The Relevance of Secretarial Staff in Utilization of ICT in the 21ˢᵗ Century in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract:

This paper explained the university age gap for admission into the university educational system in Nigeria. It also explains that the secretary is an indispensable officer in any organization as well as the relevance of secretaries in the office. In addition, it deals on information and communication positive impact of secretarial staff, the challenges of ICT to the modern secretaries, other challenges of the secretaries, record keeping and management, problems association with record keeping, problem of curriculum, some of the few information and communication technology a sectary must be familiar with. This paper also explained the functions of the secretary as well as secretary preparation towards retirement – new ventures creative opportunities. Conclusions and recommendations such as management should make adequate provision for ICT and necessary infrastructure to secretaries to enable them efficiently and accurately perform their duties. Secretaries should endeavor to update their knowledge as at when due to enable them be abreast of the modern office equipment and Management should make secretaries more powerful with new roles and responsibilities were made.

Key words: University, Secretary, Curriculum, ICT, Indispensable

Introduction

University is an institution of higher education that (typically accept students from age of about 17 or 18 depending on the country, but in some exceptional cases able to take younger students) where subjects are studied and researched in depth and degrees are offered.

The secretary is an indispensable officer in any organization/office. They are by their training and in the course of carrying out their duties make use of office machines in the offices. He/she is an administrative assistant who has good mastering of office skills and ability to assume responsibilities without direct supervision, displays initiatives, exercise judgment, makes decision with the scope of his/her ability. According to competent sources; a secretary is someone trusted with a secret, a confident. A person who keeps records, take notes and handles general clerical work. The use of Office automation and ICT in general has made the secretary to be part of office technology and management practitioner.

If we all agree that the secretary is the chief organizer of meetings, and scheduling of appointments for or on behalf of the boss and these attributes has placed the secretary at the centre of playing very important roles in the efficient management of the office, why then are secretarial staff relegating themselves in the office? In this paper, the authors refer to the secretary as office technology managers. This is because the secretary is the user of ICT in the office to the maximum efficiency and effectiveness of performing his/he functions depends mainly on the availability of the desired proficiencies and skills acquired by the secretary in the office. The name "secretary" is a Latin word, which means "Secret". Originally, it means one entrusted with the secrets and confidences of a superior. Personal Secretary, being a skilled and specialized type of employee in an establishment is entrusted with some aspects of organizational functions in the unit including dealing with people, correspondence and other business matters, especially private or confidential matters. The secretary is an assistant to an executive or a manager, the secretary who is trained to type and perform many office duties. The secretary possesses personal and business attributes. The secretary guards his professional ethics of confidentiality, good appearance and absolute loyalty (Onifade, 2010).

According to Ohiwerei and Onimawo (2016) in the 21st century the term information and communication technology has encompassed many aspect of computing such as ICT professionals performs include data management, net work, data base and soft ware design as well as the management and administration of entire system. ICT has taken over all operational process in all educational organizations as well as businesses.

Various authors such as Ohiwerei, Azih and Okoli (2013), Joshi and Chug (2009) and Olakulehi (2007) in Ohiwerei (2015) have expressed their professional contributions on pragmatic utilization of ICT, usability of ICT and best pedagogy of ICT, best psychomotor of utilization of ICT in business education, yet these contributions have not been fully included into the utilization of ICT in teaching and learning of business education in Nigerian Universities.

ICT today is making business to be growing rapidly and creating a wide departure from the traditional business enterprises to the evolution of international and multinational organizations in Nigerian economy where offices have acquired and installed modern communication equipment to carry out day to day office duties. Whether you like it or not ICT is really fast growing in Nigeria today, thereby creating a lot of challenges to modern secretaries. Therefore, for a secretarial staff to be successful in his/her career today depends on his/her ability to acquire ICT based skills and expertise as well as skills require for each category of staff. The ICT environmental changes coupled with competition within and outside industries or the society

account for the urgent reason why secretarial staff should engage in training and development to meet up with the challenges.

The Relevance of Secretaries in the Office

A professional secretary performs tasks similar to an executive or administrative assistant. Secretarial function is just central in every organization and no office can easily function without a secretary. This brings about the importance of secretaries to the successful growth and development of the organization (Adam 2015). Training of secretarial staff can prove to be parameter for improving the ability of office workforce for achieving the organization's objectives.

According to Adebayo and Akinyele (2012). The secretary coordinates the daily routines of an office and organizes the office schedules and paper work which includes analysis of prevailing situation, judgment, technical knowledge and creativity.

The secretary, due to the nature of his work has remained to be a key player in the success of achieving organizational goals and objectives. Many organizations relied on the secretary's ability for the achievement of their organizational goals and objectives. (Nwaokwa and Okoli, 2012).

According to Mayer in Azih (2013), a secretary is an assistant to an executive who has the mastery of office skills and ability to assume responsibility without direct supervision. A qualified secretary should have a wide knowledge of business insight, versatile knowledge in accounting, personnel, office practice, and communication and knowledge of the operation of all departments within the organisation where he or she works. This is unlike an untrained secretary who possesses only knowledge of shorthand, typewriting and basic office practices. The employability prospect of the secretary depends largely on the work skills acquired for employment. Secretaries can only be relevant if he/she possess skills in word processing, database management, desktop publishing, micrographic, reprographic and office communication skills for effective operations of ICT- based equipment and facilities.

Information and Communication Positive Impact of Secretarial Staff

According to Chukwuma (2002) Communication is a process in which people share information and feelings. All communication depends on understanding people and having them understand us. It is important to note that in communication, the effective dissemination use or implementation of information received is more important them how the information was produced. There is no doubt that secretaries are found at the center of information and communication Technology as they operate the system associated with it.

Information and Communication application has impacted positively on the secretarial profession. Most Secretaries do not encounter problem in the use of ICT but the maintenance and procurement is a problem. This is because management in all levels do not make adequate provision for ICT and necessary infrastructure for secretaries. For a secretarial staff to have an impact in the office he/she must be able to carry out the following functions in an office:

Mastering the keyboard and to be able to identify the names and functions of the basic computer parts, understand the keyboard – home keys and guard keys, saving and retrieving of documents, editing of documents, copy, cut and paste, the use of underscore, bolding of words, centralization of words, printing of documents, how to proofread, and to type-set day-to-day-office assignment. To produce various kinds of letters-business, personal and official, to typeset

advanced manuscript, to produce mailable documents, to typeset various office jobs such as tabular works and how to acquire speed using the appropriate skills.

Design various office forms with the aid of a computer, such as official headed papers, memorandum, creation of logo, letter headed paper, editing and arrangement of curriculum vitae, statement in a tabular form, visitors form, retirement form, loan form and any other forms used in the office Equip himself or herself with the use of Ms Excel, spreadsheet analysis, formatting, functions, data analysis, graphing & charts, cells and text alignment.

Equip himself or herself with the use of power point, developing power point presentation, performing advanced text editing operations, adding graphical elements to your presentation, modifying object in your presentation, adding tables & charts to your presentation and presentation delivery. Creation of office files, filing of documents in ICT format, creating office file folder, creating office mail, sending of mail from one office to the other, responding to mail, retrieval of files from recycle bin and saving of documents to flash, Cd, etc.

Challenges of Ict to the Modern Secretaries

Information and communication technology recently introduced into our office environment coupled with competition within and outside the industry and the society has imported challenges to modern office secretaries. The secretaries, are not only faced with the administrative processes problems, but now with ICT equipment problem which has replaced the manual and electric typewriters, duplicating machines, telext machines etc. Because of these changes, the secretaries need to proceed to acquire more training and retraining to enable him/her fit into the new office environment. Unfortunately, some secretarial staff have phobia for ICT training, therefore would prefer to continue with the old fashion if he/she has the option or put in for voluntary retirement. A resultant effect, which put more pressure and work overload on the few secretaries that are left in the system as management has since placed embargo on recruitment of fresh secretarial staff. The few secretarial staff left are overlabored without compensation. Majority of secretarial staff we find in office today are well educated unlike those days, they have self confidence, intelligent, fluent in communication, transparently honest, polite, smart and tidy in carrying out their duties. Changes are the only thing that is permanent in life hence the secretary is faced with changes in his/her dressing, personal life as well as his/her attitude towards his/her profession.

According to Okwuanaso and Obayi (2003), information and communication technology has posed challenges to secretaries as they communicate in the present day office. In the past, secretaries functions were performed manually such that documents and records were maintained on papers, stored in files and drawers. The consequences of global development in the modern information and communication technology, calls for corresponding development of new skills in office communication by all secretaries and office managers.

Before now secretaries type with manual or electric typewriters to produce enormous copies through the use of cutting of stencils with the help of duplicating machines to produced large copies as required, but it has been discovered with the help of ICT there has been a greater increase in the use of the computer to perform office tasks by secretaries. Because of this some secretaries who ignored the call to adapt to the use of Information and communication technology will be forced to retire or be sent on redundancy.

Nwaokwa and Okoli (2012) stated that many secretaries lack the communication technology skills required in the various offices and this has greatly affected their performance.

The effect of ICT in the office is to increase the organizational productivity by redefining the office work improve the quality and accuracy of output.

Other challenges of the secretaries are:

1. Lack of provision of modern ICT for secretarial;
2. Lack of training and re-training for secretarial staff;
3. Constant and alternative power supply,
4. Lack of good background knowledge of the ICT equipment;
5. Lack of ICT connectivity to secretarial offices;
6. Lack of fund to purchase modem and airtime data;
7. Lack of good computers;
8. Resistance to change;
9. Learners motivation;
10. Previous Technological skills of learners.

Record Keeping and Management

According to Ohiwerei (2015) record keeping and management are integral part of the office activities because the major function of the office will be incomplete when data received are processed and disseminated without adequate safe keeping and easy retrieval. Record keeping and management have evolved from their manual process to electronic process because of information Technology (IT) innovation. Information Technology (IT) has also made possible a completely new approach to the management of records and information system. The electronic file whether stored on a floppy disk or within the hard disk is replacing many paper based systems of record keeping managers and the secretarial staff are increasingly accessing files and records on their desktop computer monitors by fetching them out from the main frame computers in a twinkling of an eye.
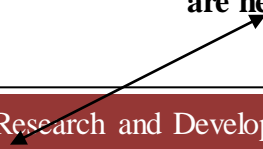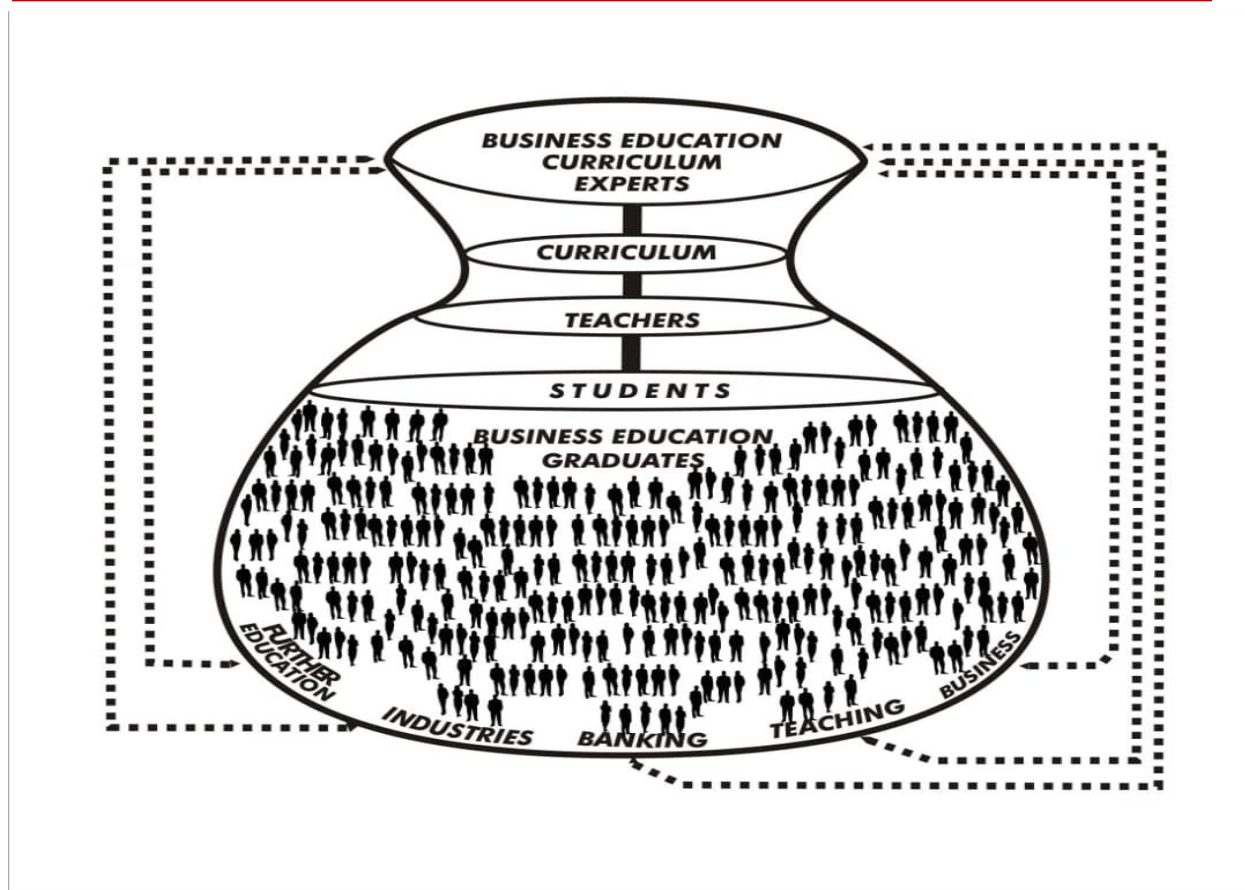
Problems Association with record keeping

1. Human difficulties
2. Poor filing system and procedure
3. Lack of policy
4. Lack of control
5. Poor use of equipment
6. Inefficient use of space
7. Lack of plans for records retention and disposals.

Problem of Curriculum

Table 1: Process of Curriculum Development

Those who are not experts are here

Source: Ohiwerei (2019)

Ohiwerei (2019) opined that there is a serious defection in the present business education curriculum which calls for urgent harmonization by all universities offering business education programme both in Nigeria and other countries globally. It is unfortunate that non-business educators' professionals seem to be involved in the curriculum design for business educators. A situation which looks like, "a man who does not eat a particular food is made to prepare food for someone to each". The resultant effect is that either the pepper or salt is too much or not enough.

A good curriculum is to reflect all aspect of the present world situation. Obanya (2020) opined that we should align school curriculum with life in the world out there, now propelled by advances in technology and stated further that curriculum goals have shifted from mere examination success to the acquisition of 21st century (transversal) skills, with equal emphasis on their hard, soft, and go-getting dimensions.

Functions of a Secretary

According to Nwosu and Ohiwerei (2010) the functions of the secretary vary according to the size of office and their organizational structure. In some offices, Secretary in addition to his usual secretarial jobs, functions as a receptionist or radio operator. While those in the banking industry find engaging themselves in preparation of returns, balancing of ledgers, reference job, writing of draft and bank cheque etc. They are sometimes referred to as the reservoir of

information. The following were the functions of the secretary before the advent of ICT which further added additional ICT functions to the secretary's functions:

1. Taking of dictation from his boss and minutes of meeting.
2. Typing of letters and other documents.
3. Dealing with correspondence – incoming and outgoing mail.
4. Keeping of impress account and balancing it weekly or monthly.
5. Handles letters marked private and confidential.
6. He ensures letters marked attention of Mr**. ……..** must be directed to the officer in charge to treat.
7. Keeping of his boss dairy and checking same on daily basis.
8. Arranging for conferences, meetings, interviews, public function and other official engagements.
9. Booking appointments for his boss.
10. Keeping of records.
11. Booking hotels and making traveling arrangement for his boss.
12. He shades his boss from unwanted visitors.
13. Keeping and retrieving information from files.
14. Keeping of stationery stock.
15. He attends to visitors who called either on enquiry or to visit his boss.
16. He provides newspapers and magazines to visitors while waiting to see the officer. He welcomes visitors and makes them comfortable.
17. He is a language specialist.
18. He draws his boss attention to newspaper publications.
19. He obtains information within a limited time.
20. He follows latest technology development in terms of office procedure, equipment and supplies by attending exhibition and seminars.

The introduction of ICT into office organization has metamorphosed the roles of the secretaries from the above stated to computers and ICT helping the secretaries to write, edit and send memos, letters and reports within and outside the organization as fast as possible. (Mumini and Hawa, (2014).

Aynsley (2015) stated that any office of today that is lacking in ICT, work in such offices would be boring and uninteresting. It is therefore a considered opinion that where ICT facilities are made available in the office, the secretary would found the environment to be friendly, sociable and interesting to work.

Some of the few Information and Communication Technology a secretary must be familiar with.

PROJECTORS

Projector Stand Board

Projector Pointer

MODEMS

Secretary Preparation towards Retirement - New Ventures Creative Opportunities

Entrepreneurs are those persons who have taken decision of taking risk by engaging themselves in business with intention to making profits or otherwise. Meredith (1996) stated that entrepreneurs are individuals who have management ability to see and evaluate business opportunities; to bring together the required resources making advantage of them; and to ensure his success. According to Akpotowho (2005) starting up a new business and making it grow involves both the science of creation through outstanding initiative and the art of management. Modern management; be it in general business, Agro-allied or food industry entails a lot of risk-taking at any aspect of the business life cycle. But chances of making any business endeavour successful are better off, if one understands the problems that he/she will encounter in the process of the business he/she works out as many of them as possible before the business takes effect.

According to Ohiwerei (2019) if you want to become an entrepreneur you may go into something you are really knowledgeable and passionate about it or may be something you think you have found a way to fill a gap in the marketplace. Whatever your have interests on will definitely guarantee it can be developed into a business. Note that having an interest in the business does not mean that it will be easy for you in the business because starting a business requires a lot patient, time, energy, effort, hard work and total commitment to the business. Many entrepreneurs have ended up failing while others survived. It is interesting and rewarding if an entrepreneur is successful but there are so many obstacles to face on the road to success.

The following are the processes of how to start your own business:
1. Generate your idea;
2. Write your business plan;
3. Assess your finances;
4. Determine your business structure;
5. Register your business with Corporate Affairs Commission;
6. Get help and training from experts;
7. Choose your business name;
8. Choose your business location;
9. Brand yourself and advertise
10. Grow your business
11. Understand your Financing Options;
12. Hiring of your employees;
13. Getting your business equipment;
14. Getting your materials;
15. Choose means of advertising your business.

Conclusion

Conclusively, the use of ICT by secretaries is now seen worldwide as both a necessity and an opportunity, therefore, effectiveness of a secretary in an office depends strongly on ability to utilize modern office ICT as well his/her skills. There is no denying the fact that ICT has dramatically changed the functions of secretarial staff over the past years. It brings in different

equipment into office thereby allows for more open and rapid communication between the secretarial staff and office equipment, among other things hence the secretarial staff must by all means makes him/her self available for this given opportunity any point in time. In order for the secretary to continuously be relevant in the office, he/she requires a regular training and re-training in the area of general office automation software, public relations, time management, communication skill as well as editing and proofreading of documents skills.

Way Forward

In consideration of the above, we hereby state that;

1. management should make adequate provision for ICT and necessary infrastructure to secretaries to enable them efficiently and accurately perform their duties.

2. secretaries should endavour to update their knowledge as at when due to enable them be abreast of the modern office equipment.

3. management should make secretaries more powerful with new roles and responsibilities.

4. secretarial association should lobby management to always have their ways because fighting does not always achieve positive results.

5. to liaison with management to upgrade those who have acquired additional qualifications as this will encourage others to further their education.

6. your association should sponsor at least one member every year for short courses.

7. members should focus themselves on the utilization of ICT.

8. members should be enthusiastic to acquire additional skills bearing in mind that changes and advances in ICT occur frequently so that they will not be left behind in the use of ICT when the opportunity is provided.

9. Management should collaborate with the Department of Business Education to give short training to any secretarial staff without ICT skills.

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