graduate.	4.18	0.99	Accepted
19.	The ICT component of the profession makes it relevant and utilizable in a globalized world.	4.98	0.81	Accepted
20.	The nature of the profession makes is a profession that can easily provide employment for its practitioners.	4.73	1.06	Accepted
21.	Professional secretaries can easily migrate to study other disciplines such as law and accountancy.	4.62	0.93	Accepted

Table 3 shows the mean ratings of the respondents' opinion on the ways teachers of the secretarial profession perceive the profession as offering a place that would ensure its marketability in the present day Nigerian labour market. The five items under this segment had Mean scores from 4.18 to 4.98 and were, therefore, all accepted. The standard deviation of the items ranged from 0.81 to 1.06 indicating that the respondents were very close to one another and to the Mean



**Table 3: In what ways do teachers of the secretarial profession perceive the promotions of the secretarial profession as attractive enough to ensure its marketability in the present day Nigerian labour market?**

S/No.	Items	Mean (X)	SD	Remarks
22.	Jobs for secretaries are hardly advertised these days.	3.64	0.43	Accepted
23.	Since other professionals can type, Secretarial profession is no longer being promoted as usual.	3.01	0.87	Accepted
24.	Secretarial profession is facing the threat of extinction.	1.73	0.63	Rejected
25.	Several Polytechnics in Nigeria are no longer emphasizing secretarial training	1.06	0.91	Rejected
26.	Other professions enjoy high patronage far more than the Secretarial profession, in the Nigerian labour market.	3.28	0.47	Accepted
27.	Secretaries cannot advertise their profession because of inferiority complex	2.03	0.97	Rejected
28.	Prevalence of Shorthand makes the profession unattractive and this affects the promotion of the course.	2.16	1.23	Rejected
29.	Most trainee secretaries find it difficult to acquire the skill of keyboarding or typing.	4.08	0.73	Accepted

Table 4 shows the mean ratings of the respondents' opinion on the ways teachers of the secretarial profession perceive the promotions of the secretarial profession as attractive enough to ensure its marketability in the present day Nigerian labour market. Items 24, 25 and 27 and 28 had Mean scores of 1.73, 1.06, 2.03 and 2.16 respectively and therefore, were all rejected. Items 22, 23, 26 and 29 had Mean scores of 3.64, 3.01, 3.28 and 4.08 respectively and were accepted. The standard deviation of the items ranged from 0.43 to 1.23 and this indicates that the respondents were very close to one another and to the Mean.

### **Discussion of Results**

The items under serial numbers 1 to 8 shows that the eight items were accepted. The study reveals that ICT course contents, its traditional course content, duration of the training, prospects for employments, the nature of training of the secretaries, their ability to compete favourably with others, the nature of the course and their ability to adapt to global needs, all contributed to making the course a viable product and thus marketable. The view on the ICT content of the course agrees with Agomuo (2007) that business education programmes at every tertiary levels must blend with the

technological skills. However, item number nine which states that other trained professionals can conveniently do the work of confidential and personal secretaries was rejected. This is a big respite as it has allayed the fears of those who feel that the secretarial profession will no longer find its place amidst several professions.

Table 2: reveals how teachers of the secretarial profession perceive the price attached to the secretarial profession regarding its marketability in the present day Nigerian labour market. The teachers rejected the opinion that salary, allowances, welfare packages make the course attractive. The high cost of training equipment was also seen as a part of what makes the course unattractive. The teachers accepted the views that infrastructure and human capital development for the teachers which are required for the training of secretaries are quite costly. These observed variables make the secretarial course unattractive and therefore unmarketable.

Table 3: reveals that the teachers accepted the view that the versatility, employability, relevance and the ability of the secretaries to migrate to other professions make the profession marketable. This view is a quite gratifying at a time when unemployment is the bane of the Nigerian society. Chukwumezie (2009) advised that young graduates or anyone else in search of jobs could begin a small business in about twenty four job areas which he identified in his study.

Table 4: reveals that the teachers accepted that jobs for secretaries are hardly advertised these days and that other professionals can type. They also accepted that other professions enjoy a better patronage than the secretarial profession. The teachers rejected that prevalence of Shorthand makes the profession unattractive. Although, the item on Shorthand was rejected, it must be stressed that several respondents accepted the view. Shorthand aids communication and should have been seen as such. Akarahu (2012) stated that communication is a vital tool for entrepreneurship. It is, however, sad that the study reveals that most trainee secretaries find it difficult to acquire the skill of keyboarding or typing. Eze (2012) averred that Office Technology and Management is a course that equips its graduates with practical and professional skills and when the skill component is not emphasized, the objective of the training will not be achieved. Aruwa in Eze (2012) opined undertook a study and averred that identified personal skills are required for success in self-employment by secretaries.

## **Conclusions**

This study that reviewed the marketability of secretarial profession has played the role of an eye opener as it has exposed the areas where this profession is being gradually sidelined in the labour market. It behooves the stakeholders to use this as a working paper in order to explore areas that demand attention. The time to do such is now if this noble profession, which made a number of us, will retain its pride of place within the labour market.

### Recommendations

In view of the foregoing, the following were recommended:

1. The management of the training institutions should provide the enabling environment and the relevant infrastructure through adequate funding in order to enhance teaching and learning of secretarial subjects.
2. Supervisory bodies should ensure that the required academic standard require for secretaries of the contemporary office, is maintained in all tertiary institutions in order to enhance the marketability of the profession.
3. The education supervisory bodies like the National Board for Technical Education, National Universities Commission, etc., should increase investment in human capital development towards teacher preparation to enhance acquisition of skill in secretarial training, because teachers cannot give what they do not have.
4. Teachers of the Secretarial profession should make students aware from the inception of their training, that the skilled subjects such as Shorthand and Keyboarding are essential components of the course and that they add value to the profession.
5. Teachers should adopt practical approach in teaching Keyboarding because such skill cannot be acquired theoretically. Non-possession of the required skills will impede the marketability of the profession.
6. The Association of Professional Secretaries should ensure that their activities are adequately publicized in order to enhance awareness and marketability of the profession.

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