

THE DYNAMISM OF SECRETARIAL PROFESSION AND ITS CHALLENGES TO THE SECRETARIES AS PERCEIVED BY SECRETARIES IN SELECTED EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN BAUCHI METROPOLIS.

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Abstract

This study assessed the dynamism of Secretarial Profession and its challenges as perceived by Secretaries in selected educational institutions in Bauchi Metroplolis. Advancement in technology has been continuous and thus has posed challenges to the performance of the Secretaries in today's office. A total of 60 Secretaries made up the population while 3 research questions guided the study. The instrument for data collection was an eleven item questionnaire using 5 Point Likert Type Rating Scale in which Mean was used to analyze data obtained. Findings revealed that the frequency of changes in the office equipment constitute serious challenges to both management and secretaries. It was recommended amongst others that the management should ensure that they update their office equipment from time to time and re-train their secretaries as the need arises.

Introduction

Changes they say is inevitable. The challenges of change have become a way of life even for the secretary. Change is bombarding the secretary from all sides. The office environment is embracing new technology. Azuka (2000) said that no one will deny that the hardware of the technology is changing the way secretaries do their job. Changes most of the time brings an improvement to an existing things or situations. Technology today is one of the notable things that have kept on changing in an alarming rate. Improvement in technology and business activities has continuously presented great challenges on the skill possessed by man in order to execute day-to-day work activities. The rapidity with which scientific inventions and innovation sink into obsolescence has forced managements of Educational institutions to acquire several kinds of office equipment within short intervals. The situation also called for acquisition of new skills and competencies to keep up with time. This is an urgent call considering the introduction of sophisticated office equipment, electronic mail system, computer, word processing etc. and coupled with new management techniques that have changed old work habits and require acquisition of new skills.

These changes have brought serious challenges to the secretaries whose offices have

been transformed into what is called today “modern office”. It is a place where the latest technological advancements and innovations are showcased and utilized. This office of today is characterized by automated system, which has greatly transformed the entire work process. The implication of this is simple, secretaries who must remain useful in the system must be skillful in the use of modern office gadgets, must be smart, intelligent and quick to learn and change as technological innovation will continually hit the world and the office.

The technological dynamism that characterizes our world today has permeated every facet of office work; virtually everything is done differently compared to the past years. Every activity in the office has a touch of the technological “wide fire” that has turned almost everything around. Secretarial profession can be regarded as that area of administration that includes personal assistance to an executive and various administrative duties. Secretarial work is so necessary in our organization that no executive or manager can do without a competent secretary. Secretaries are referred to as life-wire of an organization. In today's office, there is a dramatic change in technology. This is as a result of one's acquisition of knowledge which makes it not too far from the truth that changes is inevitable.

Development has become part of life to both human beings and organizations. When we talk about developing technology, we are referring to modern office technology which has to do with the invention of computers and other office equipment found in our offices today. These computers are useful in office, schools, hospital and even in our private homes.

As it is said, “knowledge is power”, the need to learn the manipulation of computers is therefore important to the secretarial profession as well as an organization. The development of today's technology is so rapid with new office machines and equipment that are now common in the market. We are faced with many challenges brought about by high technology.

Statement of the Problem

The secretarial profession of today is different from what is obtained before. The profession is now ICT based. The secretaries are expected to change along with the new trend. How has it been with the secretaries, the organization that require the services of the secretaries, the institutions that train their secretaries as regards the purchase, of their equipment and the training and retraining of secretaries and probably the retraining of the trainers. Will the organization be able to bear the cost of buying new equipment as they come, pay the fees for the retraining? All these prompted the researchers to study this topic.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to;

1. Identify the type of training required for a secretary to cope with the ever changing technology in the office.
2. Identify the challenges of technological changes on secretarial profession.
3. Examine the financial implication of these changes.

Research Questions

Some of the questions that guided the study in order to get the problem solved are:

1. What kind of training does a secretary need to cope with the ever changing technology in the office?
2. What are the challenges of these technological changes on the secretarial profession?
3. What is the financial implication of these changes?

Review Of Related Literature

In the pre-automation era the secretarial profession was limited to typing, writing and transcribing of shorthand only. To bring more light to the dynamic nature of the profession, the researchers looked back on how the office was run before automation. Therefore pre-automation era is the era before automation. It is a time where every office work was manually carried out. It was a period in which work was carried out in the office with more human efforts Eta (2004). To process a document which involved recording, transcribing, reproduction and distribution of text took a very long time to be accomplished. In the aspect of business operation several processes were involved, stages and a number of items of equipment, such as typewriting were involved. This has been labour-intensive when compared with the modern alternatives.

During that time work in the office proved to be dirty and waste time due to manual means of carrying out the work. This is because it is relatively slow to operate, causes wastage and errors that are difficult to correct. Today, it is far beyond this, it involves functions as sorting and retrieving of information, passing on information and so on with the help of computer and other electronic equipment. In this information communication technology era, there are controversies about the future of the secretary. It becomes imperative to define who a secretary is. According to Olise (2009) a secretary is an assistant to an executive and possesses mastery of office skills and ability to assume responsibilities, without direct supervision. She exercises initiative, judgment and makes decision within the scope of his or her ability. Nwosu, Anaka and Eleoba (2003) postulate that a secretary is a skilled and specialized employee in an organization who is expected to perform secretarial technology tasks such as: producing manuscripts, memos, letters, notice of meetings, agenda, minutes etc. Nwosu (2007) also observed that a secretary is one of those individuals who

make wheel of the organization.

Komolafe, Adebayo, Adegbenjo (2010) defined technology as a field of systematized and accumulated knowledge, techniques and intellectual skills and their practical application in creating essential goods and services for mankind. It is also the application of knowledge and skills, experience and organization that is required to enhance the quality of life of the people. It is in the area of the application of knowledge and skills that the challenges are emerging most in modern offices. Nna (2009) defined technology as the development and application of scientific methods, skills, processes, techniques, tools and raw materials to produce desired products to solve problems and satisfy human needs.

Kanter (2002) defined information and communication technology as the function of developing, acquiring testing, implementing and maintain electronic systems. These systems include databases, applications and procedures of support the business needs of the organization in the capture, storage, retrieval, transfer, computation, process and dissemination of information: It also includes the evaluation, acquisition, tendering leasing, licensing and disposal of software and hardware. It is the technology required for information processing. In particular the use of electronic computers and computer software to convert, store, protect, processes, transmit and retrieve information from anywhere and at any time.

Effect of Technological Changes on the Secretarial Profession

Despite all the benefits that comes with technological advancements, it is worthy of note that these innovations has increased the level of challenges faced by both management and employees. It has increased the level of tension, anxiety and uncertainty in most office workers who perceive these innovations as threats. According to John, Robert and Michel (2005) “Anxiety and frustration can set in if an employees is concerned about real or imagined obsolescence, feels that promotion progress is inadequate, or is generally dissatisfied with the match between his career aspiration and current position”.

The office which was formally referred to as a place where paper work is done is gradually becoming a paperless office/electronic office. The following are some of major office activities that have been affected by the technological changes as identified by Nna (2011), Communication, Records Management, Administration, Advertisement, Public Relations and Customer care services, Document creation, Sales and purchase, Meetings, seminars and workshops.

The new technology in the office had no doubt made obsolete the training of the traditional secretaries hence the need for retraining. Nwosu, (2007) stated that the traditional office was characterized by manual typewriters, steel cabinet, dictating machines, duplication machines, and photocopiers, single or multiple line telephones, telex, facsimile, desk calculators, memo sheets, writing pads and others. The

implication of not having the right training is obvious. According to Peter, (2012) Computer has become an integral part of the daily lives of many people in Nigeria today. They are widely used in industries, offices, and homes. This is an information age and computer literacy is one of the basic skills needed for survival. The secretary who is at the centre of information management has the greatest challenges of all. This is because executives often rely on secretaries to provide comprehensive, accurate and up to date information promptly to enable them arrive at quality management decisions. Today's secretaryship has witnessed tremendous changes in scope, training and advancement. In scope, the function and roles of secretary in the office have shifted from taking down shorthand dictation and transcribing same with the typewriter to managerial and information functions such as advisory, supervising, human relations, personnel management, exhibiting high sense of tact, maturity psychological traits and information management. To become a qualified secretary today, the acquisition of technical skills in typewriting and shorthand are not the only criteria as was originally the case. Today's secretaries are versatile in scope and education. They must exhibit among others high and thorough knowledge in subjects such as ICT office application, Database Management systems, Advanced Desktop Publishing etc.

A secretary that was not trained in the usage of the modern equipment will find it difficult getting employment because the success of any organization depends much on the efficiency of her staff. It is important at this stage to define training. Ifesi (2007) stated that educational training is a long term training activity aimed at preparing individuals for a variety of roles in the society. Training of secretaries in this context is all about equipping them with the necessary learning strategies that would enable them to acquire the skill in Office Technology and Management to fit into today's office. The sole aim of training is to develop an efficient workforce at all levels to ensure that corporate objectives are met by the trainees acquiring new manipulative skills, technical knowledge and problem-solving ability.

Training and Re-Training of the Trainer/the Secretaries

The training of today must be planned, supervised and evaluated for its effectiveness. Ogunkule (2002) considered training of competent teachers as a compelling need in the educational system of our changing world. The emerging technology has rendered most of what the teachers know at present to oblivion. The main target of the new training outfit should be the teachers. Okoro (2007) pointed that “if teachers are trained and retrained to embrace new technologies, they then encourage and model the skills at scientific inquiry, curiosity, openness to new ideas and address learning needs of varying categories of students”. On the other hand the constant change in technology calls for training and retraining of the secretaries from time to time so as to keep abreast with current innovations in the office. This can be achieved by attending seminars, workshops, workers industrial attachment scheme, further education etc. However, one should not lose sight of the fact that some of the facilities needed for this

training are lacking. Okebukola, (2002) observed that even the most basic of these, that is classroom, are in adequate. Inadequate classrooms, laboratories and workshops in our institutions are a dearth to the teaching and learning of office technology and management programmes.

Cost Implication of these Changes

The high cost of acquiring the modern equipment is a problem related to technological changes in the office. Furthermore, the cost of maintaining this equipment is on the high side since most of the time experts need to be consulted. The epileptic power supply in the country today also pose a problem to most organizations in the use of modern equipment as an alternative power supply must be provided for the utilization of such equipment.

Another last implication is the acquisition of the ICT equipment by the schools training the secretaries according to the requirement of the NBTE. These we know require a state budget to make it a reality. When none or few of these equipment are not available, the training will not be complete. According to Nnaji and Bagudu (2012) “Office technology and management is capital intensive and sometimes the fund provided to departments is not always sufficient to provide all the necessary training materials needed”. Therefore fund is seriously required to achieve this goal. For more than a decade now, this issue of funding as it affects education and especially technical education has been a matter of concern. Azuka in Moses (2011) noted that finance has inhibited the development of studies in Nigeria. According to him, many institutions that offer office courses in education lack facilities for proper execution of their applauded programme. As a result, these programmes have been operating at a pseudo level, a situation that negated some of the basic theories of vocational education. Otobo and Yahaya (2002), noted that poor funding by proprietors (in most cases, the federal and state governments) and failure of institutional managers to accord Office Technology and Management programme (the department that train secretaries) the right priority is a serious problem affecting the teaching and learning process in Office Technology and Management.

Methodology

The study was conducted in two Polytechnics and a University within Bauchi metropolis. The Polytechnics studied were Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi (FPTB) Abubakar Tafari Ali Polytechnic, Bauchi (ATAPB) and Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi (ATBU) The population of the study comprised 167 secretaries.

Table 1. Administration of the questionnaires

Name of schools studied	Population of secretaries	Sample
Federal Polytechnic Bauchi	67	40
Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic	27	10
Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University	73	50
Total	167	100

Sampling Techniques

The researchers sampled 100 secretaries out of the entire population using simple random selection technique.

Method of Data Collection

A structured questionnaire which consists of 11 item questions was used in the collection of data. The questionnaire was designed using the 5 Point Likert rating scale to which values were attached. Data collected were analyzed using mean.

Research question 1: **What kind of training does a secretary need to cope with the ever changing technology in the office?**

Table 2: Mean response (x) on the kind of training a secretary need to cope with the ever changing technology in the office.

Variables	SA	A	UD	DA	SD	Σ	X	Remarks
On the job training will be enough to cope in an automated office of today	50	25	5	15	5	400	4.0	Accepted
Secretaries need further training /education to cope with technological challenges in the office	88	12	-	-	-	488	4.9	Accepted
Attending relevant workshops, seminars is another way of coping with the changes in the use of office equipment	60	31	4	3	2	444	4.4	Accepted
Workers Industrial Attachment Scheme is one of the ways secretaries can be trained to cope in the automated office.	65	29	4	1	1	456	4.6	Accepted

It is evidence from the table 2 above that on the job training is not enough to cope in an office with mean score of 4.0. The knowledge about the equipment and their uses is required to cope in the ever changing technology in the office with the mean score of 4.9. It is obvious from the table that attending relevant workshop, seminars is another way of coping with the changes in the office equipment with the mean score of 4.4. The respondents also agreed that Workers Industrial Attachment Scheme is one of the

ways secretaries can be trained to cope in the automated office with the mean score of 4.6.

Research question 2: What are the challenges of these technological changes on the secretarial profession?

Table 3: Mean response (x) on the effect of these changes in the office.

Variables	SA	A	UD	DA	SD	X	X	Remarks
The new equipment in the office has brought about job insecurity as almost everyone is computer literate.	50	20	10	15	5	395	4.0	Accepted
Constant training and retraining of Secretaries in the organization is one of the technological challenges.	60	35	5	-	-	455	4.5	Accepted
The rate at which this equipment is modified and updated is a challenge to the secretarial profession.	55	40	3	2	-	448	4.5	Accepted

From the above table 3, it can be observed that the new equipment in the office has brought about job insecurity as almost everyone is computer literate with the mean score of 4.0. The same table revealed constant training and retraining of secretaries in the organization is one of the technological challenges with the mean score of 4.5 and also that the rate at which this equipment is modified and updated is a challenge to the secretarial profession with a means score of 4.5.

Research question 3: What is the cost implication of these technological changes?

Table 4: Mean response(x) on the cost implication of these changes in the areas of training and acquiring of new equipment to replace the old ones.

Variables	SA	A	UD	DA	SD	X	X	Remarks
The high cost of acquiring these equipment is a challenge to the organizations.	60	20	4	6	10	414	4.1	Accepted
The cost of maintaining these equipment is also a problem.	65	25	3	2	-	438	4.4	Accepted
Another problem is the cost of getting alternative power supply for utilization such equipment	68	20	2	1	9	439	4.40	Accepted
The organizations face the problem of training and retraining of the secretaries which is also cost intensive.	53	42	2	2	1	444	4.4	Accepted

The above table 4 proved that the high cost of acquiring these equipment is a challenge to the organizations with a mean score of 4.1. The table also revealed that the cost of maintaining these equipment is also a problem with a mean score of 4.4. The same

table also indicated that the cost of getting alternative power supply for utilization of such equipment is also a challenge with mean score of 4.40. The mean score of 4.41 in table 4 shows that the organizations face the problem of training and retraining of the secretaries which is also cost intensive.

Discussion of Findings

From the above analysis, it is clear that on the job-training is not enough to cope in the office. This was made clear when most of the respondents said that the knowledge about the equipment and their uses is necessary in other to cope in the ever changing technology in the office. It was revealed too that attending workshops and seminars will help the secretaries to cope with the changes in the office equipment. Osborne (2002) observed that the productivity level has increased significantly. He asserted that changes have also brought easy means of communication. It is evidently clear that modern office equipment render secretaries redundant. This assumption has been proved wrong from the analysis which shows that the new equipment cannot rendered secretaries redundant if the knowledge is acquired with the mean score of 4.16.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn; that the new technology in the office has brought serious challenges to the secretarial profession. In the near future, technology may displace some of the lazy secretaries since most executives now do the typing themselves. In spite of the enumerated challenges technology is a blessing hence it has lifted the face of the profession and brought about increase in the level of production.

Recommendation

From the analysis of data and the subsequent findings and conclusion, the researchers recommends as follows:

1. That the new syllabus that emphasizes ICT be fully implemented in the institutions that trains secretaries nations wide.
2. That management of the organization should do everything possible to acquire these new equipment and retrain their secretaries to be relevant in the new technology.
3. Government should make fund available and equip our higher institutions for proper training of the secretaries for economic growth.
4. That the management should ensure that they update their office equipment from time to time and re-train their secretaries as the need arises.

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