

**SECRETARYS' COMPETENCIES COVERGE AS HUBS FOR OPTIMUM
PERFORMANCE IN CONTEMPORARY OFFICES**

Nwanneka Peculiar OZOEMENAM & Sylvester Okonkwo ASOGWA

Department of Office Technology and Management

School of Business Studies

Federal Polytechnic,

BAUCHI, Bauchi State

Abstract

This study examined the Secretary's competencies coverage as hubs for optimum performance in contemporary offices. This topic was necessitated by the fact that Technology is consistently evolving in the facet of every human endeavors and offices being the most affected. Based on this, it became imperative that secretaries as the core personnel that facilitate the smooth running of offices activities should without hesitation cover up any competency gap especially the digital ones as it propel secretaries to the desired goal actualization in contemporary offices. 68 secretaries been the total population of secretaries in Federal Polytechnic Bauchi responded to the structured instrument thereby providing the needed data for the study. The three research questions that guided the study were answered using mean method Patterned after five point Likert Type Rating Scales. The result reviewed that secretaries should be versatile in manning social media issues ranging from WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, online activities like e commerce as well as other internet related activities. It was concluded that secretaries should as a matter of urgency cover up any competencies gap if both personal and organization's goal will be actualized. The study recommended among others that secretaries should engage in safe development program like aggrieve reading, not only acquisition of iPad or android phones but also mastering the usage. Department of OTM should upgrade the departmental labs to accommodate current ICT gargets.

Keywords: Secretary, Competency and Contemporary Office.

INTRODUCTION

There is no other profession that is versatile, dynamic and at the hub of office operations as secretarial profession. No wonder Okoro and Ifesi(2015), opined that there is hardly any organization in the world that secretaries don't hold sway. This assertion emanates from the fact that all organizations must keep records, administer correspondence as well as humanly relates with their internal and external environment amidst other commitments. Incidentally, office works / functions are being revolutionized due to hyper activities that characterize the use of Information and Communication Technology in today's office environment. This among others is the reason behind the assertion of Adeshian and Align (2015) that ICT 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 organization and even government agencies are adopting office automation which is also referred to as e office in their routine offices. In addition to this, ICT skills is also seeing as panacea for unemployment that is devastating Nigeria economy today. This is why all secretaries should as a matter of urgency cover up ICT competencies gap as it propels their hyper savvy ability in contemporary offices.

Secretary according to The Institute of Certified Secretary and Reporters (1999) in Wannang, Dazen and 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 organizational behaviours. Haruna, Pophan and Tilton (2008) in Gabriel, Gakung and Karshima (2015), defined a secretary as an executive assistant who possesses a mastery of office skills without direct supervision, exercise initiative and judgment and makes decision within the scope of assigned authority. Currie (2009) in Egwu (2016) viewed a secretary as a worker whose work involve design, complementation, evaluation, and maintenance of the process of work within an office or organization in order to maintain and improve efficiency and productivity. Ozoemenam (2018) stated that secretary's definitions revealed that secretaries must be some hyper knowledgeable personnel with comprehensive and complete skills or competences to be able to man the responsibilities accrue to them especially in this technological advancement. Coupled with the fact that secretary's most sensitive role in any organization is that he or she is at the center of information and communication and as such had the duty of providing comprehensive, accurate and up to date information promptly to ensure quality management decisions. This of course has placed secretaries on red alert as far as competency coverage is concerned because without which, these responsibilities will be inadequately done.

The crave to keep pace with advancement in technology and the current changes in contemporary business offices necessitated the change in nomenclature of Secretarial Profession to Office Technology and Management by National Board for Technical Education (NBTE 2006). This change is geared towards incorporating more courses in Information and Communication Technology which is at the hub of any contemporary office. This is why Adebayo and Akinyele (2012) opined that modern professional secretaries are now referred to as office managers because of their activities, education, skills acquisition, knowledge and even expectations from their bosses, customers, clients and even the general public. It is worthy to note that most secretaries that are working in contemporary offices now acquired the old secretarial skills which is not ICT compliance especially in this jet society of ours where most professions are offering ICT courses and some at a very high degree. No wonder some directors, chief Executive Officers and managers are even typing their documents personally. To worsen the situation or make it more complex, the

advancement in technology is not relenting rather, it is increasing at a very high speed that is why we now have Artificial Intelligent (AI) and Robotics which is already posing threat to office workers especially secretaries. If these issues are placing threat already to humans, how much horrible will it be on those secretaries with retarded competency? This now prove beyond any reasonable doubt that if secretaries are to remain employable and relevant as well, the anus is on them to ensure they pursue competency coverage at all cost.

Competencies synonyms with capability, ability, competency, capacity, proficiency, adeptness, adroitness, expertise, skill, skillfulness, prowess, mastery, faculties, talent, virtuosity, savvy, artistry and know how. Competence is the set of demonstrable characteristics and skills that enable and improve the efficiency or performance of a job. Pratt (2023). Collins, (2023) viewed competence as the ability to do something well or effectively. It is generally a combination of skills, knowledge, attributes and behaviours that enables an individual to perform a task or an activity successfully within a given job. In order words, if you have competence, you are qualified or well prepared to do something. Secretaries will prove that they are competent enough when they cover all the needed skills that are necessary for effective and efficient operation of modern offices.

Contemporary or modern office is the office of the new age where office activities are tilted toward electronic operations due to the presence of sophisticated machines like computer connected to internet which drastically reduces paper works. Duniya (2011) in Ewarawon, (2015) observed that due to introduction of sophisticated technological (electronic) office equipment in today's office and the role secretaries play in ensuring accuracy and efficiency in their jobs, they need to meet the challenges by acquiring new skills and competencies for efficient operations in electronic or modern office. This skill or competencies resolves round ICT and its components. No wonder Okoro, (2010) stated that today, you will find references to virtual offices, mobile offices and home offices. Persons who work at other than the traditional office are considered to telecommuting who does not travel to the office or to meet with the clients or customers daily but receives information via a variety of telecommunication methods, greatly decreasing the need to travel. He went further to state that it is apparent that secretaries attend such things like conferences, seminars and workshops where they can acquire this knowledge because that is where some of these new trends will be reviewed.

Competency coverage of secretaries demands that secretaries should as a matter of urgency keep abreast with advancement in technology i.e. digital world. Ozoemenam (2018) stated that the skilled required by secretaries to remain relevant in contemporary offices in this age of technological advancement are enormous and can be acquired through formal or informal learning as well as on line because Okoro (2010) opined that contemporary office requires both technical and non technical

skills to function effectively and efficiently. The technical competencies include: ability to manipulate different computer operating systems, use emails, search engines to search for information etc. According to Arikwandu, Ozoemenam and Leka (2015), world wide web that interconnects computers, the core of ICT abounds with opportunities for electronic business contacts –e business, e commerce. e government and e everything else we can think of. The anus is on secretaries to leverage on ICT enabled transactions such as internet shopping &telemedicine& social media that gives customers more choices in how they shop, communicate and interact and update their competencies. The non technical competencies that should be covered also include employability skills that plays important role of effective and successful participation in work place. Overtoom (2000) in Okoro (2015) viewed employability skills as transferable core skill groups that represent essential functional and enabling knowledge, skills and attributes required by the 21st century work place necessary for career success at all levels of employment and all levels of education. Employability skills are those basic skills necessary for getting, keeping and doing well on a job. He went further to state that skills and other issues like globalization, knowledge driven environment, the impact of digital environment on business environment as well as social political changes necessitated that secretaries should constantly upgrade knowledge coupled with competence that will enhance employability as well as relevance in modern or contemporary offices today.

Statement of Problems

Information and Communications Technology like time and nature is no respecter of persons as it continues to revolve and evolve not minding whether one is keeping pace or lagging behind. This has no doubt upgraded and forced office mechanization and digitalization of office tasks and functions to be ICT compliant. Hence the importance of emerging role of secretarial profession in building new competences to combat the advancement in technology cannot be over emphasized. Regrettably, secretaries that are at the hub of office functions and upliftment are not running as fast as possible in order to keep pace with the development or evolvement of ICT. Oguejiofor and Umeh (2016), rightly observed that as some of these technologies are becoming obsolete, others are emerging with more complexities in operations and applications. Hence calling for competency coverage without which, the secretaries will be like racking in the offices leading to maladroitness of office functions due to incompetency. The end result will be that office functions will be arduous instead adulation to both secretaries and the organization which could result to termination of employment or extinction of the organization.

Purpose of Study

The general purpose of this study was to determine secretary's competencies coverage as hubs for optimum performance in contemporary offices. Specifically,

the study determined:

- How secretary's acquisition of ICT skills will promote competency coverage for optimum performance in contemporary offices.
- Ways secretaries should engage in continuous learning in order to promote competency coverage for optimum performance in contemporary offices.
- Whether regular attendance to conferences, seminars & workshops will enhance secretary's competency coverage for optimum performance.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered

- In what ways will secretary's acquisition of ICT skills promote competency coverage for optimum performance in contemporary offices?
- How will secretaries engage in continuous learning in order to upgrade competency coverage for optimum performance in contemporary offices?
- What are the ways regular attendance to conferences, seminars & workshops enhance secretary's competency coverage for optimum performance?

Methodology:

This study adopted survey research design. Gall, Gall and Bork (2003) in Okoro and Ifesi (2015) 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 generalized. Also, Nworgu (2006) in Okoro et al (2015) opined that a survey design enables the researcher to obtain information from people who are considered to be representative of the entire population. Respondents were the 68 secretaries in Federal Polytechnic Bauchi. Copies of a 17 item questionnaire were distributed to 68 secretaries but 64 were filled and returned. This was formulated based on five points Likert Rating Scales Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Undecided (UD), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD). These response categories were assigned numerical values as 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The data gathered were analyzed using mean. Any mean response below 3.00 was rejected while the mean scores from 3.00 and above were accepted.

Result

Research Question I: In what ways will secretary's acquisition of ICT skills promote competency coverage for optimum performance in contemporary offices?

Table 1: ways in which secretary's acquisition of ICT skills promote competency coverage for optimum performance in contemporary offices

S/N	Items	SA	A	UD	D	SD	ΣX	X	Remarks
1.	Possession of android phone will aid secretary's coverage	16	40	3	1	4	255	4.0	agreed
2.	Improve navigation through Social media handles like Instagram, WhatsApp etc.	24	32	4	2	2	266	4.2	agreed
3.	Enhance sending and Receiving email messages.	32	24	5	3		274	4.3	agreed
4.	Facilitate involvement in e commerce / e business	20	38	2	2	2	264	4.1	agreed
5.	Promotes ability to use Search Engines like google, Wikipedia etc.	22	36	2	2	2	266	4.2	agreed

Table 1 shows the mean ratings of the respondents' opinion on the ways secretary's acquisition of ICT skills will promote competency coverage for optimum performance in contemporary offices. The items under serial numbers 1 to 5 had means score of 4.0 and 4.3 respectively implying that the respondents agreed that the five items were actually feasible.

Research Question 2: How will secretaries engage in continuous learning that will promote competency coverage for optimum performance in contemporary offices?

Table 2: How secretaries will engage in continuous learning that will promote competency coverage for optimum performance in contemporary offices

SECRETARY'S COMPETENCIES COVERAGE AS HUBS FOR OPTIMUM PERFORMANCE
IN CONTEMPORARY OFFICES

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Σ X	X	Remark
6.	Attending different levels of Formal schools to obtain Like ND, HND, Degree or Master's etc.	20	34	2	6	2	256	4.0	agreed
7.	Aggressive reading of different Articles at any levels.	12	38	6	6	2	226	3.5	agreed
8.	Internet usage will enhance Secretary's competency Coverage.	16	40	4	2	2	258	4.0	agreed
9.	Learning from different Colleagues	16	34	10	2	2	246	3.8	agreed
10.	Watching / listening to news Will Promote competency coverage	16	34	6	6	2	248	3.9	agreed
11.	Engaging in informal learning Will achieve the desired goal.	2	40	10	6	6	248	3.8	agreed

Table 2 shows that the mean ratings of the respondent's opinion on how secretaries will engage in continuous learning in order to promote competency coverage in modern offices. Items from number 6 to 11 were all agreed by the respondents because they have mean scores ranging from 3.8 to 4.0 respectively.

Research Question 3: In what ways will regular attendance to conferences, workshops & seminars Promote secretary's competency coverage for optimum performance in contemporary offices.

Table 3: ways regular attendance to conferences, workshops & seminars will promote secretary's competency coverage for optimum performance in contemporary offices.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	UD	D	SD	ΣX	X	Remarks
1.	Secretary's knowledge and under Standing will be boosted.	36	2	8			292	4.6	agreed
2.	Secretaries will keep pace with Current trends in office work.	25	27	12			269	4.2	agreed
3.	It will keep secretaries abreast With advancement in Technology.	26	30	44			270	4.2	agreed
4.	They will acquire conference, Seminars & workshop Materials.	26	30	4	4		270	4.2	agreed
5.	Creates opportunity to listen to Different paper presentations.	8	50	6			258	4.0	agreed
6.	It gives secretaries opportunity To make new friends.	14	36	12	2		254	4.0	agreed

From Table 3 above, it can be deduced that the respondents' opinion on whether regular attendance to conferences, seminars & workshops will upgrade secretary's competency coverage for optimum performance in contemporary offices shows that the six items i.e.s from 12 to 17 have mean scores of 4.0 to 4.6 indicating that they all agreed that regular attendance to conferences, seminars and workshop will actually promote secretary's competency coverage.

Discussion of Findings

From table 1, The variables under serial numbers 1 to 5 revealed that the respondents agreed that possession of android phone, navigating through social media handles like Instagram, WhatsApp and others, sending and receiving messages through emails, involvements in e-commerce, e-business or on line activities and the use of search engines like google were among the things secretaries will accomplish with ICT skills that will improve competency coverage for optimum performance in contemporary offices. This is in agreement with the assertion of Duniya (2011) in Ewarawon, (2015) who observed that due to introduction of sophisticated technological (electronic) office equipment into today's office and the role secretaries play in ensuring accuracy and efficiency in their jobs, they need to meet the challenges by acquiring new skills and competencies for efficient operations in electronic or modern office. This skill or competencies revolves round ICT and its components.

Under Table 2, the respondents agreed that secretaries can engage in continuous learning by attending formal schools, engaging in aggressive reading different kinds of materials, using internets to learn, learning from colleagues, watching news / listening to radios as well as engaging in informal learning. This is quite important as they without any doubt are avenues of learning and acquiring different skills as well as current ideas, knowledge, skills and so on that are vital for secretary's competency coverage for optimum performance in contemporary offices. The assertion of Ozoemenam (2018) agreed with this finding because it stated that the skilled required by secretaries to remain relevant in contemporary offices in this age of technological advancement are enormous and can be acquired through formal or informal learning as well as on line.

Table 3 revealed ways secretary's attendance to conferences, seminars & workshops will enhance competency coverage for optimum performance in contemporary offices as can be seen from Items 12 to 17. The respondents agreed that it will boost secretary's knowledge and understanding, help them to keep pace with current trends in office operations, keep them abreast with technological advancement in technology, pave way for them to acquire conference, seminar and workshop materials, make way for them to listen and learn from paper presentations as well as enable them to make new friends i.e. improve their socializations. These no doubt will keep secretaries abreast with current events that upgrade competency coverage

which no doubt upgrade performance in modern offices. This finding support the opinion of Okoro, (2010) who stated that today, you will find references to virtual offices, mobile offices and home offices. Persons who work at other than the traditional office are considered to telecommuting who does not travel to the office or to meet with the clients or customers daily but receives information via a variety of telecommunication methods, greatly decreasing the need to travel. He went further to state that it is apparent that secretaries attend such things like conferences, seminars and workshops where they can acquire this knowledge because that is where some of these new trends will be reviewed.

Conclusions

This study that reviewed secretary's competency coverage as a hub for optimum performance in contemporary offices has actually served as an eye opener to secretaries as per what they need to do in order to cover up competency gaps especially as it touches ICT as it keeps evolving. It be hooves on the stakeholders to do the needful to augment proper functions of modern offices.

Recommendations

In view of the findings and conclusions arrived, the following were recommended:

- Secretaries should as a matter of urgency, get involved in online activities, attend both formal& informal schools and conferences in order to acquire current trends in competencies so as to cover up any known gap
- OTM student should ensure they acquire the current skills or competencies before graduating even if they will do it themselves.
- Curriculum developers should as matter of urgency review OTM curriculum to ensure that all the ICT courses that would cover up modern trends in ICT are incorporated in the curriculum.
- Office Technology and Management Department as well should ensure that their labs are equipped in such a way that current technology will be easily adapted to in the department.

References

- Abdulazeez, K.B., Arikwandu, S.O., & Ifesi, C. (2021). Modern Record Management and Information Security. Ramadan Press Limited.
- Adedayo, A., & Akinyele, T.A. (2012). Challenges of Modern Professional Secretary/Office Managers in Achieving Success at Work. Journal of Management and Corporate Governance, 4.
- Adeshina, T.J., & Aliyu, M. (2012). Curriculum Innovation for Office Education

- Programme in View of the Growing Information Technology (IT): A Case Study of the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) Programme. *International Journal of Education Administration and Policy Studies*, 4(4), 108–114.
- Arikwandu, S.O., Ozoemenam, N.P., & Leka, C.N. (2015). Entrepreneurship Education as a New Paradigm for Tackling Unemployment: A Spotlight on the OTM Programme. *Journal of APSSON*, 23.
- Currie, W. (2009). *Management Strategy for ICT: International Perspective*. Pitman.
- Dajur, C.I.K., Irarakpor, H.T., Leka, C.N., Muhammad, S., & Okoro, F. (2010). *Contemporary Office Management*. New Era Production.
- Duniya, A.P. (2011). Electronic Office Skills Required by Secretaries in Polytechnics in Kogi State. *Business Education Journal*, 8(1).
- Gall, M.D., Gall, J.P., & Brog, W.R. (2003). *Education Research: An Introduction*. 7th Edition. Allen & Bacon.
- National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) (2006). *Curriculum and Course Specifications for Office Technology and Management*. NBTE. <http://www.collinsdictionary.com>, retrieved 26th September 2023.
- Oguejiofor, C.S., & Umeh, U.F. (2015). Database Management Functions Used by Secretaries in Managing Records in the Civil Service of Anambra State. *Journal of APSSON* (2015).
- Okoro, F. (2012). *Strategies Required for Enhancing the Utilization of Information and Communication Technology Facilities Among Small and Medium Scale Entrepreneurs Within Bauchi Metropolis*. Unpublished MBA Project, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi.
- Ozoemenam, N.P. (2018). *Office Manager's Self Development in Enhancing Productivity: A Case Study of Federal Polytechnic Bauchi*. Unpublished Project, FPTB.