



COMPETENCIES REQUIRED OF SECRETARIES IN SMALL SCALE BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS IN ENUGU STATE FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The study focused on competencies required of secretaries in small scale business organizations in Enugu state for national development. Survey research design was adopted. Two research questions and two null hypotheses tested at .05 level of significance guided the study. The population for the study was 198 secretaries of functional small scale business organizations out of 305 registered small scale business organizations in Enugu State (137 females and 61 males). The number was manageable hence, there was no sampling. Structured questionnaire containing a total of 24 items was the instrument for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Crombach Alpha reliability coefficient. A correlation of 71 was obtained. The entire 198 copies of the instrument distributed were retrieved giving 100% return rate. It was found out that all the communication and computer/ word processing competencies enumerated were highly required of secretaries in private small scale business organizations in Enugu State for national development. Subsequently, there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the female and male respondents on the communication and computer/word processing competencies required of secretaries in private small scale business organizations in Enugu State for national development. Recommendations made include: workshops and seminars should be organized by the management of private small scale business organizations in Enugu state for retraining their secretaries for possession of the required competencies; the government of Enugu state should make sure that secretaries of small scale business organizations are registered with Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) Development Agency of Nigeria.

Introduction

National development implies the development of a nation as a whole. Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011) defined national development as the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country or nation. The Nigerian government has in last few decades mapped out plans for the country's national development. However most of the national development plans did not achieve the set objectives. Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011) noted that most of the national development plans failed as a result of implementation problem and lack of committed leadership. Since the failure of the former national development plans and crumbling of oil price, Nigeria has been plagued with multifaceted problems varying from low capacity utilization, massive graduate unemployment, poverty, insecurity, collapse of infrastructural facilities and poor macroeconomic policy management. As a result of these the country lost opportunities for growth and sustainable



development. The Nigeria government initiated several programs and policies to bring about national development. One of these is the promotion of small scale businesses.

Small scale business organization can be seen as business that is actively managed by its owners, highly personalized, largely local in its area of operations, of relatively small size and little capital. Ebue (2011) defined a small scale business as one which is owned, managed by one or two persons influenced by the family in decision making, has undifferentiated organizational structure, market share is relatively small and employs less than 50 workers.

Small scale business organizations are seen as bedrock for industrial development and national development. Oduntan (2014) enumerated the roles of small scale business towards national development to include: capacity building, employment generation, promoting growth, industrial linkages, backward and forward linkages, technological/industrial development, technological/acquisition, poverty alleviation etc.

From the foregoing, a small scale business may have the opportunity of delving into different areas of business but on a small scale. Opportunities available include: farming, agro processing, mining, transportation, merchandise, and financial business, chemical and pharmaceutical industry, cooperative societies among others. Most of these small scale business are either one man businesses (sole proprietorship) or a combined effort business (partnership). Some business organizations are privately owned. The private ones are owned by individual members of the society while the public ones are owned by the government.

There are so many business organizations in Nigeria especially Enugu state. Enugu state is one of the 36 states in Nigeria and has 17 local government areas. Enugu is the capital of Enugu state and the capital of the former east central state. As such the state has many business organizations.

Nevertheless, for all these business organizations to succeed and achieve their objectives and subsequently national development there is need for them to have competent secretaries. Agwu and Emeti (2014) observed that most small scale business organizations die within their first five years of existence and only about five to ten percent survive, thrive and grow to maturity. These small scale business organizations have not contributed to the development of the Nigerian economy. Olumide (2004) noted that the failure of these small scale business organization were due to poor management practices, absence of business-friendly environment and lack of entrepreneurial skills among others. In order words a small scale business organization secretary with required competencies will help alleviate some of the problems that lead to failure of small scale business and achieve national development.

According to Adebayo and Akinyele (2012) the Professional Secretary International (PSI) defines a secretary as an executive assistant who has mastery of office skills, demonstrates the ability to assume responsibility without direct supervision, exercise initiative and judgment and makes decisions within the scope of assigned authority. From the above definitions, although various office workers perform some facets of secretarial work, not all office workers are secretaries. As such some qualifications are required. Also, some qualified secretaries are not



registered with the Professional Secretary International (PSI) which is an organization for professional secretaries.

Aromalaran (2010) opined that the certificate required of a general secretary in Nigeria was West African School Certificate Examinations, Pitman Institute of London or Royal Society of Arts (RSA) London. These days due to professionalism and automation, the required certificates include; Higher national Diploma (HND) in office Technology and Management or Secretarial Management/Studies from any accredited polytechnic; Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Education from a recognized university. In order words, the training of the secretary must reflect the challenges and experiences in the world of work.

Due to changes in technology, the role of secretary in business has changed tremendously from that of typewriting and shorthand dictation, answering of telephone calls and processing of mails. Today's secretaries are exposed to office technology including the internet that makes work much easier and knowledge more accessible (Edwin 2008). It is worthy to note that in the work of a secretary, these are no gender bias.

Both male and female gender work as secretaries in small scale business organizations. Isokla (2013) observed that in the profession of a secretary, one of the unethical practices is the erroneous notion of the secretary's career as being solely for females. However, their competencies can only be measured in their output. Competency is required on the part of the secretary for the achievement of a business organization's objectives.

Competency in the words of Olaitan, Alaribe and Eze (2010) refers to successful performance of a task through the use of knowledge, skills, attitude and judgment. This means that a secretary will not only have the theoretical knowledge of his work but should be able to carry out the duties practically, efficiently and effectively towards achieving the objectives of the organization and that of the nation. The secretary should possess the required competencies for job dexterity. These include: personality, technical, public relations, communication, computer /word processing competencies among others.

The secretary should possess communication competence as he is the coordinator of the daily routines of an office and organizes the office schedules and paper works. Adebayo and Akinyele (2012) posited that a secretary's duty includes: helping the executive manage his schedules, handle visitors and callers, produce documents and communications.

Subsequently, the secretary is required to possess computer /word processing competencies. With automation and organizational restructuring, computer software programee such as word processing for writing and editing letters, memos and reports; data management programme for use of long list of data and spreadsheet programme which handle tables and numbers should be mastered by the secretary.

Competency of the secretary impact on the prospects and successes of any business organization. Any small scale business organization without a secretary with the desired competencies will amount to organizational suicide. The use of an



incompetent secretary will amount to enormous mistakes. According to Igbinedion (2010:116) mistakes include;

Errors in typing important document and the poor image they convey, inability to interpret issues in correspondence correctly, lack of prompt initiative, misplacing of important documents due to poor filing approach, poor organization of work leading to unnecessary delays and inability to deal with technical complex matters because of the weak educational background.

With all these pitfalls, the expected objectives and national development will not be achieved. It is therefore necessary to determine the competencies required of secretaries of small scale business organizations in Enugu state for national development.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to determine the competencies required of secretaries of small scale business organizations in Enugu state for national development.

The study specifically sought to determine:

1. The communication competencies required of secretaries of small scale business organization in Enugu State for national development
2. The computer / word processing competencies required of secretaries of small scale business organizations in Enugu state for national development.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the communications competencies required of secretaries of small scale business organizations in Enugu state for national development?
2. What are the computer/word processing competencies required of secretaries of small scale business organizations in Enugu state for national development?

Null Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses tested at .05 level of significance guided the study:

HO₁: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of the female and male secretaries of small scale business organizations in Enugu state with respect to communication competencies required for national development.

HO₂: A significant difference does not exist between the mean ratings of the female and male secretaries of small scale business organizations in Enugu state with respect to computer/word processing competencies required for national development.

Method

This study adopted survey research design. According to Nworgu (2006) a survey research design is one in which a group of people or items are studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people or entire group. In this study data were collected from 198 secretaries of functional and registered small scale business organizations Out of the 305 registered small scale business organizations in



Enugu State (137 females and 61 males, Source; Field survey 2016). The number was manageable and as such, there was no sampling.

The data collected were done using 24 item questionnaire developed by the researchers from literature review. Four point response scale of very highly required (4) highly required (3), not required (2) and highly not required (1) was used. The instrument was validated by three experts from the department of Technology and Vocational Education, Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu. Their corrections and suggestions were used to produce the final instrument. The instrument was trial tested using 20 registered secretaries of small scale business organizations in Ebonyi state. These were used because they were not part of the study. The reliability coefficient was 0.71 using Crombach Alpha formula.

Six research assistants helped in the distribution of the 198 copies of the questionnaire. All the copies distributed were retrieved giving 100% return rate. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. Weighted means and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions. Decisions were made using the lower and upper limits of the scale values 1 to 4 on a four point scale as follows:

Very Highly required	_____	3.50 - 4.00
Highly Required	_____	2.50 – 3.49
Not Required	_____	1.50 – 2.49
Highly Not Required	_____	0.50 – 1.49

The standard deviation was used to determine the homogeneity or otherwise of the opinions of the respondents. The t – test statistics of no significance difference was used to test the null hypotheses. The t- calculated was compared with the t- table value at .05 level of significance and at appropriate degree of freedom. The null hypothesis was not rejected where the calculated t – value was less than the t – table value at appropriate degree of freedom; otherwise the null hypothesis was rejected.

Results

The results of the study were obtained from the research questions answered and hypotheses tested (see table 1-4).

Research Question I

What are the communication competencies required of secretaries of small scale business organizations in Enugu state for national development?



Table I: mean rating and standard deviations of responses on communication competences required of female and male secretaries of small scale business organizations in Enugu state for national development.

S/NO	Item Statement	$\bar{x}_1 n_1$	SD ₁	$\bar{x}_2 n_2$	SD ₂	\bar{X}_G	SDG	Decision
	The following are communication competencies required of secretaries of small scale business organizations in Enugu state for national development:	137						
1.	Ability to construct mailable letters	2.89	0.75	3.60	0.50	3.25	0.63	HR
2.	Ability to edit documents	3.30	0.78	3.40	.94	3.35	0.86	HR
3.	Ability to generate and send e-mail	3.41	1.02	3.30	0.80	3.36	0.91	HR
4.	Ability to produce office correspondence	3.48	0.51	3.50	0.61	3.49	0.58	HR
5.	Ability to answer telephone calls in a pleasant and efficient manner	3.26	0.71	3.20	1.01	3.23	0.86	HR
6.	Ability to handle confidential matters	3.00	0.62	3.20	0.62	3.10	0.62	HR
7.	Ability to use English language to pass information effectively	3.37	0.79	3.35	0.49	3.36	0.64	HR
8.	Ability to sort and prioritize mails based on deadlines	3.52	0.51	3.50	1.05	3.51	0.78	HR
9.	Ability to arrange call backs and appointments	3.67	0.48	3.85	0.37	3.76	0.43	HR
10	Ability to answer questions about the specifics of the office	3.44	0.75	3.40	0.50	3.42	0.63	HR
Grand mean / Standard Deviation		3.33	0.69	3.43	0.69	3.38	0.69	HR

Key

- \bar{x}_1 = Mean responses of female secretaries
- SD₁ = Standard deviations of female secretaries
- \bar{x}_2 = Mean responses of male secretaries
- SD₂ = Standard deviations of male secretaries
- n₁ = Number of female secretaries
- n₂ = Number of male secretaries
- \bar{X}_G = Pull or aggregate mean
- SDG = pull or aggregate standard deviation

Results from Table I indicate that item number 8 and 9 have pull means of 3.51 and 3.76 respectively. This implies that ability to sort and prioritize mails based on deadlines and ability to arrange call backs and appointments are communication



competencies very highly required of secretaries of small scale business organizations in Enugu state for national development. All other items (1-7 and 10) with pull mean scores of 3.25, 3.35, 3.36, 3.49, 3.23, 3.10, 3.36 and 3.42 were unanimously agreed upon, as highly required communication competencies of secretaries of small scale business organization secretaries in Enugu state for national development. The grand mean of 3.38 also confirms that. The pull standard deviations range from 0.43 to 0.91 indicating homogeneity of opinions.

HO₁: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of the female and male secretaries of small scale business organization in Enugu state with respect to communication competencies required for national development.

Table 2: The t- test comparison of the opinions of female and male secretaries of small scale business organization in Enugu state with respect to communication competencies required for national development

Variable	\bar{X}	SD	n	df	t-cal	t-table	Decision
Female	3.330	0.691	137	196	0.782	1.98	Not Significant
Male	3.340	0.696	1				

t-cal. (0.782) < t- table (1.98) Not significant

The results in Table 2 reveal that t- calculated of 0.782 is less than the t- tabulated of 1.98 at .05 level of significance and 196 degree of freedom. Hence there is no significant difference between the mean rating of the female and male secretaries of small scale business organization in Enugu state with respect to communication competencies required for national development

Research Question 2

What are the computer/word processing competencies required of secretaries of small scale business organizations in Enugu state for national development?

Table 3: Mean ratings and standard deviation of responses on computer/word processing competencies required of female and male secretaries of small scale business organizations in Enugu state for national development.

S/N	Item Statement	\bar{x}_1	SD ₁	\bar{x}_2	n ₂	SD ₂	\bar{X}_G	SDG	Decision
		$n_1 = 137$							
	The following are computer/word processing competencies required of secretaries of small scale business organizations in Enugu state for national development:								
11.	Ability to connect electrical appliances to UPS and stabilizer	3.59	0.85	3.60	0.50	3.66	0.68	VHR	
12.	Ability to boot the computer	3.48	0.51	3.40	0.94	3.44	0.73	HR	
13.	Ability to connect the keyboard	3.70	0.72	3.80	0.55	3.75	0.64	VHR	
14.	Use of computer keyboard and mouse in type-setting	3.56	0.51	3.20	0.62	3.38	0.57	HR	



15.	Use of computer programme software such as word perfect	3.26	0.76	3.40	0.50	3.33	0.63	HR
16.	Use of computer programme software such as windows95,98,200, 2003 and 2007	3.30	0.61	3.30	0.66	3.30	0.64	HR
17.	Use of computer programme software such as micro soft excel	3.74	0.45	3.75	0.44	3.75	0.45	VHR
18.	Use of computer programme software such as Access	3.52	0.51	3.80	0.41	3.66	0.46	VHR
19.	Use of computer programme software such as power point	3.33	0.55	3.65	0.71	3.49	0.63	HR
20.	Use of Header/footer, End note/ foot note	3.33	0.96	3.40	0.94	3.37	0.95	HR
21.	Ability to save typed work from computer into flash drive, CD and diskette	3.33	0.96	3.80	0.55	3.57	0.76	VHR
22.	Ability to protect document with password	3.48	0.75	3.45	0.51	3.47	0.63	HR
23.	Use of sort command to arrange information in selected rows, list and series of paragraph alphabetically, numerically or by date	3.42	1.01	3.10	1.02	3.26	1.02	HR
24.	Use of internet services	3.78	0.42	3.60	0.46	3.69	0.44	VHR
Grand Mean/Standard Deviation		3.49	0.68	3.52	0.63	3.50	0.66	VHR

Table 3 indicates that respondents agree that item number 11, 13, 17, 18, 21 and 24 with aggregate mean scores of 3.60, 3.75, 3.75, 3.66, 3.57 and 3.69 are very highly required of secretaries of private small scale business organization in Enugu state for national development. Item numbers 12, 14, 15, 16, 19 20, 22 and 23 with mean scores of 3.44, 3.38, 3.33, 3.30, 3.49, 3.37, 3.47 and 3.26 are highly required of secretaries of private small scale business organizations in Enugu state for national development. The grand mean of 3.0 attested to the fact that indicating that all these word processing competencies are highly required of secretaries of small scale business organizations in Enugu state for national development. The standard deviations range from 0.45 to 1.02 indicating that their opinions were not heterogeneous.

HO₂: A significant difference does not exist between the mean ratings of the female and male secretaries of small scale business organization in Enugu state with respect to computer/word processing competencies required for national development.



Table 4: The t- test comparison of the opinions of female and male secretaries of small scale business organizations in Enugu state with respect to computer/word processing competencies required for national development.

Variable	\bar{X}	S	Df	t-cal	t-table	Decision
Female	3.490	0.681	37	1.960	1.98	Not Significant
Male	3.520	0.636	1			

t-cal (0.242) < t- table (1.98) Not significant

Table 4 shows that t- calculated of 0.242 is less than t- table value of 1.98 at .05 level of significance and 196 degree of freedom. Hence, a significant difference does not exist between the mean ratings of the female and male secretaries of small scale business organizations in Enugu state with respect to computer/word processing competencies required for national development.

Discussion

From the study it was found out that the respondents agreed with all the 10 items in table one as highly required of secretaries of small scales business organizations in Enugu state for national development. These include ability to construct mailable letters, edit documents, generate and send e-mail, reproduce office correspondence and answer telephone calls in a pleasant and efficient manner. This is in agreement with the findings of Adebayo and Akinyele (2012) that a secretary's duty includes: helping the executive manages his schedule, handle visitors and callers, produce documents and communications.

Also agreed as highly required by the respondents are: ability to use English language to pass information effectively, ability to sort and prioritize mails based on deadlines, ability to arrange call backs and appointments and ability to answer enquirers about the specifics of the office. This is in agreement with the statements of Akpomi and Ordu (2009) that a qualified secretary should have a wide knowledge of business acumen, versatile knowledge in accounting, personal, office practice, communication and inside knowledge of the operation of all departments within the organization where he works.

Furthermore, the findings of this study shows that respondents agreed with all the 14 items in table two as highly required of secretaries of small scale business organizations in Enugu state for national development. These include ability: to connect electrical appliances to UPS and stabilizer, boot the computer, connect the keyboard monitor and scanner to the system unit and use the computer keyboard and mouse in typesetting. This concurs with the findings of Adebayo and Akinyele (2012) that the nature of secretarial work has changed drastically, with more professional managers keying in their own correspondence and more files being stored electronically. Ugwuanyi (2010) affirmed that the modern office secretary require occupational skills such as word processing skills, human relation skills, information communication Technology (ICT) and accounting skills among others.

In addition, use of programme software's (windows 95,98, 2000, 2003 and 2007) Microsoft Excel, Access, power point were also seen as highly required of



secretaries of small scale business organizations in Enugu state for national development. This is in consonance with the findings of Akpomi and Ordu (2009) that the three most popular types of computer software programme are word processing which helps the user to write, edit memos, letters and reports; dot management programmes or database which helps the user-secretary to use long list of data. The other one is spreadsheet programme which handle table and numbers.

Nevertheless, it was found out that there was no significant difference between the responses of the female and male secretaries of small scale business organization in Enugu state with respect to communication and computer/word processing competencies required of them for national development. This is at variance with the arguments of Cray, Malon, Devonish, Alleyne and Alleyne (2006) that females have less overall experience with computers and are more likely than male to have negative attitudes towards computers.

Conclusion

Small scale business organizations are seen as the bed rock towards national development. They are perceived as key to Nigeria's economic growth poverty alleviation and employment generation. However many of them die within their first five years negating the achievement of the objective of national development. Several factors have been discovered to contribute to that. Key among them are insufficient capital, infrastructural inadequacies, lack of proper book keeping, inability to engage or employ the right caliber of staff. Hence, employment of secretaries without the right or required competencies will amount to organizational suicide and non achievement of the envisaged national objectives. In essence, communication and computer/word processing competencies are required of secretaries of private business organizations in Nigeria, especially Enugu state for achievement of national development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. Owners and managers of small scale business organizations should make sure that the secretaries they employ possess the required communication and computer/word processing competencies in order to achieve the organizations objectives and national development.
2. Workshops and seminars should be organized by the management of small scale business organizations in Enugu state for retraining their secretaries for possession of the required competencies.
3. The government of Enugu state should make sure that secretaries of small scale business organizations are registered with Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) Development Agency of Nigeria.



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