

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES ON MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC-RELATIONS SKILLS OF THE POLYTECHNIC GRADUATE SECRETARY

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Abstract

The contemporary issues on the Polytechnic training of secretaries have to do with the competence of the graduate secretaries since the concept of modern office came into secretarial profession. The general belief is that the graduate secretaries need to upgrade their skills before they can fit into modern office technological advancements. This study has identified the secretarial functions in Management and Public - Relations skills affected by modern office technological advancements. Graded questionnaires were administered to 100 respondents in selected modern offices in Wuse and Garki areas of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Two Research Questions were answered and one hypothesis tested at 0.05 level of significance using the t-test. Management and Public Relation skills were affected by the modern office technological advancements and the Null hypothesis was upheld. It was therefore, recommended that Polytechnic secretarial education curriculum should be reviewed. The provision of modern equipment for the training of secretaries was also recommended.

Introduction

A lot has been written on the training of secretaries and their competence in the job market. However, the contemporary issues at stake about the polytechnic training are on the skills acquisition of the secretary and the need of the modern offices. The secretary is an executive who possesses mastery of office skills. This implies that, the secretary should have received a training that will make him all rounder in managing the executive office of an organization, no matter the sophistication. The polytechnics in particular have been challenged over the years to inculcate the skills that will produce secretaries that are all rounder in offices, no matter the sophistications.

Nigeria had forty - six (46) Polytechnics by 1998. These Polytechnics, according to Federal Ministry of Education (2000), produced 3,607 Higher National Diploma Graduate Secretaries from 1993 to 1998 (5 year). All these graduate secretaries acquired secretarial skills in accordance with the NBTE curriculum and course specification of 1989. The skills imparted into these secretaries can be grouped as: (i) Stenography (ii) Reprography (iii) Communication (iv) Management and (v) Public Relations. The graduates were deemed to have successfully passed the SIWES of three months according to the curriculum, which supposed that the training was not much far away from the practices in modern or industrial offices. This assertion can only be correct when their performances in modern "offices are evaluated.

Modern Office

Modern offices are the offices, which use secretarial advanced technological revolutions. This revolution has led to automation, which is integration of functions and using more sophisticated machines in rendering secretarial services. Isineyi (1996), quoting Owen (1992) stated that automation is the merging of technologies and integration of functions providing quality information and communication facilities designed to improve professional and managerial productivity. Some of these automated facilities are computer, word processor, electronic typewriters, shredding machines, fax and telex machines.

Effect Of Modern Office on Secretarial Practice

The NBTE curriculum of 1989 is stale and obsolete because the world has witnessed new changes and innovations (especially in computer telecommunications and micro-graphics) have almost completely altered the nature, environment, content and competencies in secretarial studies and functions all over the world. Therefore, in agreement with Nwosu (1997), the relevance of the current secretarial curriculum for the training of secretaries is not adequate. Eckersley (1976) stated that technological advancements have not only

created considerable impact on offices, that they have also altered the responsibilities and functions of the secretary. Modern business has so widened the roles or functions of the secretary. Some of these changing roles of the secretary are:

- (a) Today's secretary can take the active role as the presiding officer or president of some professional organizations.
- (b) The use of modern technology in office dictation and transcription systems enable the secretary to reflect the corporate image in correspondence most quickly, efficiently and effectively.
- (c) Today's society depends on paper-based communications and the technological evolution of office machines, which makes it imperative for secretaries to be more sophisticated themselves.

All authors on automation or modern offices agreed that functions of secretaries have changed but none has exhibited specificity of the impact on the polytechnic secretarial graduates. Isineyi (1996), investigation showed that exposure of secretaries to modern offices gave the practicing secretaries significant performance over beginning graduate secretaries in four secretarial functions out of eleven functions. Onuoha (2005), investigated on the extent of effect of field practice on the training of secretaries and found that on the average, the practicing secretary's performance over the beginning secretary on the three core secretarial skill clusters, (i) stenography, (ii) reprography and (iii) communication rose by 21.02%.

There was no work done on the effect of modern office on the Management and Public-Relations skills of polytechnic graduate secretaries. This work was therefore, set to determine how modern office has impacted on the performance of the polytechnic secretarial graduates on management and Public-Relation skills. The outcome of this investigation gave insight on the polytechnic competence to produce secretaries that could fit into modern offices without further training in these areas.

Methods and Materials

Survey design was used in this study. Opinions of the Business executive and their secretaries on the secretarial functions affected by modern office technological advancements were sought. Two major towns of Garki and Wuse in the federal Capital Territory of Abuja were sampled. These towns have cluster of viable modern offices. The population of the study comprised 100 respondents made up of 50 executives and 50 practicing secretaries of at least, three years experience, drawn from selected 20 modern business offices in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The sample was restricted to polytechnic graduate secretaries. The data were collected using questionnaire methods seventeen functional statements were grouped into two secretarial skills and distributed as

1. Management skills with 11 functional statements; and
2. Public-Relations skills with 6 functional statements.

Stanwell and Shaw (1974) identified these functional statements as primary and secondary functions of secretaries. Each skill statement was rated for possible response alternatives as very much Affected - 5 points, much Affected - 4 points, Affected - 3 points, somewhat Affected - 2 points and Not Affected - 1 point.

The rating was done by the Executives and the secretaries. The questionnaires were personally administered and retrieved by the author. 89% of the number administered were retrieved and 85% of the number distributed were correctly filled and used for the study. Two Research Questions:

- (1) What management skills are affected by modern office technological advancements?
- (2) What Public-Relations skills are affected by modern office technological advancements

And one Null Hypothesis Ho:

Ho: There is no significant difference at 0.05 level between the mean responses of the office executives and the secretaries regarding the secretarial skills affected by modern office technological advancements were used in the research. Skills determination rating scale was used to determine the skills affected by modern office advancements technology. The mean rating for each skill statement was obtained statistically.

The responses of the Executives and secretaries were pooled together to obtain a grand mean of the ratings on a continuous scale as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: A continuous Rating Scale to Determine the Degree of Affectedness of the Responses

Response Category	Points	Range
Very Much Affected	5	4.50-5.00
Much Affected	4	3.50-4.49
Affected	3	2.50-3.49
Somewhat affected	2	1.50-2.49
Not Affected	1	0.50- 1.49

The Null Hypothesis was tested using t-test for each cluster. The mean of the ratings provided for each skill statement as perceived by the business executives and that of the secretaries provided the required values for each of the columns X_1 and X_2 .

Results and Discussion

Research Question One

What management skills are affected by modern office technological advancement?

The management skills affected by modern office technological advancements were rated by the secretaries and executives. The grand mean ratings are shown on Table 2.

Table 2: Grand Mean Ratings to Determine the Management Skills Affected by Modern Office Technological Advancements

S/N	Management Skills Statements	X_1	X_2	\bar{X}	Remarks
1	Ability to think very fast	4.55	4.34	4.45	Much Affected
2.	Ability to use stationery economically	4.58	4.34	4.46	Much Affected
3.	Ability to organize office using robots and ergonomics	3.37	3.37	3.37	Affected
4.	Ability to make travel arrangement	4.38	4.19	4.29	Much Affected
5.	Ability to conduct minor research	3.98	3.62	3.80	Much Affected

6.	Ability to keep simple records of accounts using computer	3.91	3.68	3.80	Much Affected
7.	Ability to handle the boss personal matters in coded computer files	4.20	4.05	4.13	Much Affected
8.	Ability to take down minutes	4.51	3.70	4.11	Much Affected
9.	Ability to write routine business correspondence	4.35	4.02	4.19	Much Affected
10.	Ability to apply the knowledge of organization and business background to solve administration problems.	4.02	3.88	3.95	Much Affected
11.	Ability to supervise using close circuit television	3.11	3.32	3.22	Affected

Table 2, shows that all the skills statements listed received grand mean ratings between 3.22 and 4.46. Nine of the skills statements were rated Much Affected. Two of the statements with grand ratings of 3.22 and 3.37 were affected by modern office technological advancements.

Research Question Two

What Public-Relations skills were affected by modern office technological advancements?

Table 3, shows the results of the ratings by the secretaries and executive officers on the Public-Relations skills affected by modern office technological advancements.

Table 3: Grand Mean Ratings to Determine the Public-Relations Skill Affected by Modern Office Technological Advancements

S/N	Public Relations skills statements	\bar{X}_1	\bar{X}_2	\bar{X}	Remarks
1.	Ability to cooperate with colleagues	4.33	4.30	4.32	Much Affected
2.	Ability to cope with stress	3.46	4.01	3.74	Much Affected
3.	Ability to dress well	4.59	4.32	4.46	Much Affected
4.	Ability to handle phones calls	4.55	4.32	4.44	Much Affected
5.	Ability to entertain official guest	4.50	4.32	4.41	Much Affected
6.	Ability to operate some equipment on behalf of the executive	4.18	4.02	4.10	Much Affected

Table 3, shows that all the Public-Relations skills were rated between 3.74 and 4.46 as grand mean. The six skills were hence Much Affected by modern office technological advancements.

Ho: Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of the office executives and the secretaries regarding the secretarial skills affected by modern office technological advancements. This hypothesis was tested on the two skill clusters and the result is shown on Table 4.

Table 4: Results of the t-test on the Mean Responses of the Modern Office Executives and the Secretaries on the Secretarial Skills Affected by Modern Office Technological Advancements

Skill clusters	df	\bar{X}_1	\bar{X}_2	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Management	20	4.09	3.86	0.50	1.73	Not significant
Public Relations	10	4.27	4.22	0.04	3.81	Not significant

All the calculated t-values were less than the t-critical. Hence Ho: was accepted for all the clusters. On the average, management and Public-Relations skills were much Affected by modern office technological advancements.

All the management skills of the secretary were affected by modern office technological advancements.

Most of the tasks that made up the skills were more of routine tasks. The effect on the skills by modern office technology is very significant. This suggests more demand on the functions of the secretary to include assisting the office executive in the administration of his organisation. It is therefore, not surprising that the management skills of the secretary were much affected generally.

This is so because it is through practices in the modern offices using advancements technology that their skills will improve. It also implies that the competence required by employers cannot be got from classroom studies only. This according to Standwell (1974) was why industrial Training Programme was planned. The result of this study agreed completely with Ohiri (1997), that the NBTE curriculum exposed the training secretary to develop through exposure in secretarial management.

The Public Relations skills were all much affected by modern office advancements technology. The high rating showed that high competence is required in Public-Relations organizations to progress highly, Public-Relations is essential skill. It therefore, means that the training curriculum must depend essentially on field practice to achieve a satisfactory goal. This assertion supports the views of Nwosu (1997), Perkins and Byrd (1978).

The implications of the findings of this study is that the polytechnic curriculum for training secretaries in these skills needs to be reviewed to accommodate the needs of modern business organizations. Business offices all over the world are undergoing rapid technological revolution or automation. The needs of this rapid technological revolution should be inculcated in the trainee secretaries before graduation.

The curriculum of NBTE has not been reviewed for some years now. The curriculum is obsolete and calls for immediate review if the training of secretaries will not be a huge waste of resources. The review should concentrate more on the courses that develop skills in the use of modern technological advancements.

Furthermore, the results show that the Supervised Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) which is supposed to complement the practical training and bridge the gap between classroom and industrial experience is a big failure. Because of Nigerian factor, the one year industrial attachment is no more, practiced. This important programme of the curriculum should be reviewed and sustained. If properly implemented, it will benefit both students and modern office employers. There is need to update the skills of the teachers with training in modern technological advancements. A very serious implication for the curriculum is that if nothing is done and fast too to review it employers of secretaries with these deficiencies will look for competent secretaries elsewhere. Some of these businesses may decide to recruit their nationals since many of them are non-Nigerian business organizations.

Recommendations

1. Business organization and employers of secretaries should participate in the funding of training of secretaries. The major problems of these polytechnics are the provision of modern office facilities which in most cases are very expensive.
2. Modern Business Organisations should accept the attachment of the National Diploma graduates for the one year experience scheme before coming back for the HND programme. This will help to augment their class-room learning before graduation.
3. The polytechnic curriculum should be reviewed immediately.
4. Training of secretaries should be specialized to some polytechnics which government should concentrate its resources.

Conclusion

Management and Public-Relations skills were affected by modern office advancements technology. The secretaries needed more training on the modern office gadgets before they could competently work in the modern offices. It is therefore, imperative that the polytechnic curriculum for training secretaries should be improved. The curriculum should introduce those courses that will integrate the modern office technological advancements in the management and Public-Relations skills of the secretaries.

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