
ASSESSMENT OF HIGHER LEVEL COMPETENCIES REQUIRED OF GRADUATE SECRETARIES IN MODERN OFFICES IN ANIOCHA SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT OF DELTA STATE

By

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the higher level competencies required of graduate secretaries in modern offices in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta state as a result of advancement in technology. Office activities have been transformed due to technological advancement. This transformation called for improvement of skills as well. Therefore, higher level competencies are required to perform office duties. In view of this, two specific purposes and two corresponding research questions guided the study. Two hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Descriptive survey design was adopted and the study was carried out in public establishments in Aniocha South Local Government Area, Delta State that have Secretaries in their employment. The total population was 52 Graduate Secretaries in public offices in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State. No sampling was made because of the manageable size of the population. A validated structured questionnaire by one expert in the Mathematics and Statistics and another expert in the Department of Office Technology and Management all in Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku was used for data collection. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach Alpha method of statistics after subjecting the instruments to ten (10) Graduate Secretaries who were not part of the target population in Oshimili South Local Government Area of Delta State. It yielded a coefficient of 0.85 which makes the instrument reliable. The research questions were answered using mean statistic and standard deviation; while t-test statistic was used to test the two null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. It was found that office employers require higher level competences such as adaptive thinking and computing competences in modern office because of changes brought by advancement in technology. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that the lecturers and employers of labour should always be involved in planning Office Technology and Management Curriculum which is the programme training office practitioners to meet the needs of the ever changing modern offices.

Keywords: Competences, Graduate Secretaries; Traditional Office, Transitional Office, Modern Office, Virtual Office.

Introduction

Business activities must be coordinated if goals must be achieved. Any location, area or space where such co-ordination takes place is known as an office. Therefore, an office is a room corner of a building, kiosk, closet, where clerical functions such as recording, writing, reading, safe-keeping, storing, retrieving, typing, printing, photocopying, scanning, receiving, transmission, processing of information are performed (Oyedele and Fadare, 2018). In the traditional office duties are performed manually. Records are usually in manuscript, extra copies of documents are copied and re-copied thereby wasting a lot of money, energy and materials (Ohaegbulem, 2019).

Ojukwu (2019), states that the office scene has changed in the past years and will continue to change further in future. The key elements causing the changes are the advances in Information and Communication Technology, increased computerization, changes in organization structures, procedure and practices. There are three notable phases of the changes in the office scene. They are the traditional office of the 1950s, the transitional office of the 1970s, electronic office of the 1990's and the future (Oyinloye & Oluwalola 2017).

Ikelegbe, (2016), asserts that the traditional office is one that is functioning with the structure and basic equipment that was available a decade or more ago. The office of 1970s was in-between the traditional office and the electronic office. Computers were used for word processing tasks. However, the computer was generally the "stand-alone" in nature of work stations. The word processors more or less were used to perform the function of typewriting and generally were not linked or communicating with other computers. The use of computer to process words in the office makes it possible for the storage and retrieval of information. The computers were not communicating electronically with one other because they were not networked. Hard copies of document were generated and files were done manually just like in the traditional office. The distribution of mails was alone manually (James, 2019).

In electronic office of the 1990s and the future, otherwise referred to as modern office or state of the art office; information processing is fully computerized and networked. More of soft rather than hard copies of document are used. The computers are networked so that sending or receiving information and performing other duties may be carried out through the interaction of computers and other information technology gadgets (Onwukwe and Obeka, 2016).

Ohaegbulem (2019) maintains that in state of the art office, information storage takes place as input into the computer similar to that of the Word Processing office; but different because information is stored electronically in software and not as hard copies in files inside drawers, shelves, cupboard, racks and others. Retrieval is also electronically done by mere command given to the system to find information and display same on the screen or print out as hard copy. Information is sent and received in state of the art office with greater speed with less or copy. Information is sent and received in state of art office with greater speed with less or no paper involved. The electronic office can be paperless office and may be a virtual office. A virtual office is an office that mostly exists in cyber space. It is not located in space like the traditional office. Office duties are transacted anywhere electronically via teleconferencing and video conferencing technology. As a result of advancement and application of technology in the office management process and system, the following could be seen: changes in the information flow process, changes in decision levels, organizational restructuring, and these mean that higher level of skills are expected of office workers (Osuala and Okeke, 2016). This is because technologies keep pushing for new application of work skills, techniques and approaches.

Competence indicates sufficiency of knowledge, attitude and skills that enable someone to act in a wide variety of situations. Competence is a person's ability, power, authority, skill requirements. Competences focus on personal image, attitudes, habits, behaviour, techniques of regularity, and human relations formation (Ohaegbulem, 2019).

Advancement in technology which has brought about modern equipment has also affected the competencies required to work in the offices. There were traditional skills required of office workers such as using an intercom, a diary, an assortment of writing pads and a Secretary seated in an adjacent office or office to receive callers to the office, but these skills are obsolete and have been replaced or upgraded to higher skills. Higher level competences are now needed in the modern office as a result of advancement in technology. These skills are higher in the sense that they are not only necessary for particular office activities but enable an office worker to be able to co-ordinate the numerous office functions. Such competencies are necessary because machine and systems have taken over the repetitive and manual aspects of the office duties.

Therefore the office worker is required to possess higher competencies that will enable him do a co-ordination job instead of routine jobs. These new responsibilities have emanated because modern machines have brought about a restructuring in modern office. Executives can now sit on the computer and type their letters and they do not give dictation to the Secretaries to transcribe. Moreover, bosses now delegate administrative and decision making duties to the Secretaries since they are not always in the office. Also information management and administration can now be done in virtual offices. These competencies were identified by Alvenfors (2020) as adaptive thinking competencies, collaborative competencies, problem solving competencies, decision making, computing competencies, and some others.

Adaptive thinking is the ability of a worker to intelligently adapt his behaviour by thinking and coming up with solutions and responses beyond what is rote and rule based. Computing skills is the ability to sit-down at a computer and have enough knowledge of how software works to figure out what to do (Okon, 2018).

It is therefore the position of this study that if some skills have become absolute as a result of advancement in technology, some other ones have to play to enable the paradigm shift to be conclusive. The researcher therefore seeks to assess these skills that are expected of modern office worker in modern office environment.

Statement of the Problem

A modern office is an office that functions with the most advanced equipment and systems available. Due to such increasing levels of automation, computerization, organizational restructuring; higher calibre of staff with increased skills are required to cope with complex office duties performed in modern offices. The development in Office Technology will continue to bring about further changes in the nature of work done in the office with increasing managerial and human resource responsibility. Office workers need higher competencies that will enhance them perform the duties required of them.

However, when one considers the poor jobs that are produced in our office, graduates roaming about due to lack of required skills even when there are offices in need of Office Managers and Secretaries, reduction in productivity in the office and others, one cannot but conclude that there is a gap. It therefore appears that office workers lack the competencies required of them due to technological advancement. In other words, workforce lacks the critical skills needed to develop the economy. Indeed a large number of employers cite lack

of skills as a major obstacle to hiring office personnel. In view of these problems, this study was carried out to assess the higher level competencies required in modern offices as a result of advancement in technology.

Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of this study was to assess the higher level competencies required in modern offices in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. assess the adaptive thinking competencies required of Graduate Secretaries in modern offices in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State.
2. assess the computing competencies required of Graduate Secretaries in modern offices in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What are the adaptive thinking competencies required of Graduate Secretaries in modern offices in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State?
2. What are the computing competencies required of Graduate Secretaries in modern offices in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were raised for the study and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

Ho₁: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female employers of labour on the adaptive thinking competencies required of Graduate Secretaries in modern offices in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female employers of labour respondents on the computing competencies required of Graduate Secretaries in modern offices in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State.

Method

A descriptive research design was used in the study. The population of the study was 52 Graduate Secretaries working in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State. The sampling was not applied because the population was sizeable to handle. The instrument for data collection was a validated well structured questionnaire on a 4-point Likert Rating scales of Highly Required (HR), Required (R), Lowly Required (LR) and Not Required (NR). To establish the reliability of the instrument to determine its internal consistency, it was administered to ten (10) Graduate Secretaries working in Oshimili South Local Government Area of Delta State who were not part of the target population using Cronbach Alpha reliability method. The analysis yielded coefficient score of 0.85 which showed that the instrument was reliable. The data retrieved from the respondents were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to analyze the data and answer the research question while t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Any grand mean value greater than or equal to 2.50 was considered a “High Extent” (HR) while less than 2.50 was considered a “Not Required” (NR). It was presumed that any hypothesis with a P-value greater than 0.05 level of significance was accepted while any hypothesis with a P-value equal to or less than 0.05 level of significance was rejected.

Results:

Table 1: Mean Responses of Respondents on the Adaptive Thinking Competencies required of Graduate Secretaries in Modern Offices in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State.

S/N	ITEMS	X	STD	DECISION
1.	Positive or rational thinking	3.47	0.62	SA
2.	Ability to conceptualize	3.42	0.72	HR
3.	Ability to analyze issues	3.45	0.74	HR
4.	Ability to evaluate information to reach an answer or conclusion	3.61	0.50	HR
5.	Ability to give sound evidence	3.70	0.46	HR
6.	Consistency of ideas or thoughts	3.74	0.44	HR
7.	Ability to compare and contrast	3.62	0.58	HR
8.	Ability to control emotions	3.49	0.52	HR
9.	Possession of positive imagination	3.89	0.22	HR
10.	Ability to evaluate evidence	3.68	0.52	HR
Grand Mean/STD		3.61	0.54	HR

Table 1 above showed that all the ten (10) variables itemized as adaptive thinking competencies are highly required (HR) in modern offices in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State.

Research Question IV: What are the computing competencies required of Graduate Secretaries in Modern Offices in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State.

Summary of the data collected to answer the result question is presented below.

Table 2: Mean Responses of Respondents on Computing Competencies required of Graduate Secretaries in Modern Offices in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State.

S/N	ITEMS	X	STD	DECISION
11	Ability to use basic skills in arithmetic	4.00	0.64	HR
12	Ability to use computer to do addition	3.37	0.58	HR
13.	Ability to use computer to do multiplication	3.64	0.60	HR
14.	Ability to use computer to do division	3.57	0.64	HR
15.	Ability to use computer to do subtraction	3.58	0.57	HR
16.	Ability to measure and cut different paper sizes	3.57	0.64	HR
17.	Ability to display a text vertically equal	3.52	0.46	HR
18.	Ability to display a text horizontally equal	3.27	0.58	HR
Grand Mean/STD		3.50	0.63	HR

Table 2 above showed that all the eight (8) items 11-18 are computing competences required of Graduate Secretaries in Modern Offices in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State.

4.2 Testing of Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female employers of labour on the adaptive thinking competencies required of Graduate Secretaries in modern offices in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State.

Table 3: Analysis of t-test statistics of mean rating of male and female Graduate Secretaries on the adaptive thinking competencies required of Graduate Secretaries in modern offices in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	@	t-cal	t-ctit.	Decision
Adaptive Skills								
Required in Modern Office								
Male Graduate Secretaries	22	3.60	0.53	50	0.05	0.0156	1.68	N/S
Female Graduate Secretaries	30	3.62	0.54					

The table 3 above showed that all the calculated z-values are less than the table value, df 50 at 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was accepted showing that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female Graduate Secretaries on the adaptive thinking competencies required of Graduate Secretaries in modern offices in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State.

Table 4: Analysis of t-test statistics of mean rating of male and female Graduate Secretaries on the adaptive computing competencies required of Graduate Secretaries in modern offices in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	@	t-cal	t-ctit.	Decision
Computing Skills								
Required in Modern Office								
Male Graduate Secretaries	22	3.56	0.50	50	0.05	0.3663	1.68	N/S
Female Graduate Secretaries	30	3.62	0.44					

The table 4 above showed that all the calculated z-values are less than the table value, df 50 at 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was accepted showing that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female Graduate Secretaries on the computing competencies required of Graduate Secretaries in modern offices in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State.

Discussion

The result of the data analyzed in table 1 indicated that the adaptive thinking skills required are required for optimum performance in modern office. The adaptive thinking skills are: positive or rational thinking, ability to conceptualize and analyze issues, ability to evaluate information to reach an answer or conclusion, ability to give sound evidence; consistency of ideas or thoughts, ability to control emotions, compare and contrast, possession of positive imagination and ability to evaluate evidence. This is an agreement with Ikpe (2016), who maintained that adaptive thinking skills are indispensable in the modern offices as a result of advancement in technology.

The results of the data analyzed in table 4 indicated that the following computing skills are required in modern offices as a result of advancement in technology. They are: ability to use basic skills in arithmetic, use computer to do addition, multiplication, division and subtraction, also, abilities to measure and cut different paper sizes, display a text vertically and horizontally equal are required in modern offices. This is in line with the views of Ovbiagele and Mgbonyebi (2018), who stated that computer skills are essential requirements for the Office Manager to function effectively and efficiently in modern offices.

Skill acquisition in education institutions is a neglected process. The tools used for the teaching and learning of the skills are crude and obsolete, worn-out manual typewriters and non-functional computers are used. Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that skill acquisition is indispensable for better job performance in modern offices. The paradigm shift brought about advancement in technology has therefore affected the level of competencies required by office practitioners because of the office restructuring changes in procedure and practices it came along with.

Recommendations

Based on the finding and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Supervisory body of Polytechnic education (NBTE) should constantly review the OTM curriculum to accommodate courses that will allow its graduates to acquire adaptive thinking skills.

2. Management of institutions and the Ministry of Higher Education should provide ICT tools to make the OTM students more proficient in the manipulation of the computer to make them fit into the modern offices.

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