

Influence of Office Automation on Secretarial Administrators' Effectiveness in Ogun State-Owned Universities.

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Abstract: *The effectiveness of a secretary in an organization strongly depends on the available office technology as well as the skills and competencies of such secretary to perform office duties. Office automation is designed to redefining the office work; improve the appearance and accuracy of output that completely changed the old way of performing office tasks and being replaced with a new business orientation thereby making the old method to be outdated. This research work examined the influence of office automation on secretaries' effectiveness in the state-owned universities in Ogun State. Four (4) research questions were answered in line with the objective of the study. A structured questionnaire was designed and validated. Data collected were analyzed using regression analysis at 0.05 level of significance. The result of the findings indicated that there was no significant influence of office automation on secretaries' interpersonal skills, personal quality, professional behavior and job related skills. It was recommended among others that Secretaries should attend seminars, conferences and workshops to develop them in the area of information technologies and Microsoft office packages. Also, it was recommended that the University Management should continually organize in-service training for the Secretaries to teach them newly automated machines.*

Keywords: Office, automation, Secretarial Administrators and Universities

I. Introduction

In the contemporary work environment, employers are in search for secretaries who possessed knowledge, skills and competencies that would enhance better job performance. As such the development of high level of efficacy in ICT will affect the success of the secretary's job performance in the ever increasing information-based environment. Information technology has drastically changed the office functions, jobs are now done in a new way. Information could be transferred, stored, retrieved and processed for onward transmission with the use of technology. As opined by Nwaokwa and Okoli (2012), many secretaries lack the communication technology skills required in the various offices and this has greatly affected their performance. The effect of office automation is to increase the organizational productivity by redefining the office work, improve the quality and accuracy of output. For an office secretary, office automation reduces the stress of role overload/identification; it affects the perceived status and job satisfaction and it has a significant influence on the workers' feelings towards the organizational goals. The introduction and development in Information Communication Technology (ICT) have changed the methods and procedure of doing office work by the Secretarial staff. As described by Iyanda (1990), the word "Secretary" means the chief administrator of an organization or a person who performs the functions of organizing and recording the proceedings of meetings, skilled in shorthand and keyboarding; responsible to an executive; as such a Secretary has been regarded to be the brain box of the organisation. Bolade (2002) opined that a secretary is of warm personality, endlessly helpful, understanding and tolerant, whose principal function is to alleviate, solve, prevent or soften problems/workloads for the executive. Some years ago, secretaries are made to type with manual typewriters to make enormous copies through cutting of stencils. But nowadays, it has been discovered that there has been an explosive increase in the use of the computer to perform office tasks by Secretaries. As such, secretaries cannot ignore the use of office automation and information system. There are many benefits being derived from the use of office automation and information technology by the secretaries, these include: production of good and error free work; record-keeping and retrieval; accessibility to information, word processing/desktop publishing/spreadsheet packages, database management system etc. Managers are looking for secretaries who are exposed to office technology and office automation including the internet to make knowledge accessible and the office work easier. Job effectiveness is the extent to which an activity fulfils its intended purpose or function. Ayelotan (2012) defined effectiveness as a measure of the match between stated goals and achievements, which is doing the right thing. Job effectiveness in context of this research work is the professional secretary's ability to use appropriately available office machinery/automation/tools to carry out the assigned duties or tasks in an efficient manner in line with the employer's expectations. It is a known fact that employees are the key elements of any organisation and professional secretaries are integral part. It is imperative that any organisation that wishes to achieve its aims and objective must be ICT compliant. The employees must be versatile and competent in handling ICT office facilities and equipment that would enhance their job effectiveness, most especially, the professional secretaries who are the core centre of the organisation's information processing activities. The secretary's functions could be categorized into four (4) namely: the secretary must communicate effectively within and outside the organization; that is, ability to write good memos/reports/letter; and being able to express oneself fluently in English Language to clients. Secondly, the secretary is responsible for information storage and retrieval – either through storage into the computer or manually stored

information. Also, the secretary serves as the brain and memory of the office. Lastly, the secretary supplies the boss with information both from the telephone calls and the visitors; as such the secretary is termed the “house-keeper of the office”; that is why some bosses are disorganized when their secretary is absent from work. All these functions and responsibilities could be done better and faster with modern office automation and ICT. Many scholars and experts opined that coping with today’s ICT challenges require better development of secretaries’ abilities to tackle complex mental tasks, doing well beyond the basic reproduction of accumulated knowledge – the writing of shorthand and typewriting skills. Efforts should be made by them to improve in developing the ICT competencies which involve cognitive and practical skills, creative abilities etc.

Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria (2013) defines ICT as encompassing all equipment and tools (inclusive of traditional technologies of radio, video and television to the newer technologies of computers, hardware, software, etc.) as well as the methods, practices, processes, procedures, concepts, and principles that come into play in the conduct of the information and communication activities. Also, Yusuf (2000) defined ICT as an electric application of computing, communication, telecommunication and satellite technology. Sholagbade (2012) opined that technology has certainly changed the ways many office tasks are being performed. Technology has simplified many routine secretarial tasks, thereby making secretaries to assume new responsibilities in the office setting. Office automation is the use of self-regulating machines to execute office tasks formerly done manually or through semi-mechanical means. Office automation has changed the secretarial duties from the manual method to purely mechanized process. According to Olsgaard (1989), office automation involves the application of integrated information handling tools and methods to improve the productivity of people in an office operation. As such, office automation is the integration of the computer application into the office tasks to make the work faster, easier and consistent. Spencer (1981) described office automation as the process of replacing human work with work done by machines or system designed to perform a specific combination of action automatically or repeatedly. To this end, a secretary who still wants to be relevant at work must be prepared for the challenging tasks of automated office.

Statement of the Problem

The incorporation of ICT facilities as an important tool in the administration and execution of job in the government and private sector cannot be overemphasized. Less importance has been placed on the contribution of ICT to job effectiveness of secretaries whose major responsibilities are to process information, disseminate and manage information. The ineffectiveness of some secretaries in handling ICT in today’s ever-changing techno-office seems conspicuous. Researchers have described a secretary as a person who is versatile in the effective use of modern office automation and ICTs. Despite the introduction of these emerging technologies to organisations, some secretaries are still being subjected to old method of handling office tasks. In actual fact, some organizations engage the services of fresh graduates who are knowledgeable in handling ICT packages such as internet facilities, networking etc. Such old method of operation leads to ineffectiveness and unproductivity among the office workers. Consequently, the study was designed to examine the influence of office automation and information technology on secretaries’ work-related effectiveness.

Research Questions

1. What is the effect of office automation on secretary’s personal quality?
2. What is the effect of office automation on interpersonal skills?
3. What is the effect of office automation on job related skills?
4. What is the effect of office automation on professional behavior?

Research Design

The research design being adopted for the study is a descriptive survey research where variables were not manipulated.

Population

The target population comprised of 300 secretarial staff in Ogun state-owned universities (198 from Olabisi Onabanjo University and 102 from Tai-Solarin University of Education) Ogun State, Nigeria

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample for this study comprised of the two hundred and forty (240) secretaries which was sampled from the entire population on probability based on simple random techniques. This constitutes 80% of the total population. 80% of the total population of each selected institution was selected. The procedure is presented in table 1:

Institution selected	Population	Sample (80%)
Tai Solarin University of Education	102	82
Olabisi Onabanjo University	198	158
TOTAL	300	240

Research Instrument

The instrument used in gathering the data in this research was a self-designed structured questionnaire. Section A of the questionnaire was tagged “Socio-Personal Characteristics of Respondents” and this dealt with the demographic-data of the secretaries, such as age, marital status, sex, highest educational qualification, etc. Section B, consists of 20 items, while the four Likert rating scale format to elicit information on office automation and secretaries’ effectiveness. Items 1-4 elicit responses on office automation while items 5-20 elicit responses on secretaries’ effectiveness. (Items 5-8 deal with the personal qualities of the secretaries; Items 9-12 covers interpersonal skills; items 13-16 deal with job related skills and items 17-20 elicited responses on the professional behavior of the secretaries). All negatively worded items were reversely scored before data analysis. In an attempt to validate the instrument, experts in evaluation ascertained the face and construct

validity. Ambiguous items were identified and some items were restructured. Test-retest method of reliability was used to ascertain the constituency of the instrument within two weeks intervals and yielded a correlation coefficient of .70.

II. Method Of Data Analysis

Data collected was grouped based on the various objective and research question postulate for testing in this study. The research questions raised were tested using regression analysis at 0.50 level of significance.

III. Results

Research Question 1: What are the effects of office automation on secretary personal quality?

Table 2:

Regression analysis of the effect of office automation on secretarial staff personal qualities

Parameter	Co-efficient	Standard Error	T-Cal	Probability
Constant	33.15	2.65	12.645	0.000
Office Automation	0.011	0.03	0.283	0.779

R²-0.002; Adj R²- 0.019; F Statistics- 0.080

In the table, office automation as the only independent variable accounts for 0.2% of the total variance in secretary personal quality (R² = 0.002, p<0.05). This is not significant. Therefore, office automation leads to a non-significant influence on secretaries' personal quality.

Research Question 2: What is the effect of office automation on interpersonal skills?

Table 3:

Regression analysis of the effect of office automation on secretarial staff interpersonal skills

Parameter	Co-efficient	Standard Error	T-Cal	Probability
Constant	10.270	2.849	3.605	0.000
Office Automation	0.045	0.043	1.055	0.297

R² = 0.023

Adjusted R² = 0.002

F-Statistic = 1.113

In table above, office automation as the only independent variable accounts for 2.3% of the total variance in secretary interpersonal skill (R² = 0.023, P>0.05). This is not significant. Therefore, office automation leads to a non-significant influence on secretary interpersonal skills.

Research Question 3: What is the effect of office automation on job related skills?

Table 4:

Regression analysis of the effect of office automation on secretarial staff Job related skills

Parameter	Co-efficient	Standard Error	T-Cal	Probability
Constant	52.24	4.441	12.213	0.000
Office Automation	0.038	0.067	0.563	0.576

R² = 0.007

Adjusted R² = 0.0014

F-Statistic = 0.317

In table above, office automation as the only independent variable accounts for 0.7% of the total variance in secretary job related skill (R² = 0.007, P>0.05). This is not significant. Therefore, office automation leads to a non-significant influence on secretaries' job related skills.

Research Question 4: What is the effect of office automation on professional behavior?

Table 5:

Regression analysis of the effect of office automation on secretarial staff professional behaviour

Parameter	Co-efficient	Standard Error	T-Cal	Probability
Constant	29.697	2.225	13.144	0.000
Office Automation	-0.020	0.034	-0.598	0.576

R² = 0.007

Adjusted R² = 0.013

F-Statistics = 0.357

In table 4, office automation as the only independent variable accounts for 0.7% of the total variance in secretary professional behavior (R² = 0.007, P>0.05). This is not significant. Therefore, office automation leads to a non-significant influence on secretaries' professional behavior.

IV. Discussion of the Findings

The findings showed that there was no influence of office automation on secretaries' interpersonal skills, personal quality and job related skills. This, according to Briggs (1993), in office environment automation improves the job performance of staff. They further stressed that in some cases, it affects their work because of lack of ICT skills and knowledge. According to them, the benefits of office automation to secretaries' effectiveness are far better than working with manual machines. The findings were in line with several scholars like Eze (2000) who indicated that modern office technology facilitates operations and improves the secretary's performance in the office. The result of the findings showed that the secretary were effective in terms of job related skill. The findings were in line with that of Water (1988) who

indicated that due to information and communication technology, most of the office staff in industrial establishment and educational institutions were effective in their job compared to the era of modern method. According to him, office automation has reduced the stress the secretary faces in the office thereby improving their job effectiveness.

The result of the findings also showed that secretaries were effective in terms of professional behavior. This findings corroborated the findings of Fredman (1984), who ascertained that office automation has not only improve the job effectiveness of individuals but also improve the professional behavior thereby making their job easier and effective to do. This indicated that as a result of office automation, individual behavior will change compared to when the office is not automated. It then means that office automation has brought about changes that are positive to the employee and employer of labour including the office secretaries. Also, the result of the findings showed that the secretary were effective in terms of personal quality. This was in line with the submission of Akinsanya (2004) that staffers are effective in their work; based on different component of information and communication technology they are exposed to. He further reiterated that the use of ICT improves the quality of work of workers and it makes work to be done faster.

Furthermore, the result of the findings showed that the secretary were effective in interpersonal skills. This was in line with Tella (2011) who carried out a study on information technology and interpersonal skills of employees in the industrial organization. He found out that the staffers were effective in their work based on their skills and the use of ICT improves the interpersonal skills of the secretaries.

Ultimately, it is important to stress that the reason for non-significant effect of office automation to secretaries' effectiveness might be as a result of the automation provided were not being used by the secretaries due to lack of technical skills. Some office automation might be available, while the secretarial staff may not be able to use them due to non-availability of knowledge on how to use it. Also, some offices are not properly equipped for to aid effectiveness. The knowledge and the technical usage of office automation is much more important than equipping the office. If an office is adequately furnished and the secretarial staff lacks the knowledge to use the facilities then effectiveness will not be achieved. Hence, the training of the secretarial staff on new office automation is paramount. As much as universities are procuring the office equipments, training on how to use the equipment is equally essential for better performance.

V. Conclusion

The effectiveness of a secretary is a modern organisation strongly depends on the availability of office technologies as well as their skills. Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that office automation greatly influence secretaries' interpersonal skills, personal quality, professional behaviour and job related skills.

VI. Recommendations

It was recommended among others that secretaries should attend seminars, conferences and workshops to develop them in the areas of information technologies and Microsoft office packages. It was also recommended that the University Management should organize in-service training for the secretaries to teach them newly automated machines. Institutions of higher learning should also train the would-be secretaries, practically-oriented courses using the modern office technologies. Lastly, employers of labour should engage secretaries that are vast with ICT competencies and skills in order to achieve administrative effectiveness in the organisation.

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