

# COMPETENCY-IMPROVEMENT NEEDS OF SECRETARIES OF HIGHER INSTITUTIONS IN ICT FOR EFFECTIVE OFFICE WORK PERFORMANCE

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines Competency-Improvement Needs of Secretaries in Higher Institutions in ICT for Effective Office Work Performance. The paper examines the conceptual background of competence, needs, improvement, secretary and ICT which means Information and Communication Technology. ICT is becoming the lifeline of most human endeavours in all the major sectors of the national development. Therefore, it has become mandatory for all the employees to possess some level of skills in ICT to be able to function and retain their jobs. The paper reveals that there are competency needs which the secretaries have acquired in ICT that should improved in other to be effective and functional in the offices especially, those in higher institutions. The paper statistically analyzed few of these competencies – improvement needs in: Word Processing; Data Processing; Computing among others. The population of the study was 333 respondents (Secretaries and Supervisors) from the entire Enugu Educational zone. Questionnaire was the main instrument used in gathering data. Mean respondents of both the secretaries (needed) and supervisors (performance) was used to analyze the study. The difference between the mean responses of secretaries (needed) and the supervisors (performance) which form improvement need index (INI) was the major decision remark. Major recommendations were also made.

## **Introduction**

Competency in the view of Robenson (2000) is the ability to do something to a level that is acceptable. According to Olaitan (2003), to be competent means that the individual has acquired the knowledge, skills, attitude and judgment which he requires in order to perform successfully at a specified proficiency level in any given work. In the context of this paper, competency means the ability of the Secretaries in Higher Institutions in Enugu State to put into practice the ICT skills acquired by them to improve the office work/responsibilities for effective performance in information dissemination and utilization. The secretaries need to demonstrate the skills in their various office works in order to stay and retain their job in educational system.

Needs in the opinion of Hornby (2003) is circumstances that require something to be doen. Chita (1992) expressed that when something that should be done is omitted, there is a gap. The author submitted that needs are of three types. Need gap, Actual Need, Passive Need. Need gap is what one requires in order to meet a target standard; that gap to be filled constitutes a need. Actual need is the identification of what one specifically requires in practical terms for accomplishing a goal. Passive need can be explained to mean other expressed judgment about what one needs to acquire toward achieving a goal. The higher institution Secretaries are still using manual typewriters to prepare memo, meetings report among others despite the provisions of the new technology equipment most of which lay unused in their offices. This indicates that there is a need for the acquisition of the ICT skills.

Improvement according to Dalla (2001) means to make something or somebody better than before. When such things or person improves, that thing or somebody gets or performs better. Robenson (2000) view improvement as the development of circumstances in which something is lacking to better standard or quality than before. If Secretaries in Enugu State higher institutions improve their skill acquisition in ICT, they will perform better.

Secretary in view of Horby (2003) is a person who works in an office, specifically, working for another person, such person can be a male or female, whose work involves dealing with letters and telephone calls, typing, keeping records, arranging meetings with people among others. Therefore the Secretary in higher Institutions require more than typewriters, file cabinets, notebooks, pen and rulers to cope with the numerous work load listed above by Horby. Ohakwe (2000) stated that Secretaries in higher institutions require skills in ICT for managing information. Azuka (1998) in his research findings found that Secretaries require such competencies as operating computer, word processors, microfilmmers, shredding machines etc. Ohakwe further revealed that secretaries require ICT skills such as composing letters, understanding long hand abbreviations, keeping tract of files, classifying records, selecting, filing equipment and disposing obsolete files/records. He concluded that electronic filing techniques and electronic document interchange are taking over records management and are challenging the traditional roles of Secretaries. Therefore there is need for the Secretaries of higher institutions to acquire the competencies in ICT especially in word processing, data processing, computing, micrographic, electronic office communication skills.

ICT means Information and communication Technologies. There are various views of different authors towards the definition of ICTs. ICT broadly refer to ..... all forms of technology used to create, store, process and use information in its various forms (data, voice, image, multi-media presentations and other forms including those not yet conceived) and which enable, facilitate and support communication. More specifically, ICTs refer to the conveyance of micro-electronics, computers and telecommunications which make it possible for data including text, video and video signals, to be transmitted anywhere in the world where digital signals can be received. They include networks such as fixed, wireless and satellite telecommunications, broadcasting networks and applications such as the internet, database management systems and multi-media tools (Howell and Hundall, 2000). While ICT clearly encompass a wide range of technologies, for the purpose of this paper, ICTs refer specifically to the use of computers, email, internet and other office automation equipment, as these are the technologies that are used predominantly to promote school and administrative performance.

Computer in the opinion of Obi (2002), as an electronic machine which accepts data through an input device, does the arithmetic or logical operations in accordance with a pre-defined programme and finally sends the processed data to an output device either for further processing or in it's final processed form. The fact that this machine is able to process data following an instruction makes it an electronic brain which work millions of times faster and more accurately than human brains.

Just as the business office has changed, so must our educational sectors. The skills demanded of secretaries today, as the significant stakeholders in information processing and monitoring areas, require emphasis on skills and knowledge for the use of modern information processing facilities (ICT). These facilities include word processors, data processing equipment, micro-computers, records management with its emphasis on paperless files and reprographics.

It has become necessary to ask the question; how many higher institutions secretaries have been trained and retrained to become computer literate and ICT compliant so as to catch-up in incorporating this powerful ICT skills in their jobs in the offices? How many of the higher

institutions secretaries even know what is required of them to acquire in terms of ICT skills for office work effectiveness?

The problem of this paper, therefore, put in question form is: What ICT competency-improvement needs are needed by the higher institution secretaries for effective office work performance in Enugu State.

### **Purpose for the Study**

The major purpose of the study is to identify the competency – improvement needs of secretaries in higher institutions in ICT for effective office work performance. Specifically, the study sought to identify competencies needed by the secretary in higher institutions in ICT for office performance in the following areas:

1. Word processing
2. Data processing
3. Computing
4. Micrographic
5. Electronic office communications

### **Research Question**

The following research quest guided the study.

What are the competency and improvement needs of Secretaries of higher institutions in ICT for effective office work performance in:

1. Word processing?
2. Data processing?
3. Computing?
4. Micrographic?
5. Electronic office communications?

### **Methodology**

The researchers employed survey research design, which made use of structured questionnaire. A structured questionnaire of 50 items was developed for collecting data from the respondents.

The structured questionnaire was face-validated using three experts. Two experts from the department of Business Education and one Senior Administrative Officer from University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

The population for the study comprised six hundred and forty-three (643) secretaries and supervisors from all the higher institutions – colleges, polytechniques and universities all over the Enugu Educational Zones. Simple random sampling techniques was used to select three hundred and thirty-three (333) secretaries and supervisors from the population in collecting data for answering the research questions.

The instrument was validated by two experts (in Business Education) from the department of Vocational Teacher Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka and a Senior Administrative Officer in the department of Business Administration, Enugu State University of Technology (ESUT).

Reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach alpha coefficient formula. A coefficient estimate of 0.804 was obtained.

The structured questionnaire on competency – improvement needs of secretaries of higher institutions in ICT was administered on the 333 respondents and all the questionnaires were retrieved to obtain data. The 333 copies of questionnaire from the respondents were analyzed to answer the research questions developed.

The Improvement Needed Index was used to answer the 5 (five) research questions. Each questionnaire was assigned two major response scale columns: level of needed and level of performance. The secretaries only respond to column A of the questionnaire which was the needed column, while the supervisors respond to column B of the questionnaire which was the performance column.

The mean of both the secretaries and supervisors (need) and (performance) were used to answer the research questions. The value attached to the secretaries response options of the questionnaire are Highly Needed (HN) = 4, Averagely Needed (AN) = 3, Slightly Needed (SN) = 2, Not Needed (NN) = 1, The mean for the value is:

$$\frac{4 + 3 + 2 + 1}{4} = \frac{10}{4} = 2.5 + 0.05 = 2.55$$

Any time with a mean rating of 2.55 and above was regarded as needed while any item with a mean below 2.55 was regarded as not needed. The supervisors responded to the performance response scale of instrument with a scale: High performance (HP) = 4, Average performance (AP) = 3, Low performance (LP) = 2, No performance (NP) = 1.

The response on needed questionnaire and those on the performance questionnaire were used to determine the improvement needed index as follows:

$$X_n - X_p = INI$$

Where  $X_n$  = mean needed, n = needed

$X_p$  = mean performance, p = performance

The improvement needed indicators were expected to fall between 0 and 3. From this, the following decisions were taken:

- (i) Where  $\overline{X_n} - \overline{X_p}$  is  $> 0$  INI was positive, therefore, improvement was needed.
- (ii) Where  $\overline{X_n} - \overline{X_p}$  is  $< 0$  INI was negative, therefore improvement will not be needed
- (iii) Where  $\overline{X_n} - \overline{X_p}$  is  $= 0$  INI was 0, therefore improvement was not needed.

**Table 1:** Mean ratings of the opinions of the respondents on the competency improvement needs of secretaries of higher institutions in word processing for effective office work performance in Enugu State.

$$N = 333$$

S/N	ITEMS	$X_n$	$X_p$	$X_n - X_p$	REMARK
1.	Use different word processing packages/software	3.79	3.53	0.26	IN
2.	Type accurately and with speed	3.78	3.51	0.27	IN
3.	Change line spacing, margin and tabs.	3.73	2.61	1.12	IN
4.	Emphasize text by the use of underline, embold and italics.	3.78	3.50	0.28	IN
5.	Type superscript, subscripts and overstrike.	3.66	3.53	0.13	IN
6.	Check and correct spelling/grammatical errors	3.68	2.98	0.70	IN

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7.	Move cursor round the active document	3.64	3.45	0.19	IN
8.	Scroll document	3.71	3.45	0.26	IN
9.	Highlight text	3.67	2.62	1.05	IN
10.	Insert new text and delete existing text.	3.66	3.51	0.15	IN

**Key:**  $X$  = mean,  $n$  = needed,  $p$  = performance,  $INI$  = improvement Needed Indicator,  $IN$  = Improvement Needed,  $N$  = Number of respondents.

The data in table one revealed that improvement needed (INI) for the ten items ranged from 0.13 – 1.12. All the improvement needed index (INI) values are positive indicating that the secretaries of higher institutions needed improvement in all the ten competencies in word processing for effective office work performance in Enugu State.

**Research Questions 2**

What are the competency – improvement needs of secretaries of higher institutions in data processing for effective office work performance.

The data for answering research question 2 are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Mean Ratings of the opinions of the respondents on competency-improvement Needs of secretaries of higher institutions in data processing for effective office work performance in Enugu State.

N = 333

		INI			
S/N	ITEMS	$X_n$	$X_p$	$X_n - X_p$	REMARK
1.	Collect data using different methods.	3.85	3.54	0.31	IN
2.	Record data in a machine readable form.	3.75	3.52	0.23	IN
3.	Classify data into convenient groups.	3.83	3.50	0.33	IN
4.	Sort data into sequence	3.91	3.61	0.30	IN
5.	Analyze data using statistical tools.	3.59	3.04	0.55	IN
6.	Use statistical analysis and forecasting software	3.45	1.96	1.49	IN
7.	Use available data processing software such as spreadsheet.	3.81	1.86	1.95	IN
8.	Store/Retrieve data in a suitable storage media	3.56	1.98	1.58	IN
9.	Print computer output	3.64	2.12	1.52	IN
10.	Interpret result of analysis	3.89	3.58	0.31	IN

**Key:**  $X$  = mean,  $n$  = needed,  $p$  = performance,  $INI$  = improvement Needed Indicator,  $IN$  = Improvement Needed,  $N$  = Number of respondents.

The data in table two showed that improvement needed index (INI) for the ten items ranged from 0.23 – 1.95. All the improvement needed index values are positive indicating that the secretaries of higher institutions needed improvement in all the ten competencies in data processing for effective office work performance in Enugu State.

**Table 3:** Mean Ratings of the opinions of the respondents on competency-improvement needs of secretaries of higher institutions in computing for effective office work performance in Enugu State.

N = 333 INI

S/N	ITEMS	$X_n$	$X_p$	$X_n - X_p$	REMARK
1.	Connect computer system components	3.51	3.50	0.01	IN
2.	Boot, and shut down computer system properly	3.56	2.39	1.17	IN
3.	Use different operating system software to run/operate computer	3.51	2.06	1.45	IN
4.	Use basic computer input devices like keyboard and mouse.	3.53	1.53	2.00	IN
5.	Use various application packages for information processing.	3.53	2.31	1.22	IN
6.	Write program in suitable programming language.	3.80	2.50	1.30	IN
7.	Apply basic security measures to safeguard information on computer system.	3.55	3.00	0.55	IN
8.	Applying program in suitable information process	3.66	3.06	0.60	IN
9.	Develop basic security measures to safeguard information on computer system.	3.79	2.91	0.88	IN
10.	Applying the appropriate commands to run the operating system software.	3.63	2.50	1.12	IN

**Key:**  $X$  = mean,  $n$  = needed,  $p$  = performance,  $INI$  = improvement Needed Indicator,  $IN$  = Improvement Needed,  $N$  = Number of respondents.

The data in table three revealed that improvement needed index (INI) for the ten items ranged from 0.01 – 2.00. All the improvement needed index values are positive indicating that the secretaries of higher institutions needed improvement in all the ten competencies in computing for effective office work performance in Enugu State.

**Table 4:** Mean Ratings of the opinions of the respondents on competency-improvement needs of secretaries of higher institutions in micrographic for effective office work performance in Enugu.

N = 333

S/N	ITEMS	$X_n$	$X_p$	$X_n - X_p$	REMARK
1.	Save and retrieve documents on disks.	3.87	3.57	0.30	IN
2.	Save and retrieve documents on microfilm	3.82	3.54	0.28	IN
3.	Access files using appropriate techniques	3.76	3.50	0.26	IN
4.	Organize files using appropriate methods.	3.83	3.50	0.33	IN
5.	Create files successfully.	3.92	3.50	0.42	IN
6.	Update files when necessary	3.87	3.50	0.37	IN
7.	Identify different types of files.	3.89	2.77	1.12	IN

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8.	Operate electronic filing	3.74	2.53	1.21	IN
9.	Index and catalogue files appropriately.	3.79	2.91	0.88	IN
10.	Create different master copies.	3.72	3.45	0.27	IN

**Key:**  $X$  = mean,  $n$  = needed,  $p$  = performance,  $INI$  = improvement Needed Indicator,  $IN$  = Improvement Needed,  $N$  = Number of respondents.

The data in table four showed that improvement needed index (INI) for the ten items ranged from 0.26 – 1.12. All the improvement needed index values are positive indicating that the secretaries of higher institutions needed improvement in all the ten competencies in micrographic for effective office work performance in Enugu State.

**Table 5:** Mean Ratings of the opinions of the respondents on competency-improvement needs of secretaries of higher institutions in effective office communication for effective office work performance in Enugu State.

N = 333

S/N	ITEMS	$X_n$	$X_p$	$X_n - X_p$	REMARK
1.	Use effective oral communication	3.85	2.58	1.27	IN
2.	Employ good listening	3.78	1.43	2.35	IN
3.	Posses rich English vocabulary	3.76	1.14	2.62	IN
4.	Compose clear and concise written documents such as business letters.	3.78	1.45	2.33	IN
5.	Use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization and numerical form.	3.79	1.00	2.79	IN
6.	Send and receive correspondence by telex, telephone and mobile phone	3.89	1.43	2.46	IN
7.	Compose, send and receive electronic mail (e-mail)	3.77	1.15	2.62	IN
8.	Browse and download information in internet.	3.77	1.03	2.74	IN
9.	Fax message	3.72	1.44	2.88	IN
10.	Operate teleconferencing facilities.	3.61	1.01	2.60	IN

**Key:**  $X$  = mean,  $n$  = needed,  $p$  = performance,  $INI$  = improvement Needed Indicator,  $IN$  = Improvement Needed,  $N$  = Number of respondents.

The data in table five revealed that improvement needed index (INI) for the ten items ranged from 1.27 – 2.88. All the improvement needed index values are positive indicating that the secretaries of higher institutions needed improvement in all the ten competencies in electronic office communication for effective office work performance in Enugu State.

### **Summary of the Findings**

All the 50 items presented as competency-improvement needs in word processing, data processing, computing, micrographic and in electronic office communication needed by secretaries in higher institution for effective office work performance were accepted by both the secretaries and the supervisors as the necessary competency-improvement needs in information and communication technology for effective office work performance by secretaries in higher institutions.

### **Recommendation**

The following recommendations were made:

- The school administration should provide opportunity for in-service training programme on ICT for the office secretaries to upgrade their skills and knowledge in new electronic software applications.
- The school administration should provide and encourage the office secretaries to attend conferences, seminars and workshops on ICT and related fields.
- The government should also finance and fund the training and re-training of the office secretaries in ICT programmes and any other outside service training programme.
- The government should provide the necessary and up-to-date ICT equipments and facilities to the schools for the office secretaries to get acquaintance with the modern information management challenges.
- The supervisors should also be provided with special sponsored retraining programmes on supervision to enable supervisors who could not afford the high cost of retraining to benefit from the supervision improvement fund of the government.

### **Conclusion**

Technology has revolutionized office information processing functions in today's offices. Functions that were traditionally performed manually have been mechanized. Today, the entire office information system has become computer-based.

Information Communication Technology (ICT) has implication on the training of secretaries in higher institutions. The modern secretarial functions/office work needs a good knowledge of office information processing system. The modern secretary must be trained to acquire skills in the areas of word processing, data processing, telecommunication, micrographic systems and reprography. They should be able to use word processors, computers, micrographic equipment, etc. Therefore, its expected that when the secretaries of higher institutions acquire these competencies (improvement needed) it will equip them with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitude for effective office work performance.

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