

African Journal of Social Policy and Administration, Volume 6, Number 1, 2013**UTILISATION OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY AMONG
ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARIES IN UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN**

Micah, Damilola John
Department of Sociology
University of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The emergence of Information and Communication Technology as a dominant means of passing information plays significant role in organizational management. It is evident that some organizations have attained high level of utilisation of ICT, while others are at the threshold of utilising ICT to execute their job function. Against this backdrop, the study focused on the perceived level of access and utilisation of ICT among University Secretaries in some selected departments. The study was a descriptive design and combined quantitative and qualitative methods. Multistage sampling was adopted. Questionnaire and in-depth interviews were conducted for primary data collection. A sample unit of 61 respondents was selected for questionnaire and 9 respondents were interviewed. More than 26% of the respondents believed that ICT was the major channel by which their official duties were executed. About 50% of the respondents said their job duties were still done manually, while 23% combined the uses of ICT and manual documentation and information exchange. About 32% said their access to ICT was high, 34% had moderate access and 32% were low. At least 19% of the respondents rated their level of utilisation of ICT high, 34% were moderate and 45% were low. Qualitative data showed that most respondents that had access to internet services, computers, scanning and lamination machines and other modern office equipments were happy and could execute their jobs without delay. ICT was essential to employee's job performance. It is required that the provision of ICT services should not be comprised in any organization of management. Every worker should have access to information technology, while training and retraining of staff for ICT skills should be sustained.

Keywords: *ICT, Access, Utilisation, Work, and Secretaries*

INTRODUCTION/STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Information plays a vital part in the lives of individuals, organizations and institutions. The emergence of Information and communication technology (ICT) in the modern industrial societies has drastically transformed the pattern of utilisation of information resource. This refers to access to information through the use of computers such as laptop and desktop which may be connected to the internet. Prior to modern information technology mentioned in the foregoing, people utilized sources such as books, journals, magazines, and newspapers among others in the libraries to access information. Studies showed that the trend in the utilisation of information has gradually accommodated new information system (Odemuyiwa, 2006; Ajiboye and Tella, 2007). This is referred to as computer age of information utilisation. The implication is that the old media like Newspaper, Magazine, and Books are gradually fading out in their utilisation by information consumers.

However, on the one hand computer information may be available without being utilised by the users due to lack of technical knowhow. On the other hand the availability may be inadequate which hindered access. This draws attention to information requirement of individual either as employee or private users. It may be stated that in some organizations of work, information is processed solely by means of electronic i.e. computers. Other organizations or individuals may lay emphasis on little or no use of computer. This means books and media papers are highly utilized in this case. Notwithstanding the choices available, electronic communication has remained dominant in the 21st century societies (Wikipedia, 2009). Hence, the level of utilisation of the modern technology has been ranked high, moderate, and low depending on the skills and interest of individual in their respective professions.

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University education is often seen as citadel of academic profession exemplified as model. As a result, attention has been focused on this educational sector for funding and sustainable facilities (Wikipedia, 2009). In this wise, it is expected that the academic and non academic staff members have required skills to utilize available facilities in order to achieve academic standard. Evidence has shown that while the modern facilities are grossly inadequate in some universities, it is also obvious that some staff members lack requisite knowledge and skills to utilize the available facilities (Ajiboye and Tella, 2007). In line with the above statement, the study addressed the following objectives. To:

1. Determine pattern of information seeking requirements among administrative secretaries in the University of Ibadan.
2. Know the level of access and utilisation of information resources available.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Uttor (1999) defined information as data value in planning, decision making and evaluation of any programmed. He goes further to say that it is data that have been subjected to some processing functions capable of answering user's query whether it is recorded, summarized, or simply collected that would help decision making. It is well understood in terms of books, journals, magazines, public and private sector documents of all kinds, whether published for mass circulation or unpublished and restricted or confidential in nature, results of research efforts that are made available to colleagues in form of reports, books articles and non-printed materials. From the above definitions, it is apparent that information is crucial to the survival of any organization and individual users.

In the cognitive viewpoint of information science Belkin (1995, 1998) defined information as associated with a text which is the generator's modified by (purpose, intent, knowledge of recipient's state of knowledge) conceptual structure which underlines the surface structure (such as language) of that text. Ingwersen (1995, 1998) defined information as the result of transformation of the generator's cognitive structures (by intentionality, model of the recipients' state of knowledge, and in the form of signs). Information is a structure which, when perceived may affect and transform the recipient's state of knowledge (Eskola, 1998). Dervin and Nilan (1998) argued that information is something constructed by human beings. It is evident in the literature reviewed that information constitutes essential element in day to day activities of human lives. The construction of human ideas framed into information can be made available in different forms. It can be put together in books, journals, newspapers and magazines and other formal and informal forms. The visit to library provides seekers of information to access the resource in manual form, while the utilisation of internet services through computers provides access to soft information. In the modern era, it is often common to see people utilising computer machines to process and access their needed information. This means increasing the number of users are now frequent with computer information and resource.

Previous findings have also established that books that were once highly consulted in the libraries now witnessed low patronage due to computer information (Wikipedia, 2009). The indication is that most books and articles in the libraries are now being reproduced into soft copies which were made available on the internet for easy access. However, the bothering issue about information need is about accessibility and utilisation, especially when it is considered in terms of the proportion of employees or professionals that computer information.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study adopted descriptive research design. This combined quantitative and qualitative methods. The population of the study was limited to Secretaries who were selected from the faculties of Law, Sciences and Education of the University of Ibadan. The study utilized 100 sample of respondents. Multi stage sampling method was utilized. This combined purposive to select the faculty area; simple random (ballot) to select departments within faculties; and convenience sampling to select the secretaries in each designated department. Quantitative and qualitative methods of primary data collection were utilized. The quantitative method generated data through questionnaire. Qualitative method generated data through in-depth interviews (IDIs). Hence, questionnaire and IDIs were the instruments of data collection. Quantitative data were analysed through the use of descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage. Qualitative data were analysed using content analysis and verbatim quotation. Data for the study was processed electronically through the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

African Journal of Social Policy and Administration, Volume 6, Number 1, 2013**RESULT AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS****SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLE**

The importance of socio-demographic variables in any research study cannot be over emphasised. They tend to shape pattern of responses of the research participants to critical issues raised in the questionnaire. Put simply, the information supplied or collected from respondents on research questions may be the reflection of their demographic characteristics.

The presentation of demographic variables on table 1 indicates that when respondents were asked about their sex, 70.5% said they were female, while 29.5% were male. The percentage (75.4%) of the respondents were married, 14.8% were divorced. About 6.6% of respondents were single. Similarly, most respondents (36.1%) were aged above fifty years, 27.9% were below 40 years and 26.2% fell between the ages 40-50 years. The indication is that most of the Secretaries in the study areas were aged fifty years and above. The ages of respondents tend to reflect the number of years they have served as secretaries in their departments. Most respondents (41.0%) had put over twenty-five years of service in their profession.

The academic qualifications of the respondents showed that 39.3% had Bachelor's Degree or HND certificate, 16.4% had post graduate qualification and 8.2% were holders of secondary school certificate. The reason for the lowest proportion of secondary school qualification may not be unconnected with the fact that respondents operate in academic environment that tends to sustain motivation for additional academic qualification.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents on demographic characteristics

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	18	29.5
Female	43	70.5
Total	61	100.0
Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	4	6.6
Married	46	75.4
Separated	9	14.8
Total	61	100.0
Ages in group	Frequency	Percentage
Below 40	17	27.9
40-50	16	26.2
Above 50	22	36.1
No response	6	9.8
Total	61	100.0
Years of service	Frequency	Percentage
Below 10	7	11.5
10-15	19	31.1
16-25	10	16.4
Above 25	25	41.0
Total	61	100.0
Highest education	Frequency	Percentage
Secondary	5	8.2
Vocational education	7	11.5
NCE/ND	15	24.6
B.SC/HND	24	39.3
Postgraduate	10	16.4
Total	61	100.0
Job status	Frequency	Percentage
Secretary assistant	15	24.6
Secretary 1	11	18.0
Secretary 11	13	21.3
Personnel secretary	20	32.8
Confidential secretary	2	3.3
Total	61	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2010

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Furthermore, findings on the job status of the respondents showed that 32.8% acted as personnel secretaries, 24.6% were secretary assistant, 21.3% secretary 2, and 18.0% secretary 2. About 3.3% acted as confidential secretary.

PATTERN OF INFORMATION SEEKING AMONG PROFESSIONAL SECRETARIES

In every organization, there are structured patterns of information seeking established to achieve set goals and objectives. While it is true that some organizations in the 21st century have shifted away from seeking information manually (Uttor, 1999), there are evidences to suggest that manual process of information still exist and well appreciated in other organisations.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents Views on the Pattern of Seeking Information

Pattern of seeking information on official duty	Frequency	Percentage
Electronic information	16	26.2
Manual and printed information	31	50.8
All of the above	14	23.0
Total	61	100.0
Processing of information in my office is online	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	29	47.5
No	32	52.5
Total	61	100.0
The level of usefulness of computer information in the official duties	Frequency	Percentage
High	40	65.5
Moderate	7	11.5
Low	14	23.0
Total	61	100.0

Source: field survey 2010

The results of the findings presented on the table 2 above showed that when respondents were asked to state the method they used to obtain and disseminate information in their offices, 50.8% said electronic information was the required standard of seeking information. About 26.2% of the respondents utilized manual and printed sources of information, while 23.0% utilized both electronic and manual methods in their information seeking. As a way of understanding the acceptability of processing information online i.e. internet services among the respondents, 47.5% said online information was a norm and compulsory channel of seeking information. The percentage (52.5%) of the respondents said they rarely accessed or processed their information on the internet. As a follow up to the above question, respondents were asked to rate the level of usefulness of computer information in their official duties. The results in the table 2 showed that 65.5% rated the level as high, 23.0% said it is low, and 11.5% said it is moderate.

The inferences that could be drawn from the results above are multidimensional. One, the manual method of seeking information in the study area is still very usefulness because people still consult books and journals in libraries and other sources. They still share a face to face communication to solve problems relating to job functions. Two, internet source of seeking information is becoming a phenomenon rapidly replacing manual method in the study area. This is by extension major source of information in other organisations. Three, the utilisation of computer machines in offices to document records is rapidly replacing manual documentation of information through the use of office files. The deduction above is buttressed in the views of a female respondent when she said:

The duties of secretaries in the modern era of office management required that you are computer literate. Now you will find it difficult to cope with office duties if you are not sound in the use of Microsoft office. We have internet service in our office. Many times the Head of department will compel me to typeset document on computer. More than 98% of my duties are on computers and internet (IDI/Senior Secretary/Faculty of Law/University of Ibadan/ 2010)

Also, another male respondent who had served in the position of secretary 1 for more than 10 years was very critical about the utilisation of computer information. He concluded:

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I'm not against the use of computer information. However the emphasis of most management that makes computer knowledge compulsory and the criteria for promotion is very wrong. At this age and the experience I had on this job, I think it is possible for me to do office documentation conveniently without error. Besides the good of computer, your employers are not even ready to train you for computer skills. Many times errors are common with computers if you not very careful (IDI/Secretary/Faculty of Education/University of Ibadan/2010).

The opinions stated above showed the positive and negative sides of computer information as criteria for seeking information in office duties. Though making computer and electronic channel as the required standard of processing documents in the office can bring significant improvement and changes to services rendered, nevertheless the manual method of seeking information plays important role.

PERCEIVED LEVEL OF ACCESS AND UTILISATION OF INFORMATION RESOURCES

Access is a measure of availability of something conceived as tangible or intangible object, in this case of the findings the information resources available. The utilisation indicates desirability to access and put into use the object that is available.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents Views on the Level of Access to Information Resources

Information resources available in my office	Frequency	Percentage
Electronic computer	27	44.3
Internet services and electronic journals	5	8.2
Office files and documentation	18	29.5
Photocopy machines, typewriting and printer	8	13.1
All of the above	3	4.9
Total	61	100.0
I have access to computer machines in my office	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	41	67.2
No	20	32.8
Total	61	100.0
The computers in my office are connected to internet	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	25	41.0
No	36	59.0
Total	61	100.0
I have ownership of personal computer	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	44	72.1
No	17	27.9
Total	61	100
My personal computer is connected to internet	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	32	52.5
No	29	47.5
Total	61	100.0
Level of access to information resource	Frequency	Percentage
High	20	32.8
Moderate	21	34.4
Low	20	32.8
Total	61	100.0

Source: field survey 2010

The findings presented on the table 3 showed that when respondents were asked to indicate the sources of information resources available in their offices, 44.3% said they had access to electronic computers, 29.5% indicated office files and documentation, 13.1% had access to photocopy machines, typewriting and printer, and 8.2% could access internet services and electronic journals. About 4.9% of the respondents said they had access to all of the above information resources. The deduction that could be made from the foregoing finding is that there are various sources of information resources available to secretaries in the course of duties.

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While it may be stated that some secretaries have access to varieties of office equipments and machines to process information, there are others that could only access very few office equipment to ease their duties. The investigation into the question of access to computer machines for office use showed that 67.2% of the respondents said they had access to computers, while 32.8% did not have access to computers in their offices. Further investigation to find out about the connectivity of office computers to internet services showed that 41.0% of the respondents said their office computers were connected to internet. At least 59.0% of the respondents indicated that they had no access to internet services in their office. On the aspect of ownership of personal computers for processing information, 72.1% said they had personal computers, while 27.9% said they did not have computer for private uses. As a follow up to the above question, respondents were asked to indicate their access to internet services for personal use. Results in the table 3 showed that 52.5% of the respondents had access to internet services, while 47.5% said they had no internet services for personal uses. Also, respondents were asked to rate the level of their access to information resources. Results showed that 34.4% were moderate in their access, 32.8% said they were either high or low in their access. As a buttress to the findings in the foregoing, the opinions of an intermediate Secretary was critical when she submitted:

I have been working in this office more than four years. The computer machines we have do not function well. It always complained about virus infection. The management is not ready to repair it. The computers are old. There are no internet services (IDI/Personnel Secretary/Faculty of Science/University of Ibadan/2010).

On the contrary view, a female respondent said:

I'm enjoying my work in this office. I have access to internet. The department is always interested to ensure that all the electronic machines are working well. I communicate mostly through the internet. I solve office work on the internet. This is good for the work and productivity (IDI/Secretary 11/Faculty of Education/University of Ibadan/2010)

On the basis of the above views and findings, there are a number of inferences that could be drawn. First, most secretaries now operate on computer machines to process information in their offices and job productivity is enhanced with the use of computer machines and internet services. Second, internet services are now assuming significant phenomenon and importance in the duties of secretaries which make communication easy, though most secretaries do not have access to internet in their offices. Third, personal computers such as laptops, desktops have assumed significant importance and necessity among secretaries in their professional duties. However, it may be argued that significant proportion of the secretaries were yet to have access to modern information system. This reality is a direct negation to expected standard emphasized in the views of Odemuyiwa (2006), who stressed the importance of ICT to worker productivity. Therefore, as substantial number of secretaries are cut off from the world of communication technology, it may be difficult to achieve job satisfaction and productivity especially where every emphasis of job function revolves information technology.

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents' Views on the Level of Utilisation of Information Resource

I can operate computer to input and output information	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	31	50.8
No	30	49.2
Total	61	100.0
I can save document files from computer to devices such as flash, compact disc, and diskettes	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	39	63.9
No	22	36.1
Total	61	100.0
I can print document from computers	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	25	41.0
No	36	59.0
Total	61	100.0
I can make use of office equipments such as photocopy, scanner, lamination machine and others	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	17	27.9
No	44	72.1
Total	61	100

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I can easily utilize internet services to access information needed	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	32	52.5
No	29	47.5
Total	61	100.0
Level of utilisation of information resource	Frequency	Percentage
High	12	19.7
Moderate	21	34.4
Low	28	45.9
Total	61	100.0

The results presented on the table 4 indicated that when respondents were asked to show their skill about operating computers to input and out information, 50.8% said they could input and output information from computers. At least 49.2% said they could not operate computers to input or output information. The proportion (63.9%) of the respondents said they could save document files from computer to devises such as flash drive, compact disc, or diskettes. About 36.1% said they could not perform the operation. Furthermore, when the respondents were instructed to show their skills about utilizing computers to print document files, 41.0 said they could print document from the computer. The percentage (59.0%) said they could not print document files from computers. The respondents were also questioned about their ability to utilize office equipments such as photocopy, scanner and lamination machines. Results showed that 27.9 of the respondents could utilize the office equipments, while 72.1% could not operate the machines. Also, when respondents were asked to show their knowledge about the utilisation of internet services to access required information, 52.5% said they could utilize internet to access information. About 47.5% said they could not operate on the internet. In rating the level of utilisation of information resource, 45.9% of the respondents said their skill of utilisation was low, 34.4% were moderate, and 19.7% were high on the utilisation. There are a number of deductions that could be drawn from the above findings. One, most respondents in the study areas could utilize computer machines to save documents in storage devises. This evidently provided that most secretaries in the University of Ibadan had access to computer technology and could input information needed. Two, significant proportion of the respondents still find it difficult to output information from computer through the use of printers, scanning machine, lamination and photocopy machine. This suggests either lack of access to the machines or inadequate training about the uses. Three, significant proportion of the respondents still find it difficult to communicate through the use of internet, though most of them could operate on the internet. In line with this view, a respondent was very emphatic when she said:

How do you expect me to have knowledge of internet services when there is none of such in my office? Usually we print our document from the general office. The printer in my office is no longer functioning well. We have requested the need for another printer but nothing is forthcoming. There are a lot of office equipments we need in our office (IDI/Secretary 1/Faculty of sciences/University of Ibadan/2010)

In line with the above, a male respondent in the Faculty of Education was unhappy about the nature of information system that operated in his office. He stated thus:

I am not happy about the way things are done in this office. The Head of department is always insisting on the need to utilize internet services to pass information, whereas the internet service is always slow. Sometimes it does not function well. The department is not ready to improve on its information technology (IDI/Secretary 11/Faculty of Law/University of Ibadan/2010)

Also, a respondent expressed a rather different opinion when she said:

In my office, there are photocopy machines, scanning and lamination machine. We have internet services. I can operate all of these machines. I communicate on the internet. I am happy with my job (IDI/Secretary 1/Faculty of Education/University of Ibadan/2010).

From the above views, it can be maintained that some secretaries are still confronted with poor access to internet services which tend to slow down information exchange, some internet services available in some offices do not connect to provide fast link of information. Also, some secretaries do not have access to office equipments such as photocopy machine, scanning, and printer and so they do not have requisite knowledge to operate them.

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This accounted for the perceived low level of utilisation of information technology. Nevertheless, the availability of office equipments for modern information system in some offices has enabled some secretaries to perform their roles with ease and satisfaction.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The significance of the study pointed to access and utilisation of modern information system in office management. The study revealed the vital role played by office equipments such as computer machine, photocopy machine, scanning and lamination, printers, and internet services. It is evident in the findings that secretaries that had access to modern information system could perform their duties with ease and satisfaction and so they remained committed and motivated. The implication is that access to information technology produces fast link of transferring information in organizational management. At the same time, information and communication technology is rapidly replacing office documentation done through manual method of files and shelves. The deduction is that more and more secretaries are now seeing the need to be trained and retrained to acquire the skills of utilizing the modern information equipment.

It is disturbing that most respondents in the study area could not adequately utilize the modern information machines. This is not unconnected with the fact that some offices do not even have these equipments. Where the equipments are available, they do not function well in most times. This explains the low funding to provide necessary facilities that could encourage secretaries to function effectively in their departments. It also affirms the agitations of the Nigerian University Workers on the need for government to adequately fund university education to yield productivity. In line with the above conclusions, the study identified some recommendations.

1. The pattern of information requirement of Secretaries dominantly reflected aspect of ICT which makes job function easy and rapid. It is therefore recommended that the provision of computer electronics and related equipments should be adequately supplied in every organization of management to enhance productivity.
2. The perceived level of access to modern information system showed that significant proportion of the secretaries do not have computers, scanning and lamination machines and internet services in their offices. This means they do not know about the utilisation of these modern equipments. It is vital that government should increase funding to university education to accommodate needs of every department.
3. The perceived level of utilisation of modern office equipments showed that most secretaries do not have requisite knowledge or technical know-how to execute official tasks. This means there will be slow pace in getting official work done. It is therefore important to ensure that training and retraining of staff in every organizational management is established especially in the area of ICT to enhance utilisation of modern office equipment. The training should accommodate every cadre of staff because of the value individual may contribute the organisation.

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