Determinants of Secretarial Effectiveness and Performance of State Corporations in Kenya

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Abstract

Secretarial effectiveness and performance of organizations has been an area if interest in academia and in the world although there has been limited studies in Africa and particularly in Kenya. In the light of advancement of computers there has been a misunderstanding around the professional role of secretaries and their contribution to the overall performance of organizations. The study examined the determinants of the effectiveness of secretaries and their influence on the performance of state parastatals in Kenya. The objectives of the study were to evaluate the role of secretarial training and experience, job specific competencies and desirable Information Technology (IT) skills on the performance of state parastatals in Kenya. The research used both quantitative and qualitative data which was collected from the research respondents. Documents from the selected parastatals were studied with the aim of generating qualitative data. Questionnaires were issued to 384 respondents who were the secretaries and office administrators in different cadres in state parastatals. Descriptive survey design was used. The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists. The questionnaire was tested for reliability and established that it had a value coefficient which was larger than R>0.7 establishing its reliability. The regression results established that secretarial training had a significant and positive influence on the performance of state parastatals, Job specific qualities revealed that they were significantly increasing state parastatals performance while desirable IT skills influenced performance of state parastatals positively and significantly. The study recommended that Secretaries should be given training on communication skills to enhance their performance, secretaries required job specific skills to perform specialized duties effectively and that IT was key in enhancing the performance of secretaries.

Keywords: *Performance of state parastatals, Secretarial Effectiveness, Secretaries, Office Administrators*

1.0 Introduction

The Secretarial Profession and effectiveness have evolved over the years from the traditional routine roles performed by secretaries to the current roles where secretaries are viewed to be office managers (Morein *et.al.,* 2016). This state of affairs had resulted from advancement in technology as well as social and economic changes which have made the role of secretaries to be multifaceted and multifunctional. (Kobernovicz, Santos, & Crotti, 2017). Secretaries in the modern businesses are viewed as coordinators because their work environment is such that they serve a diversified cadre of managers and clientele who require them to possess the m to not only possess the requisite skills but also to keep updating themselves to cope with the changing company needs (Lima & Soares,2024). Olughenga (2020) indicated that secretarial job effectiveness was a key element in organizational performance in modern times and in the centuries ahead. This is because the secretarial effectiveness is a measure of the efficient manner of utilization of organizational resources to propel the achievement of organizational objectives. Morino (2006) highlighted that job effectiveness was directly related to the quality of a company's output in terms of goods and services which will affects its public relations and reputation as well as the satisfaction of its customers.

Professional secretaries are packed with academic qualifications which they have achieved after undergoing through training for not less than 3 years together with a wealth of working experience in different organizations. This makes their positions indispensable in organizations because they perform different daily duties which propel the daily running of organizations. The traditional duties of a secretary are numerous and diverse ranging from typing, filing, correspondence, hospitality and management, organization, planning for appointments, meetings, healthcare and legal services hence the pivotal role they play cannot be under estimated (Kolawole, 2010). Secretaries also use different computer programmers as well as management of computer services. They handle routine office machines in the course of their secretarial duties. Secretaries are indispensable in organizations because they play a multifunctional, multifaceted and multisectoral role in interconnectivity people from various levels hence they ought to possess the required knowledge and skills (Kobernovics, Santos and Crolsti,2017). Globalization has brought along diverse changes in the business world which demand that modern day secretaries must be equipped with diverse knowledge ranging from linguistics, human and public relations, excellent organizational skills, exemplary writing skills, knowledge of economics, finance, math and accounting as well as law (Martins, Terra, Maccari and Vincente, 2010).

Secretarial professionals have therefore been conditioned to develop a work life balance between related engagements as well as emotional balance between their personal and work-related engagements as well as emotional balance. The secretarial training and job require secretaries to be dynamic as well as versatile in order to distinguish themselves from other professionals in different fields who confess to be able to perform secretarial duties thereby replacing the professional secretary (Lima and Soares,2014, Mello, 2011). Today's secretaries must be continuously trained and updated about modern demands, practices, trends, demands and be well prepared for daily challenges (Lobato, Dasilva and Costa,2013). The need for secretarial professionals in modern organizations cannot be underestimated because they perform technical and support tasks which include the routine duties cut as filing, control and drawing of agendas as well as king minutes in the meeting (Lima and Soares,2014). However, will the advent of computerization and office automation some there has been different schools of thought who have viewed the secretarial profession from a replaceable point of view (Sabino and de Andrade, 2011). This schools of thought have influenced the perceptions of people who would wish to take up covers in secretarial as well as the employers.

Kobernovicz et al 2017 states that this lack of understanding of the role of the secretarial profession in enhancing organizational performance has led to stereotypes which have increasingly undermined the secretarial profession. Durante, vaz, nertoletelfi, dos santos and chais, (2011) opined that the stereotyped of secretarial professionals have negatively influenced the morale, self-esteemed and identity of the sectional professionals to the point where their qualifications an experienced are ignored when negotiating for their renumeration despite the job demands for more work and responsibility. In recent times the secretarial profession has been facing many obstacles because of the different nomenclatures such as technicians, managers, bilingual executive, general assistant, receptionist, executive secretaries, and advisor's wo are all geared toward degrading the secretarial profession. Secretaries have therefore been subjected to the dilemma of consolidating their identity knowledge in the enhancing their position in the job market (Nonato, 2019)

2.0 Literature Review

Bond and Olive (2009) states that the origin of secretarial profession dates back to 300 years BC when scribes started to practice secretarial related duties. As organizations developed in the 70s there was a need to train secretaries who could cope with the changing organizational complexities. Marcio *et. Al* 2021(Valuation of the secretarial profession in the current. Organizational contest). Modern secretaries play multi-functional roles because the profession has undergone several transformations (Durante and Favero,2009), Mesquita, Oliveira and Sequeira,2019). These transformations include quality computer and competency era (Castelo, 2007). The secretarial job nowadays requires highly trained and skilled professionals who can move organizations to higher achievements and relieve the managers of their workload and stress. Secretaries are challenged to achieve academic credentials that are required to match with the changing market needs which require creativity, interpersonal relationships as well as the flexibility that is required (Rodrigues, Rosa and Braid Melo, 2016).

Ensel and Vaughn (2012) view a secretary as a person who is in employment and who does office duties as well as helping subordinates to perform their duties. Neil (2013) stated that secretaries also organize papers and files in different firms. Clement (2020) stated that all secretarial duties could not be stated categorically because the ae numerous and diverse and multifaceted. Greg 2012 pointed that the performance of an organization is influenced by the efficiency of a secretary and also by the way the supervisors of the secretaries make use of secretarial services. Odu and Vito (2017) highlighted that office managers who interchange professional secretaries with other caliber of staff end up hiring people who lack the requisite skills and experiences thereby encouraging ineffectiveness and stereotypes as well as stress to the professionals. Clark and cooper (2013) stated that the advent of technology requires constant retraining of secretaries in order to be able to gain new skills failure to which secretaries can get stressed at the workplace.

3.0 Research Methodology

The research methodology encompassed determining the sample size, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, and data analysis and presentation tools. The study employed a descriptive survey design, selecting a sample of 384 secretaries for the survey. Both cross-sectional and descriptive study approaches were utilized as they facilitated the simultaneous evaluation of multiple variables. The study aimed to test the correlation between dependent and independent variables, with the objective of determining if there was a significant relationship, thereby aiding in hypothesis testing (Cooper and Schindler, 2016). The target population comprised secretaries and office administrators across various cadres in state parastatals, with 384 individuals chosen as representatives of this broader group, thus forming the research sample (Casteel & Bridier, 2021). The sampling process involved stratified random

sampling and cross-sectional sampling, enabling the researcher to draw accurate conclusions and ensure fair representation of all subgroups.

4.0 Research Findings and Discussion

The discussions of the research findings are presented in sections.

4.1 Reliability and Validity

A pilot of the questionnaire was conducted whereby 30 questionnaires were issued to secretaries who were not involved in the main study. This was to test the reliability of the questionnaire which was tested using Cronbach's Alpha. which would be confirmed if the Cronbach's Alpha was to be satisfactory.   For the questionnaire to be acceptable the alpha coefficient value was to be larger than $R > 0.7$.

Table 1: Reliability Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha coefficient
Secretarial training and experience	0.957
Job specific competencies	0.826
Desirable IT Skills	0.861
Performance of State Parastatals in Kenya	0. 870

Table 1 above indicates that the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of secretarial training and experience, Job specific qualities and competencies, Desirable IT Skills, and Performance of state parastatals competencies, qualities and performance were 0.957, 0.826, 0.861 and 0.870 respectively. The results indicate that the questionnaire was   reliable and that the independent variables and dependent variable were reliable and valid.

4.2 Correlation Results

The bivariant correlation between the determinants of secretarial effectiveness and the performance of the corporations in Kenya was determined using Pearson's correlation. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016) person correlation analysis was useful in indicating the strength, direction and significance of relationship among variables. The correlation results are presented in Table 2

Table 2: Correlation Matrix Results

		Training and Experience	Job specific competencies	IT skills	Secretarial performance
Training and Experience	Pearson Correlation	1.000			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N	384			
Job specific competencies	Pearson Correlation	.600**	1.000		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
	N	384**	384		
IT Skills	Pearson Correlation	.503**	.987**	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		
	N	384	384	384	
Performance of state parastatals	Pearson Correlation	.664**	.988**	.966**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	384	384	384	384

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation matrix in Table 2 revealed a strong positive significant relationship between Training and experience and the performance of state parastatals (r=0.664, p=0.000). The results further indicated a very strong significant relationship between job specific competencies and the performance of state parastatals (r=0.988, p=0.000). The results further indicated that IT skills had a strong relationship with the performance of state parastatals (r=0.966n, p=0.000). From the results the null hypothesis is rejected for the independent variables and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Kingsley and Chinessa (2019) supported this study by highlighting that its skills, secretarial training and job specific competencies contributed to secretarial performance hence the performance.

4.3 Regression Results

Multiple Regression analysis was done to establish the relationship between the variables secretarial training and experience, Job specific qualities and competencies, and Desirable IT Skills.

Table 3: Model Summary

MODEL	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Eror of the est
1	0.900(a)	0.806	0.830	0.76177

a. Predictors (constant). secretarial training and experience, Job specific qualities and competencies, and Desirable IT Skills.

The independent variable secretarial training and experience, Job specific qualities and competencies, and Desirable IT Skills were found to be statistically significant. This is because they had a positive relationship as shown through the R-Squared of 0.830 which translated to the fact that the variables explain 83% of the variation in the performance of state parastatals in Kenya. Zhang (2015) and

Ojalanyu (2018) reported that technology challenges influenced secretarial performance hence supporting the outcome of this study.

Table 4: ANOVA for Secretarial Training and performance of state parastatals

Model	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	232.108	3	232.110	18.784	.000[b]
Residual	2520.570	281	12.355		
Total	2752.681	284			

a. Dependent Variable: performance of state parastatals

b. Predictors (constant) secretarial training

The results of the ANOVA state that secretarial effectiveness variables had a strong and significant influence on the performance of state parastatals as shown by F=18.78 Sig=0.000<0.05. Table 5 presents the regression coefficient results.

Table 5: Regression coefficient

Model		B	Std Error	Beta	t	Sig.
			Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients		
1	(Constant)	5.824	1.350		4.312	.000
	X_1Secretarial training and experience	0.384	0.49	.144	2.192	.000
	X_2Job specific qualities and competencies	0.213	0.61	.044	.562	.000
	X_3Desirable IT skills	0.326	0.054	.455	6.071	.000

a. Dependent Variable: performance of state parastatals

The regression that was generated was as follows: -

$$Y=5.824+0.384X_1+0.213X_2+0.326X_3+ \varepsilon$$

The regression above shows that   secretarial training had a significant and positive influence on the performance of state parastatals as shown by $\beta 1=0.384$ at p=0.000. This indicates that an increase in training and experience, coaching, career planning, compensation and remuneration results to an increase of performance by $\beta 1=0.384$ at p=0.000. Job specific qualities revealed that they were significantly increasing state parastatals performance by $\beta 2=0.213$ at p=0.000 whereby honesty, confidentiality, cooperation, reliability, loyalty, taking dictation, telephone competency and typing competencies as well as dictation competencies contributed to $\beta 2=0.213$ at p=0.000 increase in performance of state parastatals in Kenya. Further, desirable IT skills influenced performance of state parastatals positively and significantly by $\beta 3=0.326$ at p=0.000. This implies that an increase in IT adoption, IT support services, IT adoption and IT Innovation led to an overall increase in

performance of state parastatals β3=0.326 at p=0.000. This study is supported by Kamau (2020) who established a positive relationship between IT adoption and organizational performance.

5.0 Conclusion

The study concluded there was a perception that training for secretaries was not a key element as anyone was vied to be able to perform the duties of a secretary. How ever it was established that this was not the case because the new role of secretaries was quite demanding requiring well trained and well-prepared secretaries. The study revealed some challenges which some competencies such as communication specifically with reference to multilingual skills which made it difficult for secretaries to relate well with customers. Information Technology was another challenge which prevented secretaries from achieving their objectives because some of them lacked the desirable skills while for others the infrastructure and equipment had not been supplied by the government. This is because some organizations do not invest in the much-required technological infrastructure that supports secretarial activities. Lack of adequate inhouse training was another conclusion which was established and which resulted from lack of finances as well as lack of managerial commitment to setting aside budgets for such training.

6.0 Recommendation

It was recommended that Secretaries should be trained according to their professional requirements which are well stipulated by the government. It was also recommended that employers should set aside some money for strengthening secretarial training both externally and internally so that secretaries can be able to handle the challenging technological changes. Job specific competencies both personal and professional were recommended according to the different mandates of the state parastatals. The government also needed to be enlighted on the importance of the effectiveness of secretaries to organizational performance. The study recommended and reinformed the importance of secretarial effectiveness as an indicator for managers to adjust their policies and adopt desirable strategies which would develop and equip secretaries. Further studies were recommended to establish the other factors not under study which may have an influence on secretarial effectiveness.

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