Enhancing the Relevance of Secretarial Staff in the University System

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Abstract

The concern of this paper is the need for all secretarial staff who are privileged to secure employment in the university (an institution known all over the world as the citadel of learning) to enhance their relevance not just to retain their jobs but to contribute maximally in the attainment of university goals and objectives and enjoy job satisfaction and self fulfillment. Keywords in the topic are clarified, the university system and determinants of the quality of university training highlighted. Several indices of workers’ relevance are discussed to draw the attention of the audience to practical issues in work performance. The paper further outline attributes of a good secretarial staff and discusses roles of secretarial staff in the university and the competencies they need to direct their focus. It concludes that given the globalized and highly competitive nature of today’s world of work which is driven by information and communications technology coupled with the paucity of employment opportunities globally, individual workers should value their positions and do whatever it takes to avoid becoming irrelevant and being replaced. The paper recommends, among other things, that individual secretarial staff irrespective of rank and experience, should pursue enhanced relevance by acquiring the highlighted competencies while the University Secretarial Staff Association should create awareness of the need among the members as well as organize seminars, workshops and conferences to enlighten them. The main purpose of this paper is to highlight relevant knowledge and competencies needed by university secretarial staff in the era of technology which will be significant to the target population, university administration, staff and students.

Keywords: enhancing, relevance, secretarial staff, university system

INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest socio-economic problems of our time is the paucity of employment opportunities especially for the teeming graduates of educational institutions who roam the streets of major cities in Nigeria and some other distressed economies years after graduation in search of non-existent jobs (Waziri, 2004). The different forms of social vices are traced to unemployment as the root cause. Waziri further observed that in the face of this problem, many workers in different organizations in Nigeria including secretarial staff in the university system appear to be only taking from their employers without adding value or making reasonable contributions to their goals’ attainment. This is why this author believes that most people who have not seen the ugly face of unemployment or loss of jobs tend not to value their employment opportunities. Observational assessment and oral interviews were adopted for this study. The researcher served as a senior administrative staff in a federal university (Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka) for over ten years with secretaries, typists and computer operators under her supervision. Her assessment of the performance of this vital category of office workers was totally unsatisfactory. She later converted to the academic cadre and for over ten years has served as a lecturer in secretarial technology with secretarial staff from Nnamdi Azikiwe University and other neighbouring tertiary institutions in her part time classes. Again, she found that most of them did not possess the background knowledge of the competencies required for their duty performance in today’s office. With a strong quest for reasonable impact in her field, she interviewed deans/faculty secretaries and heads of departments in 2011 on how effective their secretarial staff were performing their duties and the findings revealed that most of the secretarial staff need retraining to competently perform their changed roles. These findings led to a publication – Ezenwafor and Okeke (2012). It is with this background that this paper seeks to awaken university secretarial staff to the urgent need of doing all they can to increase their relevance for the benefit of the university and its community as well as their own job satisfaction and personal fulfillment.

PROBLEM OF THE STUDY

Secretarial staff have been described as the key personnel concerned with office information processing (Nwosu, 2000, Obayi, 2009, Ezenwafor & Okeke 2011 and 2012). The university system deals with information processing to a very great extent and employs different categories of secretarial staff for the functions. The researcher’s personal observation and oral interview with Deans and Heads of Departments in her university concerning the performance of secretarial staff revealed that most of
them do not possess relevant knowledge and competencies for the technology driven office of today. This problem, if not addressed, will ultimately render this vital category of office workers irrelevant in the university system hence this study.

This paper approached the discourse under the following sub-headings:
- Clarification of key words in the topic
- The university as a system
- Determinants of the quality of university training,
- Indices of workers’ relevance,
- Attributes of a good secretarial staff,
- Roles of university secretarial staff,
- Competencies needed by university secretarial staff to remain relevant in the system,
- Conclusion and recommendations.

Clarification of key words in the topic

To avoid any form of ambiguity or confusion, the key words used in the topic were clarified as follows:

- **Enhancing**: This is the process or act of improving or making something better. Robinson and Davidson (1999) defined enhancing as improving or increasing the value, quality or intensity of something (especially something that is already good). Operationally, the word is used in the topic to mean improving or increasing the usefulness of secretarial staff in the university system.

- **Relevance**: This is used to mean the value, necessity or indispensability of a person or product or a worker as a member of a team; this time secretarial staff in the university system. A product or worker who fails to perform as effectively and efficiently as expected has become valueless, irrelevant or unnecessary. Everyone knows the prominent role of salt in almost all meals but our Lord Jesus in Dickson (2011) had unequivocally affirmed that salt is only relevant (good) in cooking so long it retains its savour (performs the function of bringing out the taste in foods) otherwise it is thrown away and trodden under the feet of men as worthless and useless (Mat. 5:13). If an individual or a group of secretarial staff in the university system fail to suitably perform their roles, their relevance will wane and they will run the risk of being easily replaced. The same thing goes for all categories of workers in all organizations although the paper focuses on university secretarial staff.

- **Secretarial staff**: According to Ezenwafor and Okeke (2012), secretarial staff consist of staff of different nomenclatures and levels such as confidential/personal secretaries, stenographers, typists and computer operators whose duties revolve around different stages and functions undertaking in an office information processing.

Hornby in Obayi (2009) defined secretarial staff as office employees who deal with correspondence, keep records and assist supervisors to ensure progress of their organizations. Garrison (1977) affirmed that this category of office workers is in very high demand and are therefore found in almost all offices since the major function of the office for any organization centres on information processing and record keeping. Consequently, Nwosu (2000) and Harrison in Ezenwafor (2009) asserted that secretarial staff are the live wire or blood stream of every organization. The implication of this assertion is that no office can run efficiently and effectively without secretarial staff who understand and play their roles actively.

- **University**: The university is the highest educational institution in all nations of the world. It is the highest level or final resort for knowledge acquisition hence it is termed the citadel of learning. Ezenwafor and Okeke (2012) observed that the university is a complex institution; as complex as its root word the universe. This means that anything from the good, the bad and the ugly can be found in the university just as in the universe. Watkins and Watkins (1992) and Robinson and Davidson (1999) defined the university as a higher educational institution with authority to award degrees from bachelor to master and doctoral levels and usually having research facilities. The author’s over twenty years of service in the university shows that many Nigerian universities are lagging behind their counterparts in developed economies in terms of quality of staff, students, instruction and relevant facilities for instruction and research.

- **The university system**: A system is a set of interconnected or interrelated parts forming a complex whole (Robinson & Davidson, 1999). In simpler terms, a system is a collection of different components each performing a specific function but interdependently by working tandem with other sub-systems for the realization of organizational goals and objectives. For instance, the human body is referred to as a system because it consists of different parts with distinct functions yet working together in such a way that no one part can function independently of others. The university system consists of students from different parts of a nation, continent and even different parts of the globe as well as of different age groups, cultures, languages and disciplines. It also consists of both academic and non academic staff of different nomenclatures, ranks, ethnicity, cultures, age brackets, educational levels and personality traits. Each of the two broad groups that make
up the university system (students and staff) must accommodate and cooperate with others within and between in order to realize the objectives of the institution. The staff should demonstrate, in handling students and their matters, that they cannot be there without students and students should equally exhibit a clear understanding of the fact that they cannot be there without the staff. As the highest educational institution in any nation and a fortress for the transmission and preservation of knowledge, members (different component parts) of the university system are expected to be the best among their equals relative to knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes (Ezenwafor & Okeke, 2012).

Determinants Of The Quality Of University Training
Robinson and Davidson (1999) defined quality as the degree or extent of excellence of something. Every employer or organization is expected to have a standard of performance required of its employees which, if not measured up to by any employee, upsets and disrupts the efforts of the employer and other employees as well as crashes the organization. In addition, organizations should recruit the right caliber of workers for specific functions and provide suitable environment, infrastructure, relevant equipment and facilities for pursuing the attainment of their goals and objectives. The quality of university training is determined by the quality and number of academic and non academic staff, admission of qualified students according to the carriage capacity of different departments/programs, suitable offices for lecturers, suitable lecture halls, adequately equipped libraries and laboratories, among others. In addition, staff and student assessment should be objective and impersonal. Unfortunately, a major consideration for employment in different Nigerian establishments including universities and admission in tertiary institutions where the quota system applies is “Whom you know” and “Where you come from” (Onwuchekwa, 1993 and 1996). This system of recruitment and admission in the university coupled with inadequacy of relevant laboratory equipment, among others are the root cause of the falling standard of education generally and university education in particular in the country because, although other contributory factors are acknowledged, it is no gainsaying the fact that the major determinants of the quality of university education is the quality of staff (academic and non academic) and students (Ezekwesili, 2006 and Ezenwafor 2005 & 2006).

Indices of Employee Relevance
Several measures can be used to determine the relevance or otherwise of an employee. These include:

- **Type of worker:** Employers and employees need to realize that there are generally three types of workers found in all organizations. The first group of workers is the class-conscious people who only wish to identify with leading organizations – the university, bank, oil company, etc. This category of worker is satisfied to belong to the organization whether or not he/she is doing a service or disservice to the organization. The second group of workers are the income-conscious people whose major concern is the size of the take home package and so long as this take home package is fat, they are satisfied to remain in the organization regardless of the level at which they are contributing. The third group of workers comprises those who are progress conscious with determination to leave the organization and office better than they met it by making sure they play their roles effectively and efficiently. It will appear that the first two groups of workers who only take from without commensurately contributing to the survival and growth of their organizations are in greater number everywhere. Thus the group of workers to which an employee belongs is the first measure of his/her relevance or irrelevance.

- **Availability:** An office worker is expected to be at his/her duty post from the time work begins in the morning to the closing time. While it is important that employers and personnel managers should consider the personal circumstances and needs of employees (Onwuchekwa, 1993 and 1996), it is dangerous for an organization to retain a worker or workers who are frequently not at their duty posts when needed to perform the functions for which they are being paid. A worker who comes late to work always and is frequently absent from the duty post is a clog in the wheel of progress for any organization. Unfortunately, lateness to work and absenteeism have become the hallmark of workers in different organizations in Nigeria including the university. Consciously or unconsciously, such workers are automatically labeling themselves irrelevant.

- **Dutifulness and diligence:** Robinson and Davidson (1999) defined duty as something a person is or feels obliged to do as a moral or legal responsibility or a task to be performed especially in connection with a job. From this background, dutifulness can be seen as the quality of knowing and doing what is required of a worker in connection with his/her job regardless of convenience. A dutiful worker should make adequate arrangement for his/her duties to be covered and obtain permission from the supervisor if he/she must come late or be absent from duty. Workers that lack this quality
will not care whose ox is gored. Diligence, on the other hand, connotes careful hard-working effort (performing duties with care and serious effort). Nwaishienyi (1989) had rightly affirmed that it is not the time an employee puts into his/her work that matters but the efforts he/she puts into the time. It takes being available, dutiful and making careful hard-working effort, among other measures, for an employee to be considered relevant in the organization.

- **Up-grading and up-datedness:** The changing work environment of today resulting from the fast rate at which information and communication technologies have permeated all facets of the society demands that for continued relevance, every worker should continually upgrade his/her knowledge, skills and methodology to remain up-to-date in his/her chosen vocation. These are the two key issues in being or remaining relevant. A worker who does not know the current trend, required skills and methods in his/her field is everything but relevant. The up-grading and up-dating can be achieved through on-line training program, personal study and part time academic programs for which opportunities abound in the university for workers or professional seminars, workshops and conferences where experienced and functional members in the given profession serve as resource persons to acquaint the participants with the current trends. Members of the University Secretarial Staff Association should be thankful to their leaders for their efforts in organizing conferences and seminars as well as be open to be positively impacted for enhanced relevance.

**Roles of Secretarial Staff in a University**

Ezenwafor (2011) posited that functions of secretarial staff in a university cover production of different types of documents for the office, lecturers and students, proofreading the document for accuracy, disseminating, storing (traditionally or electronically) and retrieving stored documents when needed. Consequently, Ezenwafor and Okeke (2012) affirmed that the university deals with data and information (records) more than most other organizations and that secretarial staff are the key personnel involved in different stages of data and information processing in the university. Thus the roles of secretarial staff in a university can be grouped under:

- **Data generation or collection:** Data is the plural form of datum which refers to a set of raw facts that require processing to be meaningful and usable by an individual or a group of individuals. In the past, data collection was laborious and time consuming as it involved flipping through pages of bulky files in the office, travelling for personal contact and search and letter writing. Today, the process of data generation is reduced to pressing some buttons or keys of ICT hardware components or clicking options in a software component. Such data could be courses taken by individual or group of students, scores of individual or group of students in the courses taken, the credit load for each course, etc. Sometimes needed data could be sourced promptly and effortlessly from other institutions or organizations via the internet with same process of pressing buttons or clicking options of different ICT hardware and software components. Secretarial staff should not shy away from data generation as if it is an exclusive area for lecturers and students engaged in research work but should embrace it as a vital role whose performance will further expose them to different benefits of using the internet and generally up-grade them.

- **Data processing and interpretation:** Information is the result of processed data which is meaningful and usable for a given purpose. It would appear that different members of the university secretarial staff have not been able to appreciate their role in data processing and interpretation because of their myopic idea that the function only has to do with research. When generated data are not properly analyzed and interpreted, they serve no useful purpose. Data analysis and interpretation do not always involve statistical tools as some times simple mathematical tools and common sense are sufficient. University secretarial staff should prepare and readily go beyond the collection of data which they keep for some specialists to analyze and interpret to handle the latter as further assistance to their supervisors and employers.

- **Information and office management:** Management is the core role of all humans at all times and places. Where ever an individual finds himself/herself, it is his/her responsibility to take adequate care of all the things put in his/her charge and this is management. After creating the earth and the visible and invisible things therein, God Almighty planted a garden and put the man He formed in it “To dress and keep it” (Gen. 2:15), this simply means to manage it. The university deals more extensively with information than other organizations and secretarial staff play key roles in both managing information and utilization of technology for the purpose (Nwosu, 2000). This is what earned secretarial programs in training institutions the new title of Office Technology Management (OTM) and the graduates as Office Technology Managers rather than Secretaries. The information management role covers creation of all types of documents, dissemination of the documents, storing, retrieval of stored documents and modification of existing documents as new information becomes available. Obayi (2009) remarked that filing is the live wire to an organization and defined it as an accumulation of knowledge, a reservoir of information that serves an organization as a memory serves a human being.
Filing acts as a cerebral centre for storing facts about events that have occurred or future events being planned. It aims at the collection of information for reference and preservation. It is not just enough to store information; the storage system should be suitable and easy to manage. Consequently, Obayi (2009) asserted that before filing can be effective in performing its several functions, some important issues like simplicity, security, compactness and comprehensiveness, clear cross-referencing, space, economy, accessibility and adaptability must be adequately considered. This corroborated the views of Whitehead (1973) that good filing system should possess the characteristics of simplicity, security, compactness, clear cross-reference, systematic tracer and follow-up as well as appropriate classification.

At the moment, there are three types of offices existing side by side in the Nigerian environment. These are the traditional office, the automated or electronic office and the transition office. Information-management in the traditional office involves use of papers, file jackets, file cabinets, naming and numbering of files but in the automated office, information management involves use of different hardware and software technological resources because all the processes are computerized.

On the other hand, in the transition office, information management is mid way between traditional and automated because the processes are only partly computerized (Nwosu, 2000 and Obayi, 2009). The current trend in information management, however, involves the use of technological resources which every secretarial staff should endeavour to become very conversant with in order to discharge the roles effectively.

- Treating correspondence: Robinson and Davidson (1999) defined correspondence as letters received or sent out of an office. In the past, treating correspondence was the major role performed by secretarial staff and they were mostly concerned with different functions relative to reproducing manuscripts emanating from their supervisors as outgoing mails from the office as well as receiving and treating in-coming mails as directed by their supervisors. Most of these secretarial staff, because of their training and educational levels, could not use their discretion for anything but had to be told what to do every inch of the way and when the supervisor was not there to give instructions (and sometimes closely monitor and supervise them), no work would be done (Ezenwafor & Okeke, 2012). This is not the same today as secretarial staff are required to be creative, innovative and discreet so they can treat correspondence expertly with little or no supervision.

- Organizing and clerking meetings: Shaw and Smith (1979) observed that the word meeting is susceptible of many connotations but that in a more specific sense, it means an assembly of persons which may arise in circumstances infinitely diverse in character and combination. They remarked that a meeting may be fortuitous and casual or organized and contrived with objects which may be as various as are the interests which are common to the generality of mankind. The authors stressed that an assembly may gather for the purpose of discussion or social interaction, entertainment, aesthetic interest, receiving instruction on specific issues or to participate in the administration of public or private affairs. Harding (1985) defined meeting as an arena for oral communication on all manner of topics which is used in business for a variety of purposes.

Supporting Shaw and Smith (1979), Sharp and Hornby in Obayi (2009) defined a meeting as an assembly of at least two persons for a lawful purpose at a certain date, time and place. Omotosho (1979) explained that meetings are held so that people can share ideas, express views on topics raised or offer suggestions or solutions to problems. Little (1977) posited that meetings form a major part of communications within the modern business and that all secretaries should be familiar with the necessary procedure for a successful meeting. All categories of secretarial staff are involved in organizing and conducting meetings from preparing and serving notice, agenda, collecting and assembling relevant data and information that will facilitate discussions or solution of problems at meetings, to clerking meetings, producing the minutes and distributing them to all entitled to the copies. To this effect, Obayi (2009) observed that all meetings must follow proper procedures for validity. He explained that a meeting is valid if all legal requirements for its conduct are satisfied. To effectively perform the role of organizing and clerking meetings, all secretarial staff should familiarize themselves with the relevant procedures for the different types of meetings, related terminologies and how to prepare good minutes.

- Handling telecommunication and postal services: Austin (1983) reported that control of telecommunication services in Britain moved from the Post Office to the British Telecommunication in 1981 following which services and charges of the post office were published annually in the Post Office Guide while the British Telecommunication issued separate guide covering available telephone services and their charges. The same thing happened in Nigeria. One government outfit (the P & T) covered postal and telecommunication services until 1985 when it was split into two establishments as the Nigerian Telecommunications Ltd. (NITEL) for telephone services and Nigerian Postal Services (NIPOST) for postal services. Services of these establishments are constantly used by different establishments including the university. Consequently, all categories of university secretarial staff should be conversant with the postal and telecommunication services provided as well as their charges to enable them perform related functions promptly and efficiently as some of them are found to
be inefficient in performing such functions (Ezenwafor & Okeke, 2011 and 2012).

Attributes of a good secretarial staff
Different roles of university secretarial staff have been outlined and discussed above but their effective performance requires certain attributes. Obayi (2009) posited that success in business requires ability to maintain composure when things go wrong (like saying ‘no’ in a tactful manner just to soothe the feelings of an irate customer, colleague or client), ability to be considerate and tolerant of others even when they are annoying and exhibit patience and resilience under extreme pressure. Supporting Obayi, Egbokhare (2011) outlined attributes of a good secretary under two classifications of business and personal. Business attributes include secretarial and language skills, organizing skills, efficiency, reliability, responsibility, discretion, initiative, punctuality, resilience, enthusiasm, adaptability and interest in business, among others. The personal attributes include being smart, tactful, neat, friendly, helpful, well informed or knowledgeable, courteous, polite and observant, among others. The author’s assessment as supervisor of university secretarial staff and their lecturer in university part-time programs and findings of the interview with deans/faculty secretaries and heads of departments revealed that most of the secretarial staff lack desirable personal attributes. Consequently, they should all aspire to possess the foregoing desirable attitudes and attributes for continued relevance.

Competencies Needed By University Secretarial Staff for Enhanced Relevance
Egbokhare (2011) remarked that some of the local realities of our time are different types of reforms which have led to retrenchment or down-sizing or right-sizing in both private and public sectors. The author concluded that inevitably, those employees who lost their jobs in the exercise are the ones who have become obsolete either because technology or knowledge has left the behind since, in the present knowledge economy, what a person knows is more important than who the person is or where he/she lives. Egbokhare cited striking quotations by notable persons about this knowledge economy, thus “About 80% of the fastest growing jobs will require some post secondary education” (Spelling – US Secretary of Education).

“It is knowledge derived from information that gives you a competitive edge” (Bill Gates).

The author asserted that the tools crucial to improving productivity are becoming more and more complex with each new generation and, therefore, require more knowledge and training to get the most out of them. Further, he posited that as the knowledge age deepens, the only difference between countries and markets will be skill levels, education and the level of empowerment of the workforce. Consequently, how well people thrive in today’s workplace depends more on their positioning in the global skills and knowledge economy than location. Competency is the ability of a student or worker to accomplish tasks, find solution and apply them effectively to problems. It comprises components that are acquired through training (knowledge and skills), components that are difficult to alter (attitudes and beliefs), aptitude (verbal, numerical and spatial), skills and abilities (thinking and leadership), knowledge (general, professional and organizational), among others. Robinson and Davidson (1999) defined competence and competency as capability or efficiency in performing assigned functions or duties. Also, the National Board for Technical Education (1989) stated that secretarial education is the type of education that equips students with vocational skills, work competencies and socio-psychological skills for inter-personal relations.

Ezenwafor and Okeke (2011) reported that confidential secretaries need secretarial competencies, office technology management competencies, communication competencies, management competencies, personality competencies and human relation competencies for effective performance in today’s office. The author’s observational assessment and interview with deans and heads of departments in the university system revealed that most of the secretarial staff do not possess much of the needed competencies. These competencies are discussed further below:

- **Secretarial competencies**: These include keyboarding ability (speed and accuracy), ability to create mailable documents with effective display and format, ability to proofread and edit documents, ability to file and promptly retrieve documents from the file, ability to keep track of files, ability to suitably handle correspondence, ability to draft routine letters, ability to clerk meetings and produce suitable minutes, among others (Njoku 2000 & Obayi, 2009).

- **Office technology management competencies**: Technology is the application of practical sciences to industry or commerce including the methods, theories and practices governing such application, total knowledge and skills available to any human society for industry, art, science, etc. Wikipedia (2012) defined technology as the making, modification or improvement applied to activity or behavior, usage, knowledge of tools, machines, techniques, crafts, systems, methods of organization or environmental modifications that solve a problem, improve existing solution to a problem and achieve or perform a specific function. It can also refer to the collection of such tools, machinery, modifications, environmental arrangement and procedures. From the foregoing, it can be seen that technology connotes a lot of things including equipment, practices and
procedures adopted at any given time. Office technology covers all electronic equipment and facilities that facilitate office information processing as well as the procedures adopted in utilizing them. The office technology management competencies needed by university secretarial staff include ability to connect hardware components, ability to boot and shut down computer, ability to effectively use input devices, ability to connect and use printer and relevant equipment for duplication, ability to use secondary storage devices, ability to use the internet for data collection and e-mailing, ability to prevent viral infection and generally care for the computer and other technological equipment, ability to use software such as word processor, spread sheet and data-base management, among others.

- **Communication competencies:**
  Communication is the process of transmitting information from one person or place to another. Nnabuife (2009) posited that communication plays an invaluable role both within and outside the organization towards goal accomplishment to facilitate achievement or furtherance of an organization’s objectives. Communication can be categorized into oral, written, sign and electronic. Osso in Agboola and Ademiluyi (2011) observed that communication is more than passing information to a receiver and involves dialogue and social exchange. Communication can only be effective when the intended message is received, correctly interpreted and understood, accepted and appropriately acted upon by the receiver and confirmed by feedback. The issue of communication is very vast, therefore, for want of time and space, the discussion is directed to the communication competencies needed by university secretarial staff for enhanced relevance. These include the ability to understand the official language, ability to use oral communication effectively, ability to effectively use written communication, ability to spell words correctly in written communication, ability to pronounce words correctly and clearly in oral communication, ability to use suitable gestures to communicate, ability to communicate with facial expressions, ability to communicate orally with adequate tone and ability to write legibly and logically in written communication, among others. The author’s findings as university secretarial supervisor and lecturer revealed that most university secretarial staff lack relevant communication competencies. This is confirmed by Bollag (2002) who reported that employers are widely complaining about the continued fall in the quality and communication skills of Nigerian university graduates, Ezekwesili (2006) and Azikiwe (2008) who affirmed that the nation’s education system (with the university at the apex) has failed to adequately equip graduates for the challenging work environment of the present day.

- **Management competencies:** All human endeavours require good management for proper functioning. A manager, according to Obayi (2009), is expected to possess special abilities in order to succeed. All workers in an organization, whether designated managers or not, must practice management of their different work tools and facilities, their work environment, etc. University secretarial staff need management competencies such as the ability to protect office documents from loss or willful destruction, ability to properly handle and adequately maintain their work equipment and facilities, ability to manage the work environment by properly arranging furniture, equipment, etc., ability to maintain different items of office furniture, ability to select suitable equipment and other devices for work, ability to procure relevant office stationery and supplies, ability to suitably use office hours and ability to maintain confidentiality of office records, ability to organize personal efforts and energy as well as those of subordinates and ability to persistently seek solutions to problems, among others.

- **Personality competencies:** Robinson and Davidson (1999) defined personality as a person’s nature or disposition; the qualities that give one’s character individuality. Personality refers to all the physical, mental and emotional characteristics of an individual as an integrated whole, especially as they are presented to other people. Knowledge and skills are not enough for a worker’s happiness and satisfaction on the job. Happiness, job satisfaction and self fulfillment of a worker are closely linked to his/her personality which, according to Jennings (1981) is what a person is, the total sum of a person’s mental, physical and emotional experiences. Personality is formed from childhood and is affected by daily experiences which bring about gradual changes such as personality development or improvement. Personality competencies cover all the physical, mental and emotional abilities possessed and employed by a person in work, relationship and other life situations. University secretarial staff constantly relate with different individuals and groups of individuals in the course of discharging their functions and need personality competencies for good success. Such personality competencies include ability to always maintain good appearance, ability to demonstrate team spirit, ability to speak and deal truthfully at all times, ability to maintain cheerfulness and be approachable, ability to tolerate other people, ability to innovate workable ideas and processes, ability to use initiative, ability to apply self-control at all times, ability to respect superiors and others, ability to persistently work even when extra time is needed and ability to be polite all the time, among others.

- **Human relations competencies:** Human relations is the interaction which occur among people in an environment in spite of conflicts or cooperative behaviours. Fulmar (1977) posited that human relations is the process of dealing with people in such
a way as to assist in accomplishing their collective goals. Human relations focus attention mostly with human interaction in the work environment with the hope of understanding fellow workers and clients, relating and dealing harmoniously with them and adapting to environments or situations as they come so as to facilitate the achievement of the goals of individual employees and the organization. Secretarial functions of answering calls, treating mail and attending visitors, relating with the public, relating with superiors, equals, subordinates and colleagues in general, etc. require human relations competencies. For university secretarial staff, needed human relations competencies for enhanced relevance include ability to understand other people, ability to treat students as important members of the university community or system, ability for team work, ability to protect the interest of the supervisor, ability to show respect to the supervisor at all times, ability to get along with others, ability to be open and sociable, ability to be selfless, ability to listen and hear other people’s point of view, etc.

CONCLUSION
This paper has highlighted the lack of relevant competencies for effective duty performance in today’s office among university secretarial staff and emphasized the need for them all, in appreciation of the elevated status of the university (an institution known all over the world as the citadel of learning), to enhance their relevance by pursuing the acquisition of these competencies in order not just to retain their jobs but to contribute maximally to the achievement of the goals and objectives of the university and enjoy job satisfaction and self fulfillment. It has fully treated several measures of workers’ relevance to alert the audience on practical issues in work performance to individually and collectively address. The paper further outlined attributes of a good secretarial staff and discussed roles of secretarial staff in the university and finally the competencies they need to direct their focus. It is the conclusion of this paper that given the globalized and highly competitive nature of today’s world of work which is driven by information and communications technologies coupled with the paucity of employment opportunities globally, a university secretarial staff who fails to pursue enhanced relevance will eventually become obsolete, unwanted and treated as such.

RECOMMENDATIONS
In view of the importance of retaining one’s job and achieving job satisfaction and self fulfillment, it is recommended that:

1. Individual members of the University Secretarial Staff Association should engage in a self-assessment to determine which of the three groups of workers highlighted in the paper they belong as well as their competency levels in the identified areas and make necessary adjustments.

2. Individual secretarial staff (irrespective of rank and experience) should pursue enhanced relevance in their duty performance by pursuing the acquisition of the highlighted competencies.

3. The University Secretarial Staff Association should create awareness of the need among the members as well as organize seminars, workshops and conferences to enlighten them.

4. Authorities of universities should provide in-service-training opportunities for their secretarial staff as well as support them in their up-grading and up-dating endeavours for mutual benefits.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY
The major limitation of this study is the fact that interview of Deans and Heads of Departments on the performance of their secretaries was done orally and in only one university. However, this does not in any way affect the generalizability of the findings since the author’s personal observation covers secretaries from other universities in her regular and part time classes.

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