

# EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS AND LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE OF PRE-SERVICE SECRETARIES IN FEDERAL COLLEGE OF EDUCATION (TECHNICAL), AKOKA, YABA, LAGOS.

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## Abstract

*The study examined employability skills and level of performance of pre-service secretaries in Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka, Yaba, Lagos. In an attempt to achieve the objectives of this study, three research questions were formulated for study. The study adopted descriptive survey research design with the population which covered all the 120 pre-service secretaries (final year students) in OTM department, Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka, Yaba, Lagos from which 50 participants were selected through simple random sampling technique. Structure questionnaire was used to collect data for the study during working hours. All the data collected were analyzed using frequency count, mean and standard deviation so as to answer the research questions. The findings of the study revealed that most of the preservice secretaries lack some important employability skills in OTM some of which include critical thinking to aid decisionmaking, regularly changing of attitude to work due to pressure and writing of the minutes of the meeting which of course lower their job performance. The study recommended that, workshop and seminar on employability skills required by employers of labour should be provided to final year students. Also, on-the-job training should be provided for practicing secretaries to upgrade their skills on the job so as to meet the employers demand effectively and as such become relevant to the world work.*

**Keywords:** Secretaries, Employability Skills, and Job Performance

## Introduction

Higher education has been concerned with the development of the whole person as well as knowledge, attributes, and skills which any educated person should have by the time of graduation (Abas and Imam, 2016). It further aims to inspire and enable individuals to develop their capabilities to the highest levels throughout life so that they can grow intellectually, contribute effectively to society, achieve personal fulfillment and well- equipped for work. Federal College of Education (Technical) Akoka, Yaba, Lagos has responded to unpredictable labour market by making parallel adjustments in order to keep pace by providing an avenue for the pre-service secretaries to gain certain general skills and qualities that will make them completely qualified for the real demands of the world of work through the office

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technology management instructional programme.

Accordingly, without compromising the academic principles, Abas-Mastura, Imam and Osman (2013) stated that, higher education institutions should demonstrate a greater commitment to develop the generalized expertise that graduates can transfer to whatever working environment they find themselves after graduation. In other words, they are expected to have developed not only subject specific skills but also employability skills to make them both specialists and generalists. Teaching and learning these generic skills should be consistent with the emerging needs of a world economy in a high-performance workplace.

Employability is a notion that refers to the idea that individuals are now increasingly responsible for their own welfare and that of society and therefore they need to acquire specific knowledge and skills, especially the knowledge and skills that employers need (DfEE, 2000). This notion is also part of a broad global context built around the idea that knowledge is the new basis for wealth (Thurow, 2000). Oliveira and Guimarães (2010) stated that, employability is about having the capability to gain initial employment, maintain employment and obtain new employment if required. This is to say that it is the individual secretary rather than the labour market who determines his/her own employability. Such an assertion fails to bring in the fact that it is the labour market that ultimately determines one's chances of finding employment. If there are few secretarial jobs available, employability will be low, even if applicants are highly educated and have acquired the necessary secretarial skills.

According to Abas and Imam (2016), employability skills refer to attributes of employees, other than technical competence, which make them an asset to an employer. The employability skills have varied classifications

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like basic academic skills, higher-order thinking skills and personal qualities with more detailed skill sets (Robinson, 2000). These generic employability skills are useful across all levels of secretarial positions from job entrants to chiefs of offices. Many employers require secretaries to have these skills to be seriously considered for employment. Similarly, these skills are crucial for employment to determine workplace success and serve as the basis for lifelong learning needed by graduates to find a job (Clarke, 2008). The significance of employability skills in work settings is then recognized (Wilton, 2008).

The employability skills are categorized into three areas by Abas and Imam (2016), which are fundamental, personal management and teamwork skills. It is important that pre-service secretaries are able to apply and upgrade their skills and also to anticipate and prepare for the future skills required of the workforce. In other words, they have to achieve competence on the use of employability skills. Such competence on skills denotes the degree to which a pre-service secretary demonstrates proficiency and mastery on the different acquired employability skills during Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme (S.I.W.E.S) and office work practice in the course of their study in office technology management (OTM) in the college.

Employers demand that, secretaries acquire a wide range of employability skills and competency, such skills for better job performance after graduation from OTM course of study. For pre-service secretaries, job performance dimensions are focused on helping colleagues, putting in extra effort to complete a given task, putting in extra hours to get work done on time. These involved the five elements

identified by Borman and Motowidlo (1993) in Abas and Imam (2016), which are volunteering, persisting, helping, endorsing, supporting and defending organizational objectives and following organizational rules identified. Pre-service secretaries are to develop competence in them and be willing to upgrade themselves when they eventually get to world of work and as such be the best on the job.

The researcher observed that after students complete the three years of study in Office Technology Management (OTM) NCE programme in College of Education (Technical)

Akoka, Yaba, Lagos, they often find it difficult to secure good secretarial jobs in organisations while some are out of jobs already. The inability of the trained secretaries to secure employment or remain lazy can be traced to lack of employability skills required by the employers to be able to enhance office operations and performance on the job. Based on these, gaps exist between employability skills that enhance work performance provided through (OTM) and pre-service secretaries' (final year students) competence which deals with the level of acquired skills during the OTM programme. In an attempt to fill in these gaps, the researcher found this study necessary.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine pre-service secretaries' employability skills required for job performance in Office Technology Management, Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka, Yaba, Lagos. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. find out the level of employability skills possessed by pre-service secretaries' in Office Technology Management (OTM) Department.
2. find out the pre-service secretaries' level of performance of the employability skilled possessed.
3. develop strategies for enhancing pre-service secretaries' acquisition and performance of employability skills in Office Technology Management (OTM).

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions shall guide this study:

1. what are the employability skills possessed by pre-service secretaries' in Office Technology Management (OTM) Department?

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2. what is the pre-service secretaries' level of performance of the employability skilled possessed?
3. what are the strategies for enhancing pre-service secretaries' acquisition and performance of employability skills in Office Technology Management (OTM)?

### **Scope of the Study**

The scope of the study covered all the pre-service secretaries (final year students) in OTM department, Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka, Yaba, Lagos. Only the pre-service secretaries' employability skills and job performance will be covered in the study.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted descriptive survey research design with the population which covers all the 120 pre-service secretaries (final year students) in OTM department, Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka, Yaba, Lagos from which 50 participants were randomly selected through simple random sampling technique. Structured questionnaire which was validated by an expert in the field of Educational Evaluation was used to collect data for the study during working hours. In an attempt to establish the reliability of the instrument, the instrument was administered once and subjected to Cronbach Alpha analysis so as to ascertain the internal consistency of the items. Cronbach Alpha value  $r=0.833$  revealed that, the instrument is highly reliable for the study. All the data collected were analyzed using frequency count, mean and standard deviation so as to answer the research questions.

### **Decision rule:**

HP=Highly Possess/Perform =4  
MP=Moderately Possess/ Perform=3  
LP=Lowly Possess/ Perform=2

Not Possess/ Perform=1

**Results**

**Table 1: Level of Employability Skills Possessed by Pre-Service Secretaries.**

Employability Categories	S/N	Statement	HP	MP	LP	NP	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
Fundamentals	1	Communication among colleagues	28	20	2	-	3.52	0.580	Possessed
	2	Managing heard rumour in the office (problem of listening skill)	11	28	9	2	2.96	0.755	
	3	The use of numbers in work operations	19	22	9	-	3.20	0.728	
	4	Critically thinking to aid decision-making	21	27	2	-	3.38	0.567	Possessed
	5	Problem-solving skills for managerial issues	22	26	2	-	3.40	0.571	Possessed
Personal Management	6	Regular changing of attitude to work due to pressure	22	24	4	-	3.36	0.631	Possessed
	7	Always rescheduling unfinished work due to pressure	20	16	13	-	3.10	0.839	
	8	Adaptability to working environment	25	22	3	-	3.44	0.611	Possessed
	9	Working safely under pressure	18	21	9	2	3.10	0.839	
Teamwork	10	Working with others after official closing hour	0.700	15	28	6	1	3.14	
	11	Participation in office projects outside your official duties	19	19	10	2	3.10	0.863	
	12	Participation in committee to achieve given tasks	22	21	6	1	3.28	0.759	

**Keys:** HP=Highly Possess; MP=Moderately Possess; ML=Lowly Possess; NP=Not Possess

Mean/cut off point  $=\frac{4+3+2+1}{4}=\frac{10}{4}=2.5$

Any item with calculated mean greater than the cut off point (2.50) should be accepted as possessed/ performed while the one less than 2.50 should be taken as not possessed/performed.

**Research Question 1**

What are the employability skills possessed by preservice secretaries' in Office Technology Management (OTM) Department?

Table 1 above showed the analysis of items 1-12 and revealed that the Mean ratings are

greater than  $X = 2.50$  cut-off point; therefore this revealed that, most of the pre-service

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secretaries possessed employability skills such as communication among colleagues, managing rumours in the office, in the use of numbers in work operations, critically thinking aid decision-making, regular changing of attitude to work due to pressure, always rescheduling unfinished task for another time, adaptability to working

environment, working safely under pressure and with others after official closing hour, participating in office projects outside official duties and in a committee to achieve given task.

### Research Question 2

What is the pre-service secretaries' level of

performance of the employability skilled possessed in Office Technology Management (OTM) Department?

**Table 2: Pre-service Secretaries' Level of Performance of the Employability Skilled Possessed.**

S/N	Statement	HP	MP	LP	NP	X	SD	Decision
13	Utilize electronic mail (email) to reach out to clients and colleagues	31	18	1	-	3.60	0.535	performed
14	Type-set office documents for work operations through computer system	20	29	1	-	3.38	0.530	performed
15	File documents and records according to reference numbers	18	28	2	2	3.24	0.716	performed
16	Take records of letters and memos	24	23	2	1	3.40	0.670	performed
17	Take detailed records of phone conversations	30	15	2	3	3.44	0.837	performed
18	Write the minutes of the meeting	28	17	3	2	3.42	0.785	performed
19	Keep financial records of day-to-day disbursement of cash	24	20	4	2	3.32	0.794	performed
20	Use photocopy machine to duplicate documents	24	22	2	2	3.36	0.749	performed

**Keys:** HP=Highly Perform; MP=Moderately Perform; ML=Lowly Perform; NP=Not Perform

Table 2 above shows the analysis of items 13-20 and revealed that the Mean ratings are greater than X = 2.50 cut-off point; therefore this revealed that, most of the pre-service secretaries can highly utilize electronic mail (email) to reach out to clients and colleagues, type-set office documents for work operations through computer system, file documents and records according to reference numbers, take records of letters and memos, take records of

phone conversations, write the minutes of the meeting, keep financial records of day-to-day disbursement of cash and using photocopy machine to duplicate documents.

### Research Question 3

What are the strategies for enhancing pre-service secretaries' acquisition and performance

of employability skills in Office Technology  
Management (OTM)?

**Table 3: Strategies for Enhancing Pre-service Secretaries' Acquisition and Performance of Employability Skills.**

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
21	Workshop on employability skills required by employers of labour should be provided for final year students	38	11	1	-	3.72	0.749	Accepted
22	OTM courses should be made more practical to reflect real office work operations	31	17	2	-	3.58	0.575	Accepted
23	On-the-job training should be provided for practising secretaries to upgrade their skills on the job	32	15	2	1	3.56	0.675	Accepted

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Table 3 above showed the analysis of items 21-23 were accepted based on the decision that their Mean ratings are greater than  $X = 2.50$  cut-off point. This revealed that most of the respondents agreed that workshop on employability skills required by employers of labour should be provided for final year students, OTM courses should be made more practical to reflect real office work operations and that on-the-job training should be provided for practising secretaries to upgrade their skills on the job.

## Discussion of Findings

Based on the analysis of the data collected, the following findings were made:

The findings revealed that most of the pre-service secretaries possessed most of the fundamental employability skills such as communication among colleagues; problem-solving skills for managerial issues; critically thinking to aid decision-making and the use of numbers in work operations. However, they moderately possessed managing heard rumour in the office. Further, the pre-service secretaries also moderately possessed adaptability to working environment and working safely under pressure, which are good personal management employability skills required by employers of labour. However, regularly changing of attitude to work due to pressure and always rescheduling unfinished work due to pressure were good personal management employability skills required by the employer of labour and these will promote negative attitude to work and encourage procrastination of given task. Findings also revealed that most of the pre-service secretaries are competent in participating in office projects outside their official work and work with others in cooperation to achieve given task in the organisation. These findings were supported by Abas and Imam (2016) who opined that, they are expected to have developed not only subject specific skills but also employability skills to make them both specialists and generalists.

Secondly, the researcher found out that most of the pre-service secretaries can highly utilize electronic mail (email) to reach out to clients and colleagues, type-set office documents for work operations through computer system, file documents and records according to reference numbers, take records of letters and memos, take records of phone conversations, write the minutes of the meeting, keep financial records of day-to-day disbursement of cash and using photocopy machine to duplicate documents.

Lastly, the findings revealed that most of the preservice secretaries agreed that workshop on employability skills required by employers of labour should be provided for final year students; OTM courses should be made practicing secretaries to upgrade their skills on the job. These findings agreed with the study of Abas-Mastura, Imam and Osman (2018) who stated that, without compromising the academic principles, higher education institutions should demonstrate a greater commitment to develop the generalised expertise that graduates can transfer to whatever working environment they find themselves in after graduation.

## Conclusion

The need to enhance the competence of pre-service secretaries on attitude to work, listening skills, giving extra time to work even after closing hours and being a solution provider to problems encountered in the work operations in the organisation cannot be overemphasized. Efforts should be taken by the OTM lecturers and management team to ensure that the college does not graduate half-baked secretaries that add to the statistics of unemployed secretaries in the society. Therefore, proper training and development should be provided to pre-service secretaries so that they can be the best on the job.

## Recommendations

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

1. Acquisition of employability skills should be centralised throughout the three years of training of prospective secretaries in Office Technology and Management (OTM) most especially in the areas of developing positive attitude to work wherever there is pressure in making given tasks done, avoidance of procrastination, having good listening skills to manage rumour in the office and learning to spend extra time on unfinished job.
2. Secondly, workshop training should be organised for pre-service secretaries during their last semester in the course of employability skill acquisition to enhance competence and improve job performance in the organisation. This will make them to become relevant to the world of work.
3. OTM lecturers should endeavour to make everything taught the course of the training programme more practical and that they should reflect everything done in world of work so that, the skills acquired by the prospective secretaries can be easily transferred to the world of work in after being employed on the job.

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