

An Empirical Analysis of Factors Influencing the Career Choice of Undergraduates in Secretarial Option of Business Education Programme in Nigeria Universities

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Abstract

Secretarial occupation has always been an enviable profession. This is because it is recognized to the extent that no office or establishment can function without the services of secretaries. As indispensable as it is, it has been observed that not many undergraduate students of business education in Nigeria universities opt to study secretarial education. This study is necessitated by the low preference many undergraduate students of business education in Nigeria universities have for secretarial education. This trend is posing a lot of threats for the future of the secretarial profession in the 21st Century, Nigeria. The objective of the study, therefore, was to investigate the determinants of secretarial option among business education students in Nigeria universities. The survey research design was adopted for the study. Three research questions were raised to guide the study and three null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The entire one hundred and eighty (180) 200 level students of accounting, marketing and secretarial education from some selected Nigerian universities offering business education programme were used for the study. One hundred and sixty nine copies of questionnaire, representing 94% which were properly completed were retrieved and subjected to statistical analyses. Weighted Mean was used to answer the research questions. Weighted mean of 2.5 and above was used as benchmark for agree while weighted mean of less than 2.5 represented disagree category. Simple regression was used to test all the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed among others that the society perceives that secretarial profession is still feministic and therefore attracts low prestige among men in the society as compare to other professions. Based on the findings, the study concluded that secretarial option of business education in Nigeria universities is still very unpopular to the society, prospective students and business education undergraduate students. In view of this, the study recommends that the Association of Business Educators of Nigeria (ABEN), Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators (ICSA) and National Association of Professional Secretarial Staff of Nigeria (NAPSSON) in collaboration with the guidance and counselors should make adequate and sustained publicity in the primary and secondary schools across the nation in order to increase the awareness of both the society and students on the benefits of secretarial education to the society and the practitioners with the intention to popularize the profession.

Key words: Career choice and secretarial education

1. Introduction

Finding a balance between the demand for and the supply of competent secretarial educators and administrators has become a problem not only for the professional secretaries in Nigeria, but also for institutions that produce these graduates in tertiary institutions of learning (Patrick 2009). As far back as 2000, Amoor (2009) notes that the enrolment of business education students into secretarial option of business education in Nigeria universities was sharply declining. This anomaly gave birth to acute shortage of competent secretarial educators and administrators who are knowledgeable and versatile in office technology, information and communication skills to teach in tertiary institutions of learning or work in office occupation. This also poses a lot of dangers for future secretarial profession in 21st century in Nigeria.

The purpose of this study was to examine empirically the influence of societal attitudes, shorthand skill and word processing skill on business education student's choice of secretarial option in Nigeria universities. In order to attract and retain students into secretarial option of business education programme in Nigeria universities, it is essential to identify the variables that influence their choices of option. Armed with this information, the Nigeria universities that offer business education will be able to improve and develop areas of the business education curriculum that are responsible for attracting students to secretarial option.

Several scholars conducted studies in this area which focused on gender factor, parental influence, peer-group influence, interest, potential, reputation but they did not focus on the influence of societal attitudes, shorthand skills and word processing skill. Hence this forms the background of the study.

2. Statement of the Problem

The department of Vocational and Technical Education in the Nigeria universities offers business education programme. This programme consists of accounting, marketing and secretarial education options. A closer observation by the researcher revealed that the majority of business education students prefer accounting or marketing education to secretarial option. Even some of the students who eventually choose secretarial option do so on the account of their failure to be registered in accounting option because of entrance requirement of mathematics. This study, therefore, analyses the influence of societal attitudes, shorthand and word processing skills on business education students' choice of secretarial option in Nigeria universities so as to ascertain the cause of the low preference of business education students for secretarial option.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is predicated on the "Social Learning Theory of Academic Decision-Making Process and Career Choice", propounded by Mitchell and Krumboltz (1990). The theorists opined that academic decision-making process and career choice hinged entirely on several motivational factors. This theory viewed motivational factors as effective tool for academic and career decision-making processes. Mitchell and Krumboltz (1990) identified the following variables such as environmental conditions, social and economic factors, skills, interest, abilities, learning experience, societal perception, teachers' influence, remuneration and habits that motivate educational decision-making process. This theory was supported by Reeve (1996) and Ainley, (2004) who maintained that there are individual characteristics or dispositions that students bring to their learning, such as their skills, interest, personality traits and the desire to acquire a particular knowledge and competence.

The theory emphasizes that one's own motive, in other words, self-value is another factor that is helpful in making an academic and career choice. This theory also received the support of scholars in Nigeria such as Modi (2008), Barry (2009) and Igbinedion (2011) who all opined that motivation factors play significant role in the students' choice of academic and career. The scholars emphasized that students search for courses that will allow them to exercise their skills and abilities, express their attitudes and values and to take on agreeable problems and avoid that which is found to be disagreeable. In this theory, students' academic choice is centred on motivational factors such as skills, abilities, attitudes, values, interest, parental influence and peer advice. Brown (2010) who is in support of the theory propounded by Mitchell and Krumboltz (1990) stresses the relevance of motivational factors in students' academic and career choice.

The scholar states that a person's behaviour is determined by an interaction between his personality and the characteristics of his environment. Brown (2010) explained further that there are three motivational factors that are believed to influence or regulate an individual choice of educational programme and career. These include self-efficacy, outcome expectations and personal goal. Though the list of motivational factors for academic and career choice are inexhaustible since other researchers identified several factors that can influence students' choice of academic programme and career, but given that the current study focused on the factors that influence business education students' choice of secretarial option in Colleges of Education in Nigeria by these theorists provided the primary theoretical underpinning for the study.

4. Literature review

Education generally empowers and develops the citizenry to acquire skills and knowledge that would prepare them for the world of work. It is a process of leading and initiating people to acquire necessary skills, facts, knowledge, habits and attitudes that will make them co-exist with others as useful and productive members of the society. Ohiwerei and Azih (2010) views education generally as the totality of life experience that man acquires and which enables him to cope with and derive satisfaction from living in the world. This is because it enables him to achieve social competence and optimum individual development. These assertions have in no small measure supported the existence of secretarial education which is charged with the responsibility of providing the desired skills, facts, knowledge and attitudes for the members of the society to be productive.

Broken down, secretarial education, an integral part of vocational business education which is subset of general education, can be seen as the development of person's head, heart and hands for his self fulfillment and optimum services to humanity. The National Board for Technical Education (1989) clearly states that secretarial education is the type of education that equips students with vocational skills, effective work competencies and

socio-psychological works skills essential for inter-personal relations. Chukumezie (2000) agrees that secretarial education revolved around job skills, employability and self-dependency. Okolo (2009) observes that secretarial education provides students with adequate skills, information and competencies needed to function well in office occupation. According to Aliyu (2006), secretarial education is offered in commercial secondary schools, colleges of education, polytechnics and Universities, primarily to educate and train students to become competent secretarial teachers (Business Teacher Education) and secretarial administrators with appropriate skills and knowledge to take up a career both in teaching, business and office occupation.

Adamu (2008) asserts that secretarial education is the art of guiding the office personnel on the use of appropriate means in his environment in order to achieve his purpose. Therefore, secretarial education is an academic discipline that provides students with appropriate skills, abilities and competences both mental and physical, that equip the learner with knowledge and makes him effective in office and educational challenges. Patrick (2009) views secretarial education as a discipline that provides students with adequate skills, information and competences needed to function well in office occupation and stressed that Secretarial education is a component of vocational education that prepares students for work in secretarial/office procedures in an organization.

In a summary, secretarial education is a vocational education that provides the recipient with adequate knowledge in office administration and management, skills in office technology and information systems, competence and creativity in public relations and attitudes in handling classified information for teaching, effective and efficient supportive service delivery in office occupation and self-reliance.

Choice is referred to as selection made from available options depending on which are preferred. Ozbligin et al (2005) suggest that two conditions are required to making a choice such as: availability of alternative options and an individual preference between the options. According to Agarwala (2008) numbers of options available to a certain individual depend upon individual and motivational factors such as family background, attitudes labor market, state of the economy. Students' choice of option in business education programme in Nigeria is constrained by many motivational factors which consist of societal perception, prestige or reputation, skills, values, environment, remunerations and interest.

4.1 Determinants of students' academic choice

Determinants are referred to as factors or variables that help individuals or students in academic decision-making processes. Many factors determine whether the students are motivated or not motivated to choose or not to choose an academic programme in tertiary institutions of learning. It is pertinent to note that no single theoretical interpretation of motivation explains all aspects of students' motivation or lack of motivation. Different theoretical interpretations do, however, shed light on why some students in a given learning situation are more likely to want to learn some courses than others. Furthermore, each theoretical interpretation can serve as the basis for the students' determinants to choose academic programme in tertiary institutions of learning.

According to Mitchell and Krumboltz (1990) whose theoretical framework was used for this study identified the following determinants that influence students' choice of academic and occupational career among others such as teachers' influence, societal attitudes and expected occupational remuneration as briefly explained below:

Societal factors, such as value, attitudes, and practices play significant role in choosing educational programme in tertiary institutions. Students tend to choose courses that the society places high values upon. These courses may include medical education, law education, engineering education, architectural education. McCrindle, (2001) shares the same view with the current researcher that vocational and technical education subjects were generally seen by the society, students, Career Advisers and Principals as less intellectually demanding and less emotionally stressful in that the subjects were more likely taken for enjoyment and as a break from a more rigorous academic load than for any other reason by the majority of enrolled students. The contributions of the researcher is significant though the researcher did not advance reasons why the society places low value on other courses liked secretarial studies.

Additionally, many students were uncertain whether vocational and technical education subjects counted towards the university entry score and tended to steer away from them because of this. Stokes, Wierenga, and Wyn, (2003) contributed that generally, students, parents and Career Advisers shared the perception that vocational and technical education was for the non-academically oriented student. Therefore, those enrolling in these subjects were sometimes referred to as "drop kicks," "drop outs" and "bludgers by the society. Esene and Ohiwerei (2005) shared the same view that the public perception of the secretarial education, which forms part of vocational education, is education for the dropouts.

In support of this statement, Afeti (2006), asserted that the impression created by the governments that the primary aim of vocational education then was to keep dropouts from secondary schools off the streets instead of projecting this type of vocational training as an effective strategy to train skilled workers for employment, self-

reliance and for poverty alleviation in the society. This misconception by the society, it is observed, has contributed immensely to making this arm of vocational education unpopular in the Nigerian tertiary institution in particular and the society in general

Obioma (2009) said that secretarial profession, despite the general improvement in the qualifications possessed by the modern secretaries as a result of modern facilities and technologies is still erroneously regarded by the uninformed society as the profession for the academic misfits and persons from the lower rung of the society. The graduates are not accorded the same recognition and treatment as their counterparts from other professions which may likely be responsible for students' choice of secretarial vocational education in tertiary institutions. Brown (2010) stated that professions that are highly respected in the society influences the career choice of the students.

In the early 1980s, Secretarial education however, has suffered the misconception in the society that it was strictly required and meant for the dropouts, unintelligent and under-achievers. Worse of all, Obiunu and Ebunu (2010) contribute that individual may choose a career because of the perception of the society. Some individuals choose careers based on the value the society places on the course of study. For example, the society places values on courses such as law education, accounting education, engineering education, medical education. This societal values influence students' career choice.

In Nigeria, according to Issa and Nwalo (2010), many youths go into unsuitable careers due to the prestige the society attach to certain jobs. Consequently, many of the youths are unsuited for their careers as they usually find themselves in jobs where they could not satisfy their value needs and when this occurs, the youths constitute nuisance to themselves and their employers. They are usually unable to contribute meaningfully to the society and ultimately become liability to the nation.

5 Objectives of the Study

The study has the following objectives:

1. to find out the influence of societal attitudes on business education students' preference for secretarial option in Nigeria universities.
2. to find out the influence of shorthand skills on business education students' preference for secretarial option
3. to find out the influence of word-processing skills on business education students' preference for secretarial option in Nigeria universities.

5.1. Research Questions

The following research questions were raised:

1. To what extent do societal attitudes influence business education students' preference for secretarial option in Nigeria universities?
2. To what extent do shorthand skills influence business education students' preference for secretarial option in Nigeria universities?
3. To what extent do word-processing influence business education students' preference for secretarial option in Nigeria universities?

5.2 Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance

1. There is no significant influence of societal attitudes on business education students' preference for secretarial option in Nigeria universities.
2. There is no significant influence of shorthand skills on business education students' preference for secretarial option in Nigeria universities.
3. There is no significant influence of word-processing skills on business education students' preference for secretarial option in Nigeria universities.

6. Methodology

The descriptive research design of the survey type was used for the study. The population for the study was 180. This comprised of twenty-eight (28) 200 level business education students from Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, sixty-seven (67) 200 level business education students from Abubakar Tafawa Barewa University (ATBU) Bauchi, and eighty-five (85) 200 level business education students from University of Nigeria (UNN) Nsukka. The population was considered manageable and therefore used as the sample size for the study. This was in line with Anikweze (1995), Alamu and Olukosi (2008) who opine that if the population number is small and manageable, it becomes synonymous with the sample. Thus, neither sample size nor sampling technique was required from the population.

A self designed questionnaire was used to elicit responses from the respondents. Section A dealt with the demographic data of the respondents while section B consisted of eight questionnaire items each on societal attitudes, shorthand skills and word-processing skills. The reliability of the instrument was ensured through split half reliability method and reliability co-efficient of 0.75 was obtained. The three research questions were analyzed using weighted mean. In the course of answering research questions, “strongly agree” and “agree” were classified as “agree”. Similarly, “strongly disagree” and “disagree” were classified as “disagree”. A weighted mean of 2.5 and above was considered as an index for agree, while the weighted mean of less than 2.5 was considered as disagree.

On the rating of the instrument, the researcher used a 4-point rating scale with 4 points for strongly agree (SA), 3 points for agree (A), 2 points for Disagree (D) and 1 point for strongly disagree (SD). The questionnaire was personally administered by the researcher and 169 copies, representing 94% were duly completed and returned. Data collected were analyzed using simple logistic Regression.

7. Results

Out of the 180 copies of data distributed, 169 copies were successfully completed and subjected to statistical analysis. The result of the analyses is presented in tables 1-6:

7.1. Research Question One: To what extent do societal attitudes influence business education undergraduate students’ choice of secretarial option in Nigeria universities?

The answer to question one is shown in table 1:

Table 1. Respondents’ opinions on influence of societal attitudes on Business Education undergraduate Students

Option	Total Score	Mean Score	SD	Decision	Remarks
Agree	411	3.3			
Disagree	89	0.7	0.62	3.3 > 2.5	
Total	500	4			

Source: field work (2014)

Table 1 shows that the respondents who agreed that societal attitudes toward secretarial profession influence business education undergraduate students’ low preference for secretarial option scored 411 points representing 3.3 weighted mean while the respondents who had contrary views scored 89 points with weighted mean of 0.7, with mean deviation value of 0.62. From the analysis, the result revealed that the calculated weighted mean of 3.3 is greater than 2.5 ($3.3 > 2.5$). This signified that societal attitudes toward secretarial profession have influence on business education undergraduate students’ low preference for secretarial option in Nigeria universities.

7.2. Research Question two: To what extent does shorthand skill influence business education undergraduate students’ low preference for secretarial option in Nigeria universities?

The answer to this question is presented in table 2:

Table 2: Respondents' opinion on influence of Shorthand skill on Business Education undergraduate Students

Option	Total Score	Mean Score	SD	Decision	Remarks
Agree	473	2.9			
Disagree	173	1.1	0.67	2.9>2.5	
Total	646	4			

Source: field work (2014)

Table 2 presents the summary of the data used in answering research question two. The total agree stood at 473 indicating a weighted mean of 2.9. The respondents who had contrary views scored 173 with a weighted mean of 1.1. The mean deviation value was 0.67. From this analysis, the weighted mean was $2.9 > 2.5$ index score. This implied that shorthand skill has influence on business education undergraduate students' low preference for secretarial option in Nigeria universities.

7.3. Research Question three: To what extent does word-processing skill influence business education undergraduate students' low preference for secretarial option in Nigeria universities?

The answer to research question three is presented in table 3:

Table 3: Respondents' opinions on influence of Word-Processing Skill on Business Education undergraduate Students

Option	Total Score	Mean Score	SD	Decision	Remarks
Agree	176	1.8			
Disagree	225	2.2	0.57	2.2<2.5	
Total	401	4			

Source: field work 2014

Table 3 shows total agree 176 with a weighted mean score of 1.8 while total disagree stood at 225 with weighted mean of 2.2. The mean deviation value was 0.57. From this analysis, the weighted mean was $2.2 < 2.5$ index score. This implied that word-processing has no influence on business education undergraduate students' low preference for secretarial option in Nigeria universities.

8.0. Testing of hypotheses:

8.1. Hypothesis one : There is no significant influence of societal attitudes on business education undergraduate students' low preference for secretarial option in Nigeria universities

Table 4: Test of Influence of Societal Attitudes on Business Education Undergraduate Students' Low Preference for Secretarial Option in Nigeria Universities

Model	B	Std. Error	T	R-crit	R-cal	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Sig.
Secretarial option	1.531	.253	6.040	0.088	.786	.618	.606	.000
Societal Attitudes	.427	.092	2.222					

Source: Field Work (2014)

The result of the data used to determine the influence of societal attitudes on business education undergraduate students' low preference for secretarial option in Nigeria universities shows the Constant value of 1.531 as against .427 for societal attitudes with the t value of 6.040 against 2.222. The R-cal was .786 found to be greater than table value of R-crit. 0.088. The R² was .606, indicating that 61% of the variance in the undergraduate students' low preference for secretarial option in Nigeria universities is determined by the societal attitudes. Hence the null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

8.2. Hypothesis two: There is no significant influence of shorthand skill on business education undergraduate students' low preference for secretarial option in Nigeria universities

Table 5: Test of Influence of Shorthand Skill on Business Education Undergraduate Students' Low Preference for Secretarial Option in Nigeria Universities

Model	B	Std. Error	T	R-crit	R-cal	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Sig.
Secretarial option	1.531	.253	6.040	0.088	.753	.567	.537	.000
Shorthand skill	.564	.092	2.978					

Source: Field Work (2014)

Analysis of data used to test null hypothesis two shows the Constant Beta value of 1.531 against .564 for shorthand skill with the t-value of 6.040 and 2.978 respectively. The R-cal value was greater than the R-critical value (.753>0.088). The result shows that R² value of .537, indicating approximately that 54% of the variance of undergraduate students low preference for secretarial option in Nigeria universities is as a result of shorthand skill. The null hypothesis is therefore, rejected.

8.3 Hypothesis three: There is no significant influence of word-processing on business education undergraduate students' low preference for secretarial option in Nigeria universities.

Table 6: Test of Influence of Word-Processing Skill on Business Education Undergraduate Students' Low Preference for Secretarial Option in Nigeria Universities

Model	B	Std. Error	T	R-crit	R-cal	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Sig.
Secretarial option	1.531	.253	6.040	0.088	0.087	0.008	0.007	.066
Word Processing skill	.374	.294	1.253					

(Source: Field Work(2014)

Table 6 tested null hypothesis six which revealed the Constant Beta value of 1.531 against .374 with t value of 6.040 against 1.253 for word processing respectively. The R- Cal value of 0.087 was found to be less than the R-crit. value of 0.088. The R² was 0.007 indicating that only 0.7% of the variance in undergraduate students' low preference for secretarial option in Nigeria universities is not determined by word-processing skill. Based on this result, the null hypothesis was therefore accepted.

9.0. Discussion of the Findings

The first finding of the study shows that societal attitude toward secretarial profession has significant influence on business education undergraduate students' low preference for secretarial option in Nigeria universities. The study reveals that the society places more value on accounting education, medical education, legal education etc than secretarial education. The higher reputation place on accounting education than secretarial education by the society encourages majority of business education students to opt for accounting instead of secretarial education. The study also reveals that the society still perceives that secretarial education is meant for women or less intelligent students who are not academically sound to study sciences in the university. The works of Afeti (2006), Issa and Nwalo (2010) have supported the findings of the current study by observing that many youths go into unsuitable careers due to the prestige the society attach to certain jobs.

The second finding of the study revealed that shorthand skill is responsible for business education undergraduate students' low preference for secretarial option in Nigeria universities. The study further revealed that majority of business education undergraduate students would have opted for the course if only shorthand is entirely removed or ninety-five percent de-emphasized from the curriculum of business education. In support of this finding, Udoh (2006) recommended outright removal of shorthand from the curriculum of business education. According

Udoh (2006), the removal of shorthand from the curriculum of business education will improve enrolment of business education undergraduate students into secretarial option in Nigeria universities.

However, the current researcher is of the opinion that lack of business education students' skill in shorthand is not responsible for low enrolment of students into secretarial option. The current researcher observed that lack of awareness of the importance of shorthand skill by business education undergraduate students despite the influx of modern office technology and information systems, is rather responsible for low enrolment of students into secretarial option in Nigeria universities.

The third finding of the study revealed that word processing has no significant influence on business education undergraduate students' low preference in secretarial option in Nigeria universities. The study showed that with the introduction of computer replacing manual typewriter, the majority of business education undergraduate students offer word processing. This is an indication that word processing skill is not responsible for low enrolment of business education undergraduate students into secretarial option in Nigeria universities.

10. Conclusion

It is evident from the revelation of the study that secretarial option of business education in Nigeria universities is still very unpopular to society, prospective students and business education undergraduate students. This is so, especially when compared with courses like accounting, medical, architecture, engineering and legal education. However, the low popularity of secretarial education in Nigeria universities among the business education undergraduate students is due more to ignorance on the lucrativeness of the course in the world of work. Ignorance of the society, prospective students and business education undergraduate students of what secretarial profession is all about in the world of work is the major factor influencing business education undergraduate students' low enrolment into secretarial option of business education programme in Nigeria universities.

11. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is hereby recommended that: -

1. The Association of Business Educators of Nigeria (ABEN), Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators (ICSA) and National Association of Professional Secretarial Staff of Nigeria (NAPSSON) in collaboration with the guidance and counselors should make adequate and sustained publicity in the primary and secondary schools across the nation in order to increase the awareness of both the society and students on the benefits of secretarial education to the society and the practitioners with the intention to popularize the profession.
2. Seasoned business educators in tertiary institutions of learning and secretarial administrators in office occupation should consistently and persistently organize and sponsor mass media publicity on the importance of secretarial education and secretarial profession. This will certainly go a long way to create great public awareness about secretarial education in tertiary institution of learning hence public awareness on the secretarial profession is very important.
3. Departments of Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria universities should organize regular seminars for business education students to create awareness to the students on the relevance of shorthand skill even in an era of advanced office technology and information systems. As soon as business education students are made to appreciate the value of shorthand skill for entrepreneurship, and also as an important tool in the hand of a secretary for effective and efficient service delivery, they will cultivate interest in the skill and work vigorously to acquire the skill. This will subsequently improve students' enrolment into the programme.
4. Similar study should be conducted at Colleges of Education in Nigeria.

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