AN ASSESSMENT OF THE NEED FOR ICT COMPETENCE AND UTILIZATION FOR EFFECTIVE SECRETARIAL PRACTICE IN SOME SELECTED INDUSTRIES IN ASABA MUNICIPALITY, DELTA STATE

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Abstract

The paper tries to assess the need for ICT competency and utilization for effective Secretarial Practice in some selected industries in Asaba municipality, Delta State. Four research questions were raised to aid the collection of data from the respondents. A total of 1,250 Secretaries from selected public and private organization in Asaba municipality formed the population of the study. The sample involved in this study consisted of 376 Secretaries. Data were analyzed with mean, standard deviation using a 0-05 level of significance revealed that secretaries did not posses excellent ICT competency and are not competently utilizing ICT in the performance of their secretarial functions. They are faced with constraints in respect of acquisition and utilization of ICT competency, which was as a result of haphazard training in school. It was recommended among others that proper ICT training should be given to students and that adequate and up-to-date training and re-training programmes should be organized for Secretaries to keep them abreast of ICT applications in e-offices.

Information and communication Technology is generally presumed to represent two important global dynamics: the shift from the use of materials as the key economic input (raw materials) to the use of information (Castells, 1996:26); and the change from the use of passive information to the use of active knowledge or symbolic/analytical information skills in economic process.

Since the introduction of Information and Communication Technology in the system of office information generation, acquisition, processing, storage and dissemination, the business environment all over the world witnessed a tremendous
change in its earlier known methods and practices. A third world country like Nigeria is not an exception.

No doubt, business executives are deeply affected by these changes because their positions and authority are equally affected. This is because their duties and responsibilities would not be effectively and efficiently carried out without the full participation and input of their confidential secretaries. Okoye (1999:8) described a confidential secretary or executive assistant as the lifeline of an enterprise and further stated that no executive could successfully carry out his duties without a full participation of his assistant or secretary. ICT is about information and the time needed for various decisions making process to be achieved and made available through the chosen medium. Information could however, be described as the "eyes" of management which is why its availability, intelligent and purposeful utilization are important in business.

According to Chukwumzie (2002:24), for any secretary to be relevant in today's technological offices, she should be conversant with the services and resources provided by the internet. For confidential secretaries to remain relevant in the new technological offices of their executives, they must be masters of the new office skills of which the competent operation of ICT is upper-most. Specifically, they should become ICT competent for the following reasons:

a. Traditional manual methods of processing data have become obsolete and inadequate for handling the information needs of today's organizations.

b. There is a greater need now than before for reliable, comprehensive and timely information. This is because, not only has information to be provided to management for decision-making, but such information has to be accurate if the decisions made from it are to be reliable and useful, ICT enhances accuracy of information through efficient processing and storage and ease in retrieving, revising, and up-dating of information.

c. Modern business practices critically require modern secretaries to be skilled in the use of ICTs. Thus, to be able to secure, maintain and progress on a top-flight secretarial position, demonstration of practical proficiency in the use of the ICT becomes imperative.

d. The use of ICT in performing secretarial functions enhances speed of performance of tasks, reduces tedious repetitive tasks and leads to increased efficiency and productivity.

e. Many communication processes in organizations are now computerized. Secretaries now work in computer terminals that are connected to networks like Internet. Secretaries are now required to send and receive electronic mails, send faxes, browse the Web, and have access to information on the Internet.

To this end, most modern offices do not seem to depend any longer on traditional methods of collecting, sorting, processing and disseminating information, rather computers are now used to perform these functions. In essence, it is required that office workers should be able to make use of and operate the information and
communication equipment effectively (Ubulom & Thorn-Otuya, 2003; 7). It is therefore evident that without being an ICT competent confidential secretary, it may be difficult, if not impossible, to function effectively and efficiently in the modern business offices.

**Statement of Problem:**
Information and communication technology (ICT) has penetrated all facets of the Nigerian economy and its role in the economic, socio-political, cultural and educational development of the country is no longer in question. Secretaries who are the pivot of office information and communication systems are, however, not left out in these technological changes. For any secretary to be relevant in today's technological offices, she should be conversant with the services and resources provided by the Internet. Furthermore, most institutions of higher learning involved in the training of secretaries are turning out graduate secretaries who seem to be non-ICT competent into the labour market(Ohakwe, 2000-22; Ubulom & Thom-Otuya, 2004:7). Without adequate training in schools, one wonders how they are able to utilize ICT resources competently in the efficient discharge of their jobs. Secretaries who eventually secure jobs in electronic offices after graduation without adequate training in ICT are likely to encounter problems in their attempt to utilize ICT in the discharge of their jobs. They may also face some constraints in their efforts to get retrain in order to properly fit into the electronic offices of today. What, therefore, is the extent of skill competency and utilization of ICT by secretaries?

**Purpose of the Study**
The main purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which secretaries were competently skilled to work with resources of Information and Communication Technology and the level of utilization of ICT in carrying out their daily functions.

Specifically, the study was aimed at identifying the following:
1. To assess the extent to which secretaries in Asaba municipality are effectively and efficiently utilizing ICT skills in the discharge of their daily office functions.
2. To examine the constraints faced by secretaries in Asaba municipality in acquiring the necessary ICT skills and competencies required to effectively work in modern offices.
3. To examine the means available to the secretary to overcoming the constraints of ICT skill acquisition and utilization in Asaba municipality of Delta State.

**Research Questions:**
In carrying out this study, the following research questions were formulated to guide the researcher:
1. To what extent are secretaries in Asaba municipality effectively and efficiently utilizing ICT skills in the discharge of their daily office functions?
2. What constraints do secretaries in Asaba municipality faced in acquiring the necessary ICT skills and competencies required to effectively work in modern offices?
3. What means are available to overcoming the constraints of ICT skill competency acquisition and utilization?

Significance of the Study

The outcomes of this study would be beneficial to a cross-section of the generality of Nigerians. First, it would benefit practicing secretaries who would become aware of current ICT applications in modern offices. They would also become aware of the new ICT skills and competencies expected of them in modern offices. This would enable them to assess themselves in the light of their new awareness to work towards gaining sufficient knowledge, skills and competencies in ICT applications in business and office operations. Further, the outcome of this study would benefit employers of secretaries in that they would become aware of the numerous ways in which the application of ICT by their secretaries could improve office efficiently, productively and overall business.

Relevant Literature

Information technology could be viewed as the acquisition, processing, storage and dissemination of vocal, pictorial, textual and numerical information by micro-electronic-based combinations of computer and telecommunications. Information and communication technology is the result of the convergence of information technology and communication technologies. The early example of ICT convergence is the crossing of photocopy machine and telephone, leading to the creation of fax machines. Osunbor (2003) stated that ICT is a concept which is used to describe the strength and divergent uses of computers and telecommunications devices for data and information interchange. It provides access to information through scientific conventions founded on the forte of computers and telecommunication facilities which enables a company locate anywhere in the world. With ICT, the world is further reduced to a global village where transactions can simply be initiated and concluded in computer right on the user's desk.

According to Anyaduba (1991) a secretary is an important office worker who combines the competences of stenographer, clerical officer, receptionist and more. She needs a variety of other skills, talents and attitude, including computer skills. A good academic background of a secretary helps to make the work more challenging and enables the employee to perform all duties within the scope of her training. Secretarial instructors need to be re-trained because teaching involves the imparting of knowledge and skills and the sharing and/or orienting of values and attitudes. The training is ranged between "one year to four years", depending on the individual's ability and the particular level, which she wants to attain. It varies according to the level of the secretary's application of ICT in electronic office.

The application of ICT in offices and the secretary in carrying out her duties, because of its accuracy of results, speed in operation and versatility in applications. Computer technology is an important aspect of ICT. According to Ohakwe (2000) a
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computer is a complex electronic machine, which can be used for all sorts of information processing, the information may be data, graphics, pictures or audio.

Methodology
This section states the methodology used this study in terms of population, sample, data collection, research design questionnaire administration and retrieval, data analysis.

Research Design
The design for the study is survey. It is survey study because the data to be collected will be obtained through the use of a questionnaire to be administered to the respondents directly by the researcher in order to assess their opinion on the subject matter.

Area of the Study
The study was conducted in Asaba municipality of Delta state and was restricted to secretaries only.

Population
The population of this study consisted of 1,250 secretaries in Asaba municipality, Delta State.

Sample and Sampling Technique
Thirty percent (30%) of the total population was used for the study and that was a sample of 376 Secretaries randomly selected.

Instrumentation
A .5 - • point Likert scale questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was designed in line with research questions raised for the study. The instrument titled: An Assessment of the need for ICT competence and utilization for effective secretarial practice in Asaba municipality (AAOJNF1CAUFESP) was used,

Validation
The instrument used for the study was subjected to face and content validation through the assistance of four research experts.

Reliability
The instrument, after a face validation was subjected to a test - retest reliability test to further evaluate the stability of the questionnaire items. The questionnaire was administered to 10 secretaries of selected industries in Asaba municipality, Delta State. The questionnaire was administered twice to 10 selected secretaries different times with an interval of two weeks. The results obtained were computed using Spearman Correlation Coefficient in order to - determine the stability of the questionnaire items. A
reliability coefficient of stability of the items for all the questions yielded a correlation of 0.82 which was considered high enough.

**Questionnaire Administration and Retrieval**

The entire questionnaire was administered in person. All the respondents used were personally contacted. The questionnaires in some instances were completed immediately by the respondents while others insisted on the researchers dropping the questionnaire and coming back to collect them later.

**Data Analysis Technique**

The data collected with the questionnaires were carefully assembled and analyzed. The results obtained were systematically organized and presented in tables. The mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the data. The mean score for each item was computed using a computer program called the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSSX).

**Decision Rule**

Boundary Limits were used to facilitate decision-making. A mean cut-off point that is equal to or greater than (> 3.0 was accepted, while a mean cut-off point that is equal to or less than (< 2.99 was rejected.

**Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Data**

Research questions were analyzed and answered with the aid of relevant tables.

**Research Question 1**

To what extent are secretaries in Asaba municipality of Delta State effectively and efficiently utilizing ICT skills for the discharge of their daily functions?

**Table 1: Mean Scores on ICT Skill Utilization Competency in Delta State**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>VHU</th>
<th>HU</th>
<th>AU</th>
<th>PU</th>
<th>NU</th>
<th>SUM</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
<th>STD. DEVI.</th>
<th>REMARK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1289.00</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1308.00</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>864.00</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>622.00</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1499.00</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>898.00</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>760.00</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>781.00</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>937.00</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1436.00</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>1149.00</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>962.00</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data in this table 1 revealed that the mean responses of the respondents met the acceptable or positive point of 3.0 and above in only seven (7) questionnaire items out of the twenty items designed to access the ICT skill competency utilization of the respondents in their offices. The other thirteen were lowly rated by the respondents as items in which they were poorly utilizing in their official duties. This means that most of the respondents possess high skill competencies in the utilization of ICT equipment.

**Research Question 2**

What constraints do secretaries in Asaba municipality of Delta State face in acquiring ICT skill competency?

**Table 2: Mean Scores on Constraints of ICT Skill Competency Acquisition**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>SUM</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
<th>STD</th>
<th>REMARK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1696.00</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1570.00</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>926.00</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1696.00</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1677.00</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1387.00</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1261.00</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1501.00</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1147.00</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1612.00</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research Data (2011)

Data in the table 2 shows that questionnaire items 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30 were constraints facing the respondents as regards ICT skills competency acquisition. On the other hand, the table also revealed that only one questionnaire item was regarded by their acquisition of ICT skill competency in modern offices.

**Research Question 3**

What means are available of overcoming the constraints of ICT skill acquisition and utilization in Asaba municipality of Delta State?

**Table 3: Mean Scores on ways of Overcoming Constraints of ICT skill Competency Acquisition and Utilization in Delta State**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>SUM</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
<th>STD</th>
<th>REMARK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

7
The analysis of data in the table shows that, all respondents unanimously agreed to the eight items of the questionnaire as ways of overcoming the constraints of ICT skill competency acquisition and utilization.

**Discussion of Findings**

The study investigated the ICT competency and utilization by secretaries in Delta State and pointed out the constraints and how the problems could be solved. Table one shows the result of the questionnaire in respect of question one, which sought to assess the extent of ICT skill utilization by secretaries in Delta State. It revealed that the respondents were competently utilizing only seven of the twenty ICT facilities listed in the table. It was found that there were constraints militating against effective utilizing and learning of ICT. This agrees with Ohakwe (2000) who stated that; today, in the classroom the era of talk and chalk is slowly giving way to technological devices via computer, e-learning, e-school, e-government etc. The study also, revealed that secretaries are not effectively utilizing ICT skill effectively in the discharge of their duties.

In the same vein, it was revealed that employers of secretaries hardly sponsor them for training and re-training programs in ICT. This is closely tied to another finding that employers are not fully aware of the benefits of using ICT for secretarial duties. The finding supports the opinion of Obijifor, Inayatulliah and Stevenson (2005) that ignorance about the importance of and need for ICTs make even those rich enough to acquire them for apathetic to ICTs.

The study also revealed that the computer application programme they learnt are no longer in use in modern offices. This supports the opinion of Oyedele (1992) that in most schools, the office machines available for training secretaries are outdated and obsolete.

**Conclusion**

This study investigated the information and communication technology skill competency and utilization by secretaries in Delta State. In order to enhance effective
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investigation of the research topic, four research questions were raised. The conclusions on the findings of the study were as follows:

1. Secretaries in Delta State were found not to be highly skilled and competent in most ICT facilities.

2. As evident from the result of the study, secretaries in Delta State were not effectively and efficiently utilizing ICT in the discharge of their daily secretarial functions.

3. As evident in the result of the study, secretaries in Delta State were faced with some constraints in their acquisition of ICT skill competency. Some of these constraints included lack of ICT facilities for training students in the schools where they attended, non-provision of ICT teaching and learning in the secretarial curriculum, inadequacy of ICT facilities for students' practical classes, and lack of employer sponsorship for ICT retraining program.

4. Secretaries in Delta State were unanimous in their agreement to ways of overcoming ICT skill competency acquisition and utilization. These remedies include provision of adequate ICT facilities for training secretaries, re-training of secretarial educators/instructors, review of secretarial curriculum to include ICT course, sponsorship of secretaries for ICT training and re-training programs by employers, provision of alternative power supply, availability of ICT technical support services, and provision of funds for ICT maintenance and repairs.

**Recommendation**

The following recommendations in respect of the findings of the study and its conclusions are hereby proffered:

1. The National Universities Commission, the National Board for Technical Education, and the National Commission for Colleges of Education as well as the authorities of secretarial training institutions should recognize the urgent need to review the secretarial curriculum to incorporate ICT skill courses as a way to ensure effective training of modern secretaries in Nigeria for the world of e-work.

2. Employers of secretaries should provide ICT facilities, train and re-train their secretaries as well as provide sufficient funds for maintenance; repairs, and technical support services.

3. All educational higher institutions training secretaries should provide ICT facilities for teaching and learning purposes. This will help in producing secretaries that are ICT compliant.

4. All secretarial educators/instructors should be made to undergo periodic training/re-training programs in ICT to adequately equip them with ICT knowledge and skills, which they would consequently impart to their students.
References


