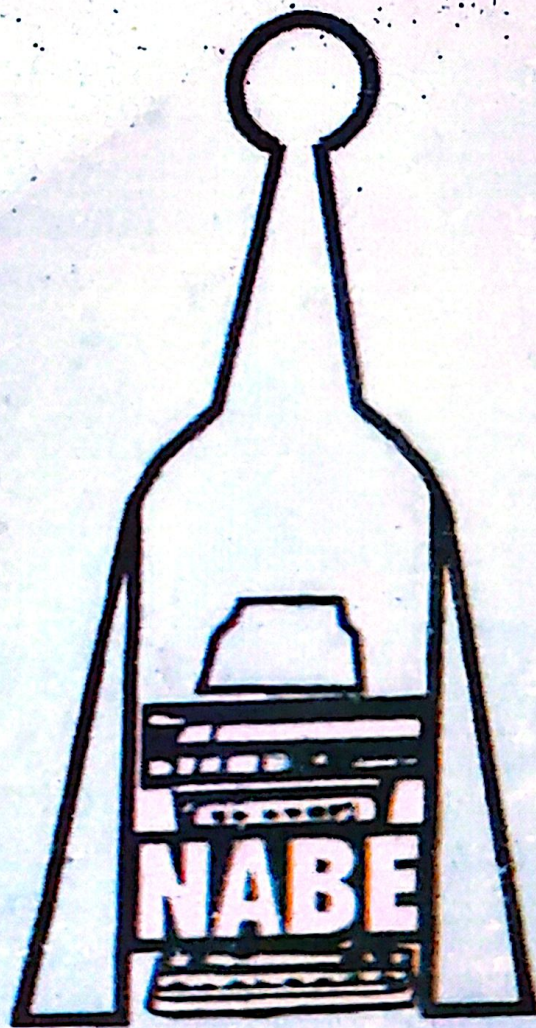


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THE ATTITUDE OF POLYTECHNIC SECRETARIAL STUDIES STUDENTS TO SECONDARY COMMERCIAL EDUCATION AS A FOUNDATION FOR SECRETARIAL TRAINING

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Abstract

Secondary school education normally precedes tertiary education. The student's choice of career in later life often depends on his performance at the secondary school level. This may be the reason why secondary school curricula, are designed to include general and pre-vocational subjects. Pre-vocational subjects include science and commercial subjects. These subjects aim at training students for future office work and also to prepare them for higher education. The purpose of this investigation is to find out the attitude of secretarial students in polytechnics to secondary commercial education as a foundation for secretarial training. The study was carried out in Polytechnics in Lagos and Ogun States, based on the following working hypotheses; that secretarial students in polytechnics consider secondary commercial education a necessary foundation for secretarial training, that secretarial students in polytechnics think that prior experience in secretarial practice improves student performance in the polytechnic and that secretarial students feel that the training received at the tertiary level is a continuation of the one received at commercial schools.

1.1 Introduction

There is no gain saying the fact that secretarial training in the Polytechnic should be effective in order to produce competent secretaries who can use their initiative, co-ordinate the activities of an office and carry out what is in effect a public and human relations role both within and outside the organisation in which the secretary is employed. As organisation continue to expand, the secretary's job also continue to increase, and there became the need to employ someone with a thorough knowledge of secretarial jobs such as taking dictation, transcribing, filing and receiving telephone calls and visitors.

Usually, student's enrolment in any course of study depends on what they hope to get out of it and their expectations also depend on interest and attitude towards the course of study. The student choice of career in later life often depends on his performance at the secondary school level. This is to say that the kind of education a child received in future depends more on how he/she performs at the primary and secondary level. The initial problems and difficulties encountered by some students during secretarial training are likely to affect their performances and this will go a long way in determining the kind of attitude they have towards secondary commercial education. There has been very strong advocacy for the development of students for higher vocational skills from the secondary school. The Public Service Review Commission (1974) in its main report suggests that: "Secondary education has some educational value for those pursuing higher studies, its value to the terminal student is questionable and yet terminal students constitute about 70 per cent of the output of Secondary Grammar Schools. This is the crux of the problem, both for the students, parents and society at large. We therefore recommend that utilitarian education should start at secondary school level and it should be planned and oriented towards the provision of the manpower needs of the nation in various sectors such as Agriculture, Commerce and Industry, Transport, Communications, Health, Welfare etc."

Therefore, there is need to find out what the attitude of secretarial students in Polytechnics are towards secondary commercial education.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The purpose of this research is to find out whether secretarial students in the Polytechnics have a favourable or an unfavourable attitude towards secondary commercial education as a foundation for effective secretarial training.

The researchers therefore sought answers to the following questions:

- * Is there any correlation between commercial subjects taken in the secondary school and secretarial studies courses in the Polytechnic?
- * Is it true that students with experience in commercial subjects perform better than their mates without experience in commercial subjects during their training as secretaries in the Polytechnic?
- * Does commercial education in the secondary school prepare students for secretarial training in the Polytechnic?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

It has been observed that secretarial students in Polytechnics consist of those students who have no previous knowledge of commercial subjects and also those who have basic knowledge of subjects such as Shorthand and Typewriting at the secondary school level. Some of them have even attended secretarial institutes before coming to the Polytechnic.

Many people think that prospective students accept admission into the Secretarial Studies Department in the Polytechnic as the last resort after all efforts to secure admission into other departments had failed. Others believe that in view of its vocational nature, chances of getting employment after secretarial training are brighter than with the other courses.

Students without basic knowledge in commercial subjects claim to have had some difficulties at the initial stage of the course especially in subjects like Shorthand and Typewriting while their other counterparts with previous knowledge of these subjects performed well.

This study is therefore aimed at exploring the attitudes of secretarial students towards commercial education at the secondary school level. It is hoped that the results of the study will guide Secretarial Studies Departments

in the Polytechnics to decide whether or not previous experience in subjects like Shorthand, Typewriting, Accounts, Business Methods and Commerce should be as pre-requisite for Secretarial Training.

1.4 Objective of the Study

Having examined the subjects grouped under commercial education in the secondary syllabus, it is equally important to know the objectives of Business Education in general. The following are the objectives of this study:

- To provide all students, exploratory opportunities and introductory information relating to business.
- To assist the students in developing occupational intelligence.
- To assist the students to choose discriminately and to use wisely all goods and services which business subjects has to offer.
- To enable students to acquire certain knowledge and skills in business subjects for personal use.
- To prepare students for more effective study in the field of business beyond the secondary level.

1.5 Working Hypothesis

The following working hypotheses were proposed to guide the conduct and analysis of this paper:

- * That secretarial students in Polytechnics consider secondary commercial education a necessary foundation for secretarial training.
- * That secretarial students in Polytechnics think that prior experience in secretarial practice improves student performance in the Polytechnic.
- * That secretarial students feel that the training received at the tertiary level is a continuation of the one received earlier at the commercial secondary school.

2.1 review of Literature

What is attitude and how does it affect learning? What is secondary commercial education and what are the problems one encountered in acquir-

ing some secretarial skills?

Attitude is a way of behaving or responding in certain ways either positively or negatively to objects, events and situations. Baltus (1983) defines attitudes as "a readiness to act, it involves both thinking and emotions." He further explains that attitude is a tendency to respond in a particular way to an object, a person, a group or even an idea. A person can hold many attitudes and they can be favourable and unfavourable. Even, not caring at all about something is an attitude. He says that in expressing attitudes, people often interchange the expressions 'I think or I feel'.

Atkinson et al (1979) also defines attitude as "a like or dislike, a positive or negative evaluation about some aspect of the world."

Arno (1977) in his own view states that "attitudes are learned evaluation reactions to objects, events and other stimuli." On the other hand, Lee (1977), points out that the term attitude more often implies "an emotional loaded belief." Particularly important are a person's belief about himself.

The Encyclopedia American shares the same view with Arno by defining attitude as "a predisposition to respond in a certain way to a person, object, situation, event or idea."

Olujobi, (2001) defines attitude as persistent tendency to feel and behave in a favourable or unfavourable way towards some object, person or idea. In other words, it is a predisposition to respond in a positive or negative way to someone or something in one's environment.

The development of positive attitude by students may be more important than the mastery of specific knowledge or skills. Attitudes are useful in the sense that they give people a simplified and practical guide for appropriate behaviour.

It will be useful to know why students enter in any course at all. What will they hope to get out of it and why will they choose it rather than others? Even, if in effect they have no choice, they may nevertheless have certain expectations one may wish to ponder on. In essence, we have different types of students in a course. There are those who want to be entertained; there are those who want an easy pass; there are those who want to cover as much educationally relevant materials as possible; and there are those who want to browse and explore.

It is worth remarking however, that students' expectation and orientation can be changed positively or negatively by the learning environment created for them. Such a change is typically described by a student saying that "I never came here because I wanted to do the course, it was the interest and knowledge not really the degree."

As can be seen from the above, attitudes usually express themselves in how a student exercises his knowledge, cognitive and social skills. In the affective area, the most basic attitude we look for is simply the students' interest and his reaching out towards a new experience.

2.2 What is Commercial Education?

The Encyclopedia Americana (1977) defines Commercial or Business Education as "Training in such skills as Arithmetic and Book keeping." It further states that the field has grown and now includes subjects such as Electronic Data Processing, Corporate Management and Economic Theory. The pattern of high school commercial studies soon became fixed, special curriculum for business students offered Typing, Book keeping and Shorthand and their three major subjects. Little attention was paid to purely academic subjects since the average business student did not plan on entering college.

Terry et. al. (1978) in their own contribution all maintain that commercial studies or education means "such school subjects as Typing, Shorthand, Book-keeping and Elementary education."

According to Gartside (1970) the professed aim of commercial education "are to provide the student with the knowledge and to train him in the skills he has come to learn, but his course will fail in its wider purpose unless at the same time it helps him in his life outside the office and to play his part as a member of a community. He suggests that commercial education must do three other things besides imparting specific knowledge and skill:

- * It must train the students to be adaptable
- * It must extend the horizon of his interests
- * It must develop his personality

The need to plan commercial courses to serve the wider interests is stressed in the following passage for Commercial Studies in school (a pamphlet of the Department of Education and Science (1970):

Since it is now generally accepted that a broadly based liberal education is the right of all young people, there would seem to be no place for narrowly conceived commercial courses before the statutory school-leaving age. Even if vocational interests are given preference, the pattern of office work is changing so rapidly that a prolonged period of full-time general education is becoming increasingly essential to ensure that the office workers of the future have flexibility in attitudes and powers of adaptation.

In the National Policy on Education, the broad aims of secondary education within the Nigerian overall national objectives are:

- (i) Preparation for useful living within the society; and
- (ii) Preparation for higher education.

It states further that the secondary school should:

- (a) Provide an increasing number of primary school pupils with the opportunity for education of a higher quality, irrespective of sex or social, religions and ethnic background.
- (b) Diversify its curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and roles possessed by or open to students after their secondary school course;
- (c) Equip students to live effectively in our modern age of science and technology.
- (d) Develop and project Nigerian culture, art and language as well as the world's cultural heritage.
- (e) Raise generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour and appreciate those values specified under our broad National aims, and live as good citizens.
- (f) Foster Nigerian Unity with emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity.
- (g) Inspire its students with a desire for achievement and self-improvement both at school and in later life.

The Encyclopedia Americana (1977) thinks that "the original goal of commercial education was the training of students who plan to work in the office and giving all students competence in the use of business services as

citizens and individuals; the original goal was for job training. It stresses further that a growing problem for secondary school educators in business studies is the widening interest of bright commercial students in attending college. This new emphasis has caused an increased demand for the inclusion of academic subjects required for college entrance in the business school curriculum. Students started offering Business Law, Economic Law, Economics, Commercial and Introduction to Business.

It is however, important for students undergoing commercial courses to know that no subject can make its best contribution unless it takes into account the contributions of others.

It could be seen from the above contributions that secondary commercial education can either provide students with the necessary skills that will be useful within the office or to prepare them for further education.

3.0 Methodology

To achieve the objectives of this paper, a descriptive research design approach is selected. For this purpose, a field survey involving a sample of one hundred questionnaire items were conducted. Eighty-eight (88) questionnaires' copies were collected back. The sample was selected from the population of Polytechnics within Lagos and Ogun States. Samples of One hundred (100) Secretarial students in HND I and HND II were selected based on random sampling because it is assumed that these students must have had enough experience in the secretarial course to decide whether the knowledge of subjects such as Shorthand, Typewriting, Commerce, Business Methods and Accounts at the secondary school level would have any effect on their performance during training in the polytechnic or not. This group consists of those who have studied some commercial subjects before coming to the Polytechnic and those with no previous experience in these subjects. However, the relevance of this is to determine the effect of prior experience in relation to the respondent's attitudes towards secretarial courses in the Polytechnics. Data were collected from the sample with the aid of structured questionnaires. The frequencies of the relationship between the attitude of secretarial students in Polytechnic towards Secondary Commercial education were measured using five (5) ranks namely, strongly disagree (1), disagree

(2), Undecided (3), agree (4) and strongly agree (5).

For easy analysis of the data collected, "Strongly agree" and "Agree" were classified as FAVOURABLE "Strongly Disagree" and "Disagree" were classified as UNFAVOURABLE while "Undecided" was classified as NEUTRAL.

The average of each set of responses would be found and determined in percentages. An hypothesis will be regarded as ACCEPTED if the percentage of responses in favour is greater than the percentage of the unfavourable ones, and vice versa.

4.0 Data Analysis and Findings

Test for Hypothesis I

"That secretarial students in polytechnics consider secondary commercial education a necessary foundation for secretarial training" is tested by question 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9.

Null Hypothesis (Ho): "That secretarial students in polytechnics do not consider secondary commercial education a necessary foundation for secretarial training.

Question No.	Total Response	Favourable		Unfavourable		Neutral	
		Actual Fig.	%	Actual Fig.	%	Actual Fig.	%
5	88	20	22.73	52	59.09	16	18.18
6	88	15	17.05	65	73.86	8	9.09
7	88	72	81.82	11	12.50	5	5.68
8	88	73	82.95	11	12.50	4	4.55
9	88	55	62.50	29	32.95	4	4.55
Aggregate	440	235	267.05	168	190.9	37	42.05
Total	88	47	53.41	33.6	38.18	7.4	8.41

The result from table I shows that out of the aggregate number of 440 responses for five questions used in testing hypothesis I an aggregate 235 responses are in favour and this represents an average of 47 or 53.41%. An aggregate of 168 responses which represents an average of 33.6 or 38.18% are not in favour while an aggregate of 37 responses which represents an average of 7.4 or 8.41%.

With the highest average of 47 or 53.41 in favour it can be said that the alternative hypothesis I is accepted while the null hypothesis is rejected.

Test For Hypothesis II

"That secretarial students in polytechnics think that prior experience in secretarial practice improves student performance in the polytechnic is tested by questions 10, 11, 12 and 13.

Null Hypothesis (H₀): "That secretarial students in polytechnics do not think that prior experience in secretarial practice improves student's performance in the polytechnic.

Table II

Question No.	Total Response	Favourable		Unfavourable		Neutral	
		Actual Fig.	%	Actual Fig.	%	Actual Fig.	%
10	88	68	77.27	18	20.45	2	2.27
11	88	60	68.18	24	27.27	4	4.55
12	88	70	79.55	10	11.36	8	9.09
13	88	68	77.27	18	20.45	2	2.27
Aggregate	352	266	75.57	70	19.88	16	4.55
Average	88	66.5	75.57	17.5	19.88	4	4.55

The result from table II shows that out of the aggregate number of 352 responses for four questions used in testing hypothesis II an aggregate 266 responses are in favour and this represents an average of 66.5 or 75.57%. An aggregate of 70 responses which represents an average of 17.5 or 19.88% are not in favour while an aggregate of 16 responses which represents an average of 4 or 4.55%.

With the highest average of 66.5 or 75.57% in favour it can be said that the alternative hypothesis II is accepted while the null hypothesis is rejected.

Test for Hypothesis III

"That secretarial student feels that the training received at the tertiary level is a continuation of the one received earlier at the commercial secondary school" is tested by questions 14, 15 and 16.

Null Hypothesis (H₀): "That secretarial student do not feel that the training received at the tertiary level is a continuation of the one received earlier at the commercial school.

Table III

Question No.	Total Response	Favourable		Unfavourable		Neutral	
		Actual Fig.	%	Actual Fig.	%	Actual Fig.	%
14	88	30	34.09	53	54.14	5	6.14
15	88	70	79.55	15	17.05	3	3.41
16	88	75	85.23	10	11.36	3	3.41
Aggregate	264	175	198.87	78	82.88	11	12.96
Average	88	58.33	66.29	26	27.63	3.6	4.32

The result from the table shows that out of the aggregate number of 264 responses for three questions used in testing hypothesis III an aggregate 175 responses are in favour and this represents an average of 58.33 or 66.29%. An aggregate of 78 responses which represents an average of 26 or 27.63% are not in favour while an aggregate of 11 responses which represents an average of 3.6 or 4.32%.

With the highest average of 58.33 or 66.29% in favour it can be said that the alternative hypothesis III is accepted while the null hypothesis is ejected.

4.1 Discussion And Interpretation of Results from the Hypotheses

The white paper on National Policy on Education, one of the objectives of secondary education is to prepare the secondary school students for higher education. The opinion of the respondents also of Ozoro (1982) states that "It is well known that secondary education plays a pivotal role in development because it is where a solid foundation or the acquisition of scientific and technological skills must be laid for sustained and purposeful development. If the foundation is weak, the superstructure cannot stand. As the analysis of hypothesis I shows, the respondents views tally with the above statements.

According to Gartside (1970), "the power to think clearly depend a good deal upon once knowledge and experience. This means that, if you know something or have acquired some knowledge or information, we should be able to give correct answers to relevant questions about it or we should be able to apply the acquired knowledge in novel problem-solving situations.

Based on result from hypothesis II, the favourable responses of the students to this hypothesis may not be unconnected with the fact that many of them had had prior experience in secretarial practice either before coming to the Polytechnic or during their one year post-ND practical training.

Therefore, it is clear that prior experience in secretarial practice improves the performance of the secretarial students in the polytechnic. This is because the student will use the practical experience already gained to understand the theoretical learning in the classroom. Other factors that the respondents consider necessary in the effective performance of a secretarial student are interest, personal effort and adequacy of equipment and training.

Hypothesis III states "that secretarial students feel that the training received at the tertiary level is a continuation of the one received earlier at the commercial secondary school level.

From the test conducted, most of the respondents agreed with the hypothesis because the subjects taken during secretarial training at the Polytechnic includes commercial subjects already taken at the secondary school level.

Conclusion

Therefore, it can be concluded that secondary commercial education besides being a necessary foundation for secretarial training will also make the task of teachers easier in imparting the necessary knowledge and skills. It will also help the students in the development of the skills already acquired in the secondary school especially in Shorthand and Typewriting.

4.2 Recommendations

Based on the result of the findings, the following recommendations are:

- The necessary facilities such as typewriters should be provided in the secondary schools to give commercial students proper learning experiences essential to achieving the educational goals and objectives.
- That much effort will also be needed on the part of the secretarial teachers in imparting the necessary knowledge in order to lay a good foundation for long-term and meaningful development of students in their chosen course of study.
- That priority should be given to prospective students with previous

knowledge of some commercial subjects, since it is believe that training received in Polytechnic is a continuation of the one already received at the secondary school level.

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