



Electronic Records Keeping Skills Needed by Secretaries in Automated Offices in Polytechnics in North-East, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at determining the electronic records keeping skills needed by secretaries in automated offices in polytechnics in North-east, Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study. The population of the study comprised 195 secretaries drawn from six polytechnics in North-east, Nigeria. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire, validated by three experts in Faculty of Technology Education, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi, Nigeria. The instrument was pilot tested using Cronbach Alpha to establish its reliability which was found to be 0.82. The data collected was analysed using mean and standard deviation. The findings revealed that electronic records keeping skills were moderately needed by secretaries for effectiveness of records and information retrieval in automated offices in polytechnics. Findings further revealed that electronic filing skills were needed by secretaries for efficient record filing system that guaranteed easy accessibility and confidentiality of official documents in polytechnics. Based on the findings, it was recommended that the management of polytechnics in North-east, Nigeria, as a matter of priority, grant office secretaries the opportunity to acquire more online and electronic record keeping skills through workshops and conferences attendance at national and international levels so they can meet expectations in automated offices; ICT facilities be installed in all the departments and units in polytechnics to enhance efficient record keeping skills by secretaries; and there should be inclusion of more practical aspect of skills to work in automated offices in the curricula of the business education programme to enable secretarial students acquire requisite office technology skills before graduation so that they can easily gain employment in organisations.

Keywords: *Electronic records keeping, skills needed, secretaries in automated offices.*

I. Introduction

Offices in today's business world including those in educational institutions, require electronic record keeping for quick access to the required information and to control the retrieval of records from storage files. Nseabasi and Ngozi (2019) posited that before the emergence of information technology, secretaries manually performed their work in such a way that documents and records were maintained on papers, stored in files and drawers. However, with the introduction of sophisticated office technology equipment like computers and its related software into the business world, the old system of records management by secretaries in an office is being phased out. For this purpose, secretaries now find it difficult to cope with the latest development in micro age because there are many problems associated with the use of computer, (Ibeneme and Emele, 2021).

The traditional methods and practices of office information generation, acquisition, processing, storage, and dissemination in workplace all over the world have witnessed tremendous changes owing to the advancements in office technology. Idele (2017) pointed out that computer has revolutionized the way teaching and learning are carried out in tertiary institutions as well as secretary's work in automated offices. According to Salah (2014), there is a workforce skills gap in many sectors as a result of the technological advancements in the work place. These advancements in technology are changing the way secretaries perform their jobs. Therefore, there is need for secretaries to acquire relevant office technology skills and integrate these skills in their daily record keeping functions to cope with the demand in automated offices, (Olayanju and Asogwa, 2017).

Skill refers to a learned response, often as a result of specific training, which affords someone the ability to perform a particular task and achieve a particular goal, (Daniel, 2011). In other words, skill refers to expertise that has been developed through training and experience overtime as well as the high level performance found as a result of professional practice, (Olatunde, 2022).

According to the work of Olayanju and Asogwa (2017) needs refers to circumstances that require something to be done and when something that should be done is omitted, there is a gap; stating that there is a gap to be filled in modern offices as a result of the introduction of modern office technology (which give rise to automation) in order to meet a target standard in an institution; and for a gap to be filled constitutes a need.

Dosunmu and Bukki (2017) defined office automation as the integration of computer application into the office tasks to make the work faster, easier and consistent. Onoja (2020) viewed automation as the technique of making a processor system automatic in handling office work. Margaret et al. (2018)

referred office automation as information technology that has the capacity and capability to change the office functions in a better way, whereby information can be transferred, stored, retrieved and processed for onward transmission with the use of technology. Office automation is an aid to the secretary who makes constant use of the machines, hence the machines can carry out routine work or clerical jobs quickly, accurately and automatically more than the ordinary human beings can do. Some of the machines used in carrying out record keeping activities in automated offices have large storage facilities and can store information in their memory unit. Example is the micro-computer with applications like Microsoft Access and Microsoft Excel.

Okolocha and Baba (2017) said that office automation lay emphasis on paperless office as a way of facilitating the process of correspondence handling and operation. This agrees with the work of Rashmi (2013) that in our contemporary business world, office automation does not only handle mechanization of tasks but also the conversion of office information to electronic form, which give rise to paperless office. He defined office automation as the varied computer machinery and software used in the office to digitally create, collect, store, manipulate and relay information needed for accomplishing basic tasks in any work environment. According to Ibeneme and Emele (2021) office automation involves the ability of secretaries to skillfully use office gadgets such as computers, machines and its related technologies in carrying out office works.

Olayanju and Asogwa (2017) opined that automation involves electronic filing techniques (filing documents in computer), and electronic document management system (typing and printing documents using a computer set) for the purpose of promoting administrative performance in tertiary institutions. The authors listed the advantages of automation to include: uses of software and hardware solutions to ease organisations workload; it allows a few employees to perform the tasks of many thereby cutting cost; when information is automated it reduces storage space, speeds retrieval and allows several employees to access the same data at the same time. In view of the modern office technologies dominating the present day offices, and the advantages it offers, Okolocha and Baba (2017) were of the view that secretaries in polytechnics and other organisations are required to possess electronic records management skills in order to cope with the increasing use of electronic information technologies to create and maintain records tailored to polytechnics.

Statement of the Problem

Modern office operations are dominated by electronic devices, which actually brought technological challenges to secretaries. Nilam and Muhammad (2022) observed that there are challenges associated with electronic records and information retrieval in modern workplace. And to eliminate these challenges necessitates evaluation of the secretaries' skills on electronic records keeping as well as electronic filing system in automated offices. Adenekan and Jimoh (2021) stated that despite the advantages and opportunities offered by digital technologies for effectiveness and higher performance in workplace, the roles and functions of secretaries in automated offices are yet to fulfil expectations of higher efficiency and quality work output.

Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of the study is to assess the electronic record keeping skill needs of secretaries in automated offices in polytechnics in North-east Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to assess:

1. Electronic record keeping skills needed by secretaries in automated offices in polytechnics in North-east, Nigeria;
2. Electronic filing skills needed by secretaries in automated offices in polytechnics in North-east, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated for the study:

1. What are the electronic record keeping skills needed by secretaries in automated offices in polytechnics in North-east, Nigeria?
2. What are the electronic filing skills needed by secretaries in automated offices in polytechnics in North-East, Nigeria?

II. Literature Review

In order to provide a good basis for understanding of this research work, literatures relevant to this study have been reviewed as follows:

Office Secretary

Okolocha and Baba (2017) defined a secretary as a person entrusted with secrets and employed in an office to prepare information and disseminate information intelligently in order to meet organizational objectives. They also pointed out that secretary is an officer who is in charge of records, correspondence, minutes of meetings, and related affairs of an organization.

Ezeonwurie (2017) expressed that a secretary is an employee in an organization who performs the routine jobs of typing various documents such as letters, memos, reports and manuscripts, taking notes in shorthand and transcribing same with the typewriters. He further stated that currently, many organizations are steadily moving into the era of paperless office which is characterized by the use of computers and their networks especially the internet. According to Wikipedia (2018), secretary is defined as the key person for all administrative tasks, and often referred to as the "gate keeper, office coordinator, executive assistant, office manager and administrative professional". It listed the duties of a secretary to include maintaining physical and electronic files, photocopying, emailing clients, ordering stationery, answering telephones, typing at high speeds using word processor, organize diaries, itineraries and meetings and carry out administrative duties as may be directed by the boss.

Adenekan and Jimoh (2021) posited that secretaries are among employees in public tertiary institutions who perform important roles in ensuring that secretarial and administrative processes of records, information and office management are capable of achieving institutional objectives. They believed

that a secretary is one who exhibits a good behavioural disposition at the various organs of public tertiary institutions and who carries out its services dutifully, resulting in fulfilment of the core responsibilities of teaching, learning and research in the institutions and by extension, advancing Nigeria's economy. Ezeh et al. (2021) opined that secretaries who work in today's automated office environment are expected to acquire digital skills in order to be proficient in their duties. Asogwa and Agusiobo (2022) corroborate the work of Ezeh et al. (2021) that the secretarial functions and its effectiveness depend much on the availability of office technology and equipment, as well as the skills and competencies of the secretary.

Based on the available literature reviewed, the following skills have been identified as skills needed by secretaries to manage record keeping in automated offices, which would bring about effective service delivery.

Electronic Record Keeping Skills

Efficient record keeping in automated offices is facilitated by Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Access applications. Secretaries in automated offices require skills on database management for effective administrative processes. Data base management is the collection of interrelated facts (examples, student ID, level, course, state of origin) to store data, update, manipulate, retrieve, report it in variety of views and print in many forms, (Azih, 2013). Ajike (2015) defined database as a collection of programs that allow users (secretaries) to specify the structure of database, to create, query and modify the structure in the database and to control access to it for the purpose of management to take decision.

According to Olatunde (2022) the sensitive position of the secretaries in any organization demands that secretaries should possess the electronic records management skills which is remarkable in workplace. He referred electronic records management to procedures where records management is done using electronic devices. This agrees with Okolocha and Baba (2017) who expressed that secretaries in polytechnics are required to possess electronic records management skills in order to cope with the increasing use of electronic information technologies to create and maintain records tailored to polytechnics. By this, secretaries should know how to operate Microsoft Excel (spreadsheet) and Microsoft Access applications to be able to input students and staff records in a database which will be referred to when the need arises.

Okpokwasili and Nonyelum (2018) opined that today's secretaries are required to use sophisticated office machines/equipment in setting up an information system architecture that would enable them to carry out their office duties efficiently in order to enhance their productivity. They strongly believe that secretaries who are not compliant in acquiring these needed information application skills will find it difficult to perform effectively in their assigned office duties. This is because traditional pattern of performing secretarial functions is fast fading away, and the introduction of sophisticated office equipment and machines has placed a demand on secretaries to acquire certain information systems skills so as to enhance their job performance and to enable them retain their job.

Electronic Filing Skills

Years ago, anyone could print a document and rush to the cabinet to file it but that time has passed. In this 21st century, e-filing is in practice due to its advantages of fastness, reliable and it ensures safe record keeping, hence office secretaries need to acquire e-filing skills in automated offices.

Olatunde (2022) expressed that e-filing referred to procedures where records management is done using electronic devices. It is the means by which office documents are electronically filed using appropriate name, and which can be retrieved easily from the computer when the need arises. E-filing have many advantages over the manual filing system in that it processes large volume of data, use of mass storage devices in computer itself, more speed and greater accuracy, cost of processing is less because computer performs repetitive task, little space is sufficient, efficiency is maintained throughout and there is no fatigue or tiredness when adopting e-filing system in an organisation. Unlike the e-filing, manual filing (traditional filing) is characterized with repetitive tasks, reduces efficiency, uses paper to store data, speed and accuracy is less, process limited volume of data, and secretaries feel bore and tiredness.

III. Methodology

The survey research design was used in the study. The population of the study comprised 195 secretaries drawn from six polytechnics in North-east Nigeria. A sample size of 127 secretaries was selected to participate in the study, using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) Table for Determining Sample Size from a given Population. A structured questionnaire containing 20 items in two clusters was used to collect data for the study. The questionnaire adopted a 4-point rating scale of Highly Needed (HN) 4 points, Needed (N) 3 points, Moderately Needed (MN) 2 points, and Lowly Needed (LN) 1 point. The research instrument was faced validated by three experts from Faculty of Technology Education, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi State, Nigeria, and it was pilot tested using Cronbach Alpha to establish its reliability which was found to be 0.82. One hundred and twenty seven (127) copies of questionnaire were distributed to the respondents by the researcher with the assistance of five Research Assistants who were hired and trained in order to enhance the administration and the return rate of the questionnaire from the respondents. The researcher employed mean and standard deviation to analyse the data collected. The decision rule was based on real limits of numbers on a 4-point rating scale as shown below:

Response option	Values	Real Limit
Highly Needed	4	3.50-4.00
Needed	3	2.50-3.49
Moderately Needed	2	1.50-2.49
Lowly Needed	1	1.00-1.49

IV. Results

Research Question 1: What are the electronic record keeping skills needed by secretaries in automated offices in polytechnics in North-east Nigeria?

Table 1: Respondents' mean ratings on electronic record keeping skills needed by secretaries in automated offices in polytechnics in North-east Nigeria.

S/N	Skill Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Skill to create employee records in a spreadsheet and access applications	1.78	0.83	Moderately Needed
2	Skill to sort records in ascending and descending order using MS Word	1.85	1.07	Moderately Needed
3	Skill to burn data and information into a CD plate	2.80	1.01	Needed
4	Skill to use internet to send document records	2.55	1.13	Needed
5	Skill to send feedback to office colleagues via e-mail.	1.81	0.98	Moderately Needed
6	Skill to create a record and move from record to record using MS Access and MS Excel applications.	2.24	1.26	Moderately Needed
7	Skill to create staff members database structure	1.47	0.80	Lowly Needed
8	Skill to assemble files in proper digital format for record-keeping.	2.31	0.95	Moderately Needed
9	Skill to find, sort and print records	3.10	1.06	Needed
10	Skill to categorise records for easy reference.	1.78	0.83	Moderately Needed
	Cluster mean	2.27		Moderately Needed

The information presented in Table 1 revealed that out of the 10 listed skills, the respondents rated items 3, 4 and 9 as needed with mean ratings between 2.55 to 3.10 and standard deviations of 1.01 to 1.13. Six items - 1, 2, 5, 6, 8 and 10 were rated moderately needed with mean ratings ranged between 1.78 and 2.31 and standard deviations of 0.83 to 1.26. Only skill item 27 was rated lowly needed with mean rating scale of 1.47 and standard deviation of 0.80. The cluster mean of 2.27 is an indication that electronic record keeping skills are moderately needed by secretaries for effectiveness of records and information retrieval in automated offices in polytechnics. The standard deviations scores of 0.80 to 1.26 showed that the respondents' opinions are closely related.

Research Question 2: What are the electronic filing skills needed by secretaries in automated offices in polytechnics in North-east Nigeria?

Table 2: Respondents' mean ratings on electronic filing skills needed by secretaries in automated offices in polytechnics in North-east Nigeria.

S/N	Skill Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remarks
11	Skill to file office documents electronically	3.56	0.63	Highly Needed
12	Skill to burn office documents into a CD plate	2.40	1.07	Moderately Needed
13	Skill to rename files/folders	3.05	1.16	Needed
14	Skill to insert pictures from other files.	3.05	1.10	Needed
15	Skill to reduce images of text into slide and file	1.40	0.63	Lowly Needed
16	Skill to retrieve files for editing and filing	3.52	0.65	Highly Needed
17	Skill to retrieve files from the internet	2.00	1.15	Moderately Needed
18	Skill to upload documents into office web site for staff members' accessibility.	1.31	0.63	Lowly Needed
19	Skill to save downloaded documents from the internet for office future use.	3.52	0.71	Highly Needed
20	Skill to file documents electronically according to subject classification.	3.50	0.81	Highly Needed
	Cluster mean	2.89		Needed

The analysis of data presented in Table 2 revealed that the respondents rated items 11, 16, 19 and 20 as highly needed with mean ratings ranged between 3.50 to 3.56 and standard deviations of 0.63 to 0.81. Furthermore, items 13 and 14 were rated needed and their corresponding standard deviations is 1.10 and 1.16. Two skill items (12 and 17) were rated moderately needed with mean ratings of 2.40 and 2.00 and standard deviations of 1.07 and 1.15. The respondents considered items 15 and 18 as lowly needed with mean ratings of 1.40 and 1.31, and same standard deviation of 0.63. The cluster mean of 2.89 indicates that the electronic filing skills are needed by secretaries for efficient filing system. The standard deviations scores of 0.63 to 1.16 indicate that the opinions of the respondents were close or homogeneous on their responses on electronic filing skills needed by secretaries in automated offices in polytechnics.

V. Discussion of Findings

The findings in relation to research question one (1) revealed that electronic record keeping skills are moderately needed by secretaries in polytechnics in North-east Nigeria. This implies that the secretaries' skills were inadequate in some electronic record keeping skill items, which include: (i) skill to create employee records using MS Excel and MS Access applications; (ii) skill to sort records in ascending and descending order using Microsoft Word, Excel and Access applications; (iii) skill to send feedback to office colleagues via e-mail; (iv) skill to create a record and move from record to record using MS Access and MS Excel applications; (v) skill to assemble files in proper digital format for record keeping; and (vi) skill to categorise records for easy reference. In view of these challenges, secretaries must acquire the needed information technology skills so that official records like students' academic transcripts, student results, and staff records can be filed electronically according to standard in polytechnics. The findings agreed with Okolocha and Baba (2017) who opined that secretaries are required to possess electronic records management skills in order to cope with the increasing use of electronic information technologies, to create and maintain records tailored to polytechnics using Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Access applications to input students and staff records in a database which will be referred to when the need arises. The findings also agreed with Nilam and Muhammad (2022) who expressed that there is a need for evaluation of the electronic record keeping skills of secretaries for effectiveness of information retrieval to facilitate efficiency and productivity in an organisation.

In Table 2, findings indicated that the identified electronic filing skills which include: skill to file office documents electronically, skill to burn document into a CD plate, skill to rename files/folders, skill to upload documents into office web site for staff members' accessibility, etc. were needed by secretaries for effective filing system in automated offices in polytechnics in North-east. This findings is in line with the view of Michele (2016) and Olatunde (2022) who posited that office secretaries need e-filing skills in automated offices. They highlighted that e-filing have many advantages over the manual filing system in that little space is sufficient, it is reliable and it ensures safe record keeping, efficiency is maintained and there is no fatigue or tiredness when adopting e-filing system in an organisation. In the same vein, Olayanju and Asogwa (2017) stated that electronic filing is advantageous to organisations in that few employees can perform the tasks of many, electronic filing reduces storage space, speedy retrieval of files and it allows several employees to access the same data at the same time in automated offices. Therefore, office secretaries should keep updating their skills on e-filing to meet expectations in automated offices in polytechnics.

VI. Conclusion

The study concludes that secretaries in automated offices in polytechnics in North-east Nigeria, required electronic record keeping skills for quick access to the required information and to control the retrieval of records from storage files for prompt decision taking by management. It was revealed that there are challenges associated with electronic records keeping and information retrieval in modern workplace. Therefore, secretaries in polytechnics should possess adequate electronic information technology skills in order to cope with the increasing use of electronic information technologies to create and maintain records and filing tailored to polytechnics.

VII. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion, it is recommended that:

1. Management of polytechnics in North-east, Nigeria should grant office secretaries the opportunity to acquire more internet and electronic record keeping skills through workshops and conferences attendance at national and international levels.
2. Management of polytechnics in North-east, Nigeria should ensure installation of ICT facilities in all the departments and units to enhance electronic record keeping management as well as electronic filing system by secretaries in polytechnics.
3. There should be inclusion of more practical aspect of skills to work in automated offices in the curricula of the business education programme to enable secretarial students stay relevant and easily employed after graduation.

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