

TECHNOLOGICAL EQUIPMENT AND EFFECTIVE DELIVERY OF SECRETARIAL RESPONSIBILITIES: EVIDENCE FROM PUBLIC TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

OLUFUNKE RHODA OMOLADE^{1*}, SUNDAY TUNMIBI²

^{1,2}DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT, LEAD CITY UNIVERSITY, IBADAN, OYO STATE, NIGERIA

*Corresponding author: olufunkehoda90@gmail.com

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Abstract

Secretarial responsibilities play important roles in the execution and delivery of administrative and managerial responsibilities in higher education institutions across the world. No matter how skillful and competent secretarial staff members are, the effective delivery of their administrative and managerial functions (that is, secretarial responsibilities) could largely depend on the effective utilization of technology equipment that are available at their disposal. Therefore, this study examined the relationship between the use of technological equipment and effective delivery of secretarial responsibilities in public tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria. A correlational survey research design was adopted to achieve the central aim of the study. 171 professionally-trained secretaries in public tertiary institutions in Ekiti State were selected as participants for the study. IBM Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) was employed as the package for data analysis. Simple Linear Regression was the statistical tool employed for data analysis. The finding revealed that technological equipment significantly associated with effective secretarial responsibilities ($r=0.529$, $p>0.005$). The authors recommended, among others, that managers and administrators of tertiary institutions should endeavour to provide adequate and state-of-the-art technological gadgets for secretarial duties to be effective and efficient in tertiary institutions.

Keywords: State-of-the-Art Technologies, Secretaries, Secretarial Responsibilities, Technological Equipment, Tertiary Institutions.

Introduction

Secretaries play very important roles in the running of the administrative and managerial responsibilities of educational institutions. These administrative and managerial responsibilities of secretaries include planning, policy development and execution, coordinating, organization, and directing, as well as clerical functions such as information gathering, record analysis, and information dissemination and distribution. As a result, secretarial services serve as the lynchpin upon which the achievement of organizational goals are to be built (Eke, 2023). The use of technological equipment in performing secretarial duties may be described as the electronic methods of creating, storing, managing, and disseminating information. These are the technological equipment that enable data to be processed and various sorts of communication to be facilitated. A secretary is a member of an organization management team, who must be able to keep abreast with business changes and development as a result he or she will be capable to utilize digital technology in order to be more productive and efficient in carrying out their secretarial duties. The efficiency of a secretary in every tertiary institutions depends on the availability and utilization of office equipment in quality and quantity as well as the manipulation of skills and competencies.

Yemisi (2021) submitted that a modern day secretary is an assistant to a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of an established organization. According to Eke (2023), a secretary is the chief administrator of an office or a person who performs the functions of planning, organizing, controlling and leading resources in effective and efficient manner as well as recording the proceedings of the various activities in an office and responsible to an executive. Apart from the traditional responsibilities, such as keyboarding, data entry, taking dictation and transcribing, managing records, receiving, storing and retrieving information, a secretary takes some decisions for and on behalf of the CEO using his or her initiative. As such, a secretary is regarded as the brain box of the CEO and the office. Job effectiveness involves the extent to which an activity fulfils its intended purpose or function. Boahen Martin (2020) is of the view that efficiency measure the match between stated goals and achievements, which implied doing the right thing. Job efficiency in context of this study involves the secretaries' ability to use available office machinery or automation or tools to carry out the assigned duties or tasks in an efficient manner in line with the expectations of the institutions.

In a contemporary work environment, employers are in search of secretaries who possess requisite knowledge, skills and competencies that would enable them to perform their job efficiently. As such, the development of high level efficacy in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) will affect the success and efficiency of the secretaries' job in the ever increasing information-based environment. As reiterated by Yemisi (2021), for secretary's job to be achieved in an efficient manner, appropriate technological equipment should be provided. There seem to be dearth of technological equipment in tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria which has impeded the secretarial duties in in effective and an efficient manner. This study tries to find out the extent to which technological equipment predict effectiveness of secretarial duties and responsibilities in public tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The central purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the utilization of technological equipment and effective delivery of secretarial responsibilities in public tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Research Question

Research Question: What is the extent of relationship between utilization of technological equipment and effective delivery of secretarial responsibilities in public tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria?

Research Hypothesis

Research Hypothesis: Utilization of technological equipment does not significantly associate with effective delivery of secretarial responsibilities in public tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria?

Conceptual Framework

The authors undergird this study with a conceptual model (Figure 1) in which the hypothesis of the study is based. The underlying assumption of this study is that effective use of technological equipment would influence effective delivery of secretarial responsibilities and duties, following the main tenet and assumption of the Structuration Theory of Information Technology (Jackson, Young & Sander, 2022). The conceptual model developed by the authors of this study has helped illustrate the relationships between effective utilization of technological equipment and effective delivery of secretarial responsibilities. The conceptual model depicted that technological equipment is characterized by information collection, information processing and information, each influencing effective delivery of secretarial responsibilities. As such, if secretarial staff members of public tertiary institutions in Ekiti State effectively utilized technological equipment, it would equally influence effective delivery of their managerial and administrative responsibilities. In contrast, if secretarial staff members of public tertiary institutions in Ekiti State ineffectively utilized technological equipment due to their inadequate supply, it would equally hinder effective delivery of their managerial and administrative responsibilities.

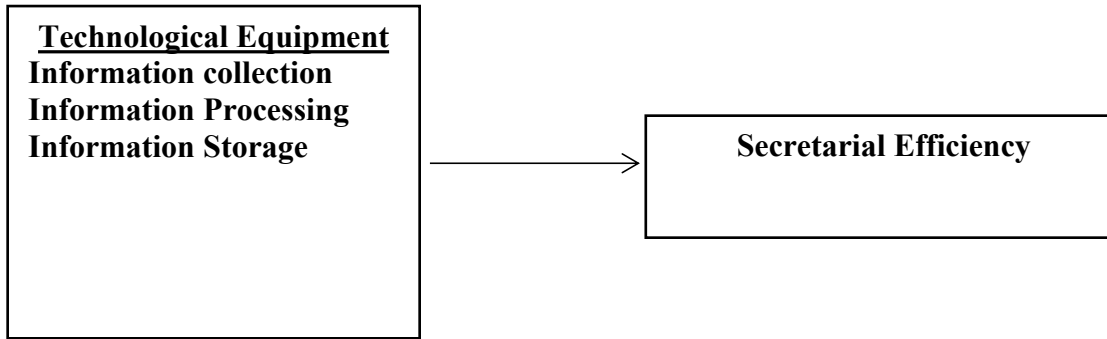


Figure 1: The Conceptual Model.

Secretary and Secretarial Responsibilities

A secretary is a person employed to perform myriad of office activities. These include the use of equipment for keyboarding, answering phone calls, and arranging meetings, also handles correspondence, keeps records, and does general clerical work for an individual in business office, and related affairs of an organization, company or firm (Herbranson, Pluckebaum, Podsobinski & Hartzell, 2022). Based on the different roles and responsibilities of a secretary in any business outfit, there exists different nomenclature for a secretarial position, such as confidential secretary, executive secretary, professional secretary, administrative/professional, administrative assistant, executive administrative executive assistant, personal assistant, etcetera (McNulty & Stewart, 2014; Aprilya & Suryanto, 2021). The core responsibilities of a secretary or other administrative assistant are to provide administrative supports to the executives in an organization. This general description depicts a wide range of assigned and non-assigned (primary and secondary) tasks and responsibilities, based on the specific needs of their organization. As the reliance on technology continues to expand in offices, the role of the office secretaries has greatly evolved. Office automation and organizations restructuring have allowed secretaries and administrative assistants to assume wider scope of responsibilities (France, 2015).

Secretarial efficiency highly depends on perception, values and attitudes. There appear to be so many variables influencing the secretarial efficiency that is almost impossible to make sense of them. Secretarial efficiency maybe defined as a function of a secretary's ability and skill and effort in carrying out secretarial duties in a given situation. In the short run, secretary's skills and abilities are relatively stable. Effort is an internal force of a person which makes him or her to work willingly, when secretaries are satisfied with their job and their needs are met, they develop an attachment to work or we say that they make an effort to perform better. Increased effort results in better efficiency which eventually led to increase in job performance (Waswa, 2008).

Secretarial efficiency is defined as the proficiency with which secretaries perform activities that are directly recognized as part of their jobs; this are activities that add up to the organization's technical or productive care either actively by doing a part of its technological processor or by providing it with needed secretarial skills (Mark, 1998). Activities related secretary efficiency varies between jobs and behavior expected of them. Job embodiment substantially contribute to the experience of work engagement. Of course, the task-specificity perspective and work engagement does not mean that there will be no interpersonal differences in between day fluctuation in work engagement as a person's general level of work engagement can increase or decrease over longer period of time, contingent on job-level and personal resources. Secretarial efficiency is secretarial duties' outcomes and job relevant behaviours. Work outcomes deal with secretarial performance, such as quality or quality of the work done, while job relevant behaviour refers to the behavioural aspects useful in achieving performance objectives. In other words, job relevant behaviours provide support in performing task-related matters. Most importantly, secretarial efficiency measures, which may be based on an absolute value or a relative judgment, can be generalized to the overall organizational performance because in total it reflects the organizational

performance to a certain extent. Absolute value of efficiency is based on the objective results, such as total points from sales or productivity, while relative judgments are performance evaluation made based on the behavioural related aspects that are very subjective in nature. In relation to different conceptualizations of secretarial efficiency, administrative staff behaviours at work constitute secretarial efficiency. Traditionally, secretarial efficiency is limited to the core task activities that were based solely on secretarial duties. The construct has, however, expanded into behavioural aspects related directly to the core tasks and other behaviours that support the core secretarial efficiency (Mathieu, 1990).

In public tertiary institutions in Nigeria, secretaries belong to an important work group which performs administrative and support functions and plays important roles in ensuring that secretarial and administrative processes of records, information and office management are capable of achieving institutional goals and objectives. Effectiveness, efficiency and good behavioural disposition of secretaries at the various organs of public tertiary institutions lend quality services delivery and fulfillment of the core responsibilities of teaching, learning and research, making the achievement of overall mandate of advancing Nigeria's economic growth and global competitiveness achievable. Making the performance of secretaries reach high level is becoming more and more challenging especially in the face of changing office functions, roles and expectations that are being influenced by emerging information technologies. With these, tertiary institutions, especially the public owned, are constantly faced with the various demands for change to acknowledge and embrace new learning and knowledge diffusion approaches, take advantage of technological development and re-orient their office personnel on service delivery, thus striving to get the highest possible level of performance from the secretaries. Despite the opportunities offered by digital technologies for effectiveness and higher performance, the roles and functions of secretaries in public tertiary institutions are being criticized for glaring failure to fulfil expectations of higher efficiency and quality work output with clear evidences of poor performance and inability to activate, update, use and connect their knowledge in the complex, diverse and unpredictable situations dictated by modern technologies. If left unaddressed, this will threaten behavioural, knowledge and procedural shift in secretaries' roles and expectations as well as the competence necessary to make good use of digital innovation and technological improvement in office functions and general administration of public tertiary institutions.

Tertiary institutions have come to appreciate the role and importance of the secretary as well as the need to providing the needed and necessary technological equipment for the efficiency of the secretarial functions (Akpomi & Ordu 2009). The efficiency and effectiveness of the secretary in every tertiary institution depend largely on the availability of technological equipment as well as the skills and competencies of the secretary. These skills and competencies required by secretaries include ability to use computer to create spreadsheets with packages like Microsoft Excel, Peachtree and lotus, compose correspondences using packages like Microsoft word, WordStar, WordPerfect etc, manage databases using software like Microsoft Access; create presentations with Microsoft PowerPoint, publish reports and documents using desktop publishing software like Microsoft Office Publisher or FrontPage and do digital graphics jobs using CorelDraw. Technological equipment has been injected into the workplace at an exponentially increasing rate over the last few decades. Many offices see technological equipment as the means to increase profit margins and to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving marketplace (Akpomi & Ordu, 2009).

There are wide range of technological equipment which enable secretaries to improve their efficiency. Such equipment takes the form of electronic typewriters that have replaced the manual ones. Word processors with milt-purpose facilities, computers and other sophisticated office machines and equipment are now provided by employers. Some of the technological equipment used by secretaries includes computer communication equipment and electronic pocket organizers. New technological equipment that has altered the procedures and technique for office functions include the computers, e-mail (electronic mail), e-commerce (electronic commerce), e-business (electronic business), voice mail, and the Internet. Oyesode (2014) opined that secretaries are now referred to as office managers by some people because of their activities, education, skill acquisition, knowledge and even expectations from their bosses, customers, clients and even the public. Office management is now more concerned with

office occupations or the exhibition or use of skills, aptitudes, attitudes and knowledge for carrying out successfully the functions of the office. The secretary who is at the centre of information has the duty of providing comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date information promptly to facilitate quality management decisions. Now and ever changing technology in offices has evolved the functions of the office to rely on different types of improved and standardized equipment which constitutes some threats to some secretaries. Secretaries serve as information and communication managers for offices, plan and schedule meetings and appointments, take minutes at meetings, organize and maintain paper work and electronic files. They disseminate information by using telephone, mail service and email. Secretaries are aided in their tasks by variety of technological equipment such as fax machines, digital photocopiers, scanners and electronic paper trimmers. In view of the highly challenging office administrative responsibilities for secretaries, coupled with the influx of office innovations in ultramodern office, it is, however, very pertinent and justifiable that any secretary who has no requisite knowledge of use of technological equipment will soon be displaced or replaced.

Because of the technological innovations and advancements in today's office, any secretary who wishes to be relevant in the workplace must endeavour to acquire basic skills on how to manipulate and operate technological equipment such as computer systems, accompanying telecommunications devices such as internet connectivity and other office related automation such as digital photocopier, paper shredders, digital duplicator, scanner, teleconference devices, etcetera. The employers of labour in this era need secretaries who are very knowledgeable and versatile in office management and in the use of modern office technology and information systems and in routine business functions such as generating, processing, storing, retrieving, handling and disseminating information with little or no supervision.

Methods

Research Design

This study adopted an inferential statistical method to explain effects of Inadequacy of Technological Equipment and its Effects on Secretarial Efficiency in Public Tertiary Institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Research Participants

The entire number of research participants consisted of 171 Secretaries from three public universities in Ekiti State, viz: Ekiti State University (EKSU), Federal University of Oye – Ekiti, (FUOYE), Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere - Ekiti.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Given the small population, this study adopted total enumeration method.

Research Instruments

The questionnaire was used to obtain information on the use of technological equipment and effective delivery of secretarial responsibilities in Public Tertiary Institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The study adapted the Likert scale design and the instrument is made up of three sections. The questionnaire was subjected to face validity which measured how well the content of the instrument measures what it is designed to measure. It was also used in determining a scale's validity, which is a method that literally measures the face value of the measuring instrument.

Validation and Reliability of Research Instruments

Instrument was sourced through related literature review and adaptation from questionnaires that have been used by other researchers. Content and construct validity was done by expert in information management. Content validity was used to assess the internal validity of the research instruments. Corrections made were incorporated in constructing the final questionnaire which was given out to the respondents for the study. To determine the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach's alpha was used to calculate the internal consistencies of the items in the instruments, which yielded the coefficient values

of 0.99 for technological equipment and 0.98 for effective delivery of secretarial responsibilities.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the participants will be analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 29. The hypothesis was tested using an inferential statistic such as the multiple regression. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance. The decisions rule for testing the hypothesis was based on any probability value less or equal to 0.05 considered the null hypothesis to be rejected, and any probability value greater than 0.05 considered the null hypothesis to be accepted.

Result

Research Hypothesis: Utilization of technological equipment does not significantly associate with effective delivery of secretarial responsibilities in public tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Regression analysis on relationship between utilization of technological equipment and effective delivery of secretarial responsibilities in public tertiary institutions.

a. Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.529 ^a	.280	.270	.46851
a. Predictors: (Constant), Information Collection, Information Processing and Information Storage				

b. ANOVA ^a						
	Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	12.056	2	6.028	27.463	.000 ^b
	Residual	30.950	141	.220		
	Total	43.007	143			
a. Dependent Variable: Secretarial Efficiency						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Information Collection, Information Processing and Information Storage						

c. Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.250	.245		5.103	.000
	Information Collection	.289	.090	.280	3.218	.002
	Information Processing	.038	.083	.033	2.457	.048
	Information Storage	.224	.74	.283	3.015	.003
a. Dependent Variable: Secretarial Efficiency						

Table 1a shows that technological equipment has moderate and positive correlation (R = 0.529) with secretarial efficiency in public tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria. In addition, Findings revealed that technological equipment have significant relationship with secretarial efficiency (Adj. R² = 0.270, P > 0.005). The other 73.0% variation in secretarial efficiency in public tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria are explained by other factors not investigated in this study. Table 1b shows that for the overall significance of the model, technological equipment has a significant influence on secretarial

efficiency in public tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria ($F(143) = 27.463, p < 0.05$). Table 4.1c also shows that, if all other factor are constant, a unit change in information collection will lead to 0.289 increase in the secretarial efficiency in public tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria, a unit change of information processing will lead to 0.038 increase in the secretarial efficiency in public tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria while a unit change in information storage will lead to 0.224 increase in the secretarial efficiency in public tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria at 95% level of confidence. Therefore, based on the result of the regression analysis, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant influence of technology equipment on secretarial efficiency in public tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria was rejected.

Discussion

The result of the study which suggest that the inadequacy of technological equipment significantly have effects on secretarial efficiency of secretaries in public tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The significant influence of the inadequacy of technological equipment on secretarial efficiency had been made earlier in the empirical study carried out in previous studies, for example; All organizations, including government parastatals, regulatory agencies and licensing boards, tertiary institutions and private firms, have had to devise new ways for their secretaries to carry out their duties while keeping the organization afloat. They had to rely on technology in conjunction with office cooperation to keep operations running, accomplish organizational objectives, and withstand the modern challenges of secretaries (Gargaillo. 2020).

Secretaries were pushed to convert from face-to-face services to utilizing technologies in educational institutions conversations with little warning (Nosakhare, 2023). Secretaries have expressed concerns about how they will be able to properly employ these technologies to deliver administrative roles effectively and efficiently (Nosakhare, 2023). Every organization's administrative department had to rise to the challenge, offer the required support, such as training, hardware, and software, and rethink their core tasks in order to continue managing their operations efficiently and effectively toward attaining defined objectives. Secretaries have also demonstrated a high degree of inventiveness in their use of technologies to provide services while the main problem with this innovative drive is the unavailability of technological equipment (Boahen, 2020; Farkas & Romaniuk, 2020; Galea et al., 2020).

On the bright side, as a consequence of widespread acceptance and use of technology, office secretarial practices improved, allowing for greater flexibility and creativity in the workplace. According to a study of over 15,000 professionals from 80 countries conducted by International Workplace Group (IPG), a flexible workspace provider, organisations recognize the value of workplace flexibility for employees. Simultaneously, technology adoption facilitated larger-scale partnerships and engagement across state and national borders, allowing for faster responses. Including new entities in existing humanitarian collaboration networks (e.g., volunteer and technical groups that assist during disasters, including pandemics); enabling diversified civic participation (e.g., digital archives of deleted postings to challenge censorship, initiatives to counter disinformation campaigns); and facilitating new types of disaster assistance (e.g., digital humanitarians, online self-support groups).

Conclusions

Technology has influenced the future of secretarial duties in organizations and played a crucial role in sustaining social order. The architecture and direction of secretarial duties in every tertiary institutions altered dramatically. There was a paradigm change in how tertiary institutions functioned all throughout the world. The administrative office has to start thinking about its surroundings and grasp new trends driven by the provision and implementation of technological equipment. Secretarial duties must now be adaptable and willing to handle changes effectively and efficiently in order for their organisation to survive the impending crisis and continue to operate as a thriving, lucrative organization through the use of technological equipment. This drive has been on the negative effect among tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria due to the non-availability of technological equipment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

6. The management of public tertiary institutions in Ekiti State should design new employment standards to match the new norm, which is a higher reliance on the implementation and use of technological equipment for optimum performance.
7. Up-to-date technological equipment must be provided for the secretaries by the management of public tertiary institutions in Ekiti State
8. Management should provide a career development opportunity platform for secretaries to grow their skills technologically for excellent service delivery.

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