

## **The Effectiveness of the One-Year Internship on the Mastery of Secretarial Skills in Nigerian Polytechnics**

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### **Abstract**

*The one year internship is an integral part of the polytechnic system in Nigeria. At the completion of the two-year National Diploma programme, students are expected to go on twelve months of industrial training before returning, if qualified, for the Higher National Diploma programme. For long, the programme was universally acclaimed for providing students with opportunities for industrial experience. Questions have recently been raised, however, on the continued effectiveness of the programme, in view of the declining Information Technology (IT) openings for students and the non-supervised nature of the programme. Observations and anecdotal inferences have also suggested that the IT programme, in its present format, may not be ideal for the mastery of secretarial skills. The study sought to evaluate the effectiveness of the Industrial Training Scheme on the mastery of secretarial skills. Out of a population of 370, a sample of 110 was drawn from second (final) year students of the National Diploma programme in Office Technology and Management (2012/2013 session) in five polytechnics in South-Western Nigeria. A combination of quasi-experimental research design and descriptive survey design was adopted. The students were assessed in core secretarial disciplines before their departure for Industrial Attachment and were re-assessed on their return. Descriptive statistics were used for the analysis of the results. The study found that IT has strong positive impact on the mastery of word processing, office management and human relations skills, and no significant impact on communication skills. Its impact on the mastery of shorthand and transcription was negative. The study also found significant relationship between the intensity of secretarial assignment undertaken during IT and mastery of secretarial skills. The study recommended a comprehensive review of the Industrial training scheme, and that greater consideration is given to the appropriateness of the industrial attachment organisations and assignments in admitting students into the Higher National Diploma programme.*

**Key words:** *Impact, internship, industrial training, secretarial skills, Nigeria*

### **Introduction**

The one-year Industrial Training is as important part of the Nigeria Polytechnic system designed to bridge the gap between the academia and industry. At the National Diploma programme level students are expected to undertake a four month supervised Industrial Works Experience Scheme (SIWES). At the completion of the National Diploma programme, students are expected to undergo industrial works experience for at least one year before returning for the Higher National Diploma programme. The internship programme is designed to prepare the student for the realities of the workplace and to provide them with the opportunities to test the concepts and skills they have acquired in the

classroom and other formal learning environments in the crucible of the real world.

Unlike the supervised Industrial Work experience Scheme, the one year internship is not supervised (Osun State Polytechnic Iree, 2014). Students are not expected to provide any report or any evidence of learning. However, students cannot register for Higher National Diploma programmes unless they produce letters indicating that they have undertaken Industrial Training for the required number of months. Students with Lower Credit grades and above are supposed to serve for twelve calendar months while those with pass grades must undertake Industrial training of 24 months.

Evidence abounds that the Supervised Industrial Works Experience Scheme has had salutary effect on student personality, comportant, knowledge and experience (Ademiluyi, 2004; Ajala, 2011). In many instances SIWES represents the student's first real exposure to the real nature of the career he has chosen, with all its intricacies, detours, opportunities and challenges. The one-year internship is expected to consolidate that introduction, thus enabling the student to bring back into the classroom on their return for the Higher National Diploma programme, real life experience and challenges which can make him a better learner and a more seasoned professional.

In the secretarial profession, exposure to the real office crystallizes classroom learning in the student-secretary, justifies the rigour of class work and convinces the student secretary that he is or is not, on the right path. Industrial exposure is supposed to make the student secretary a versatile office operator, adept in word processing and machine operation, skilled in office and man-management, professional in receptionist duties and facile in shorthand and transcription skills. The trainee secretary on industrial attachment is also expected to be exposed to other office tasks like management of meetings, communication, trouble shooting, arranging travel and accommodation, organizing office activities and events, management of guests and clients reporting, preparing draft, project coordination among others. This study is designed to determine how effective the unsupervised one-year industrial attachment has been in helping students to master the vital secretarial skills of word processing, office management, human relations, communication and transcription; thus contributing to the programme objective of producing competent and confident office managers and secretaries for the Nigerian economy.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The one year industrial experience scheme is compulsory for all National Diploma graduates seeking admission into the Higher National Diploma level. Students with Lower credit grade are expected to undergo industrial attachment for one year while those with grades below lower credit are to undergo the attachment for two years. For office Technology and Management students, the industrial experience is expected to provide the opportunity to consolidate their skills in various aspects of office management functions. Scholars have however, recently raised questions in the contained effectiveness of the one year industrial training scheme in

achieving its stated objectives (Wodi & Dokubo, 2009). Science and technology teachers have reported post-IT decline in students' dexterity in certain skills (Awe & Adebisi, 2014). There is no reason to be sanguine that secretarial students should be exempt from that malaise. Indeed, some secretarial scholars opine that in the absence of rigorous practice for twelve months, certain secretarial skills are bound to atrophy (Ezenwafor & Okeke, 2011). The veracity of these postulates needs to be investigated.

Furthermore, the one-year internship programme involves considerable investment of time and other valuable resources; yet, there are, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, few studies on its effectiveness especially on the mastery of the primary secretarial skills like word processing, office management, human relations/receptionist duties, communication and transcription. There is a need to fill this gap in knowledge on the effectiveness of the one-year internship on mastery of secretarial skills, hence the decision to undertake this study.

### ***Research Objectives***

The research objectives of the study were to determine the impact of the one year industrial training on the mastery of the following secretarial skills: Word processing skill, office management, human relations/personnel management skill, communication skills and shorthand/transcription skill.

### **Literature Review**

The Nigerian polytechnic system was inherited, warts and all, from the colonial administrators. The British operated a two-tier Polytechnic system. A two-year post secondary programme called the Ordinary National Diploma was followed by one-year industrial training which was followed by the Higher National Diploma programme. (Ademiluyi, 2004, Ohakwe, 2004). In Nigeria, no major modification was made on the British system until 1976 when the Federal Government introduced the Nigeria National Diploma (NND) programme. By the mid 1970s, the need for middle-level technical manpower had soared astronomically, fuelled by a burgeoning oil-boom. The military government consequently felt compelled to send hundreds of youth to various technological academies in Europe on "Crash Programmes". At home, several new polytechnics were established. To further hasten the development of technical manpower, the Federal Government introduced the Nigeria National Diploma programme.

The NND programme was originally designed as a one-tier, three-year programme, instituted to satisfy the nation's thirst for middle-level technical manpower in technology and engineering. Students' resistance forced the government led by General Olusegun Obasanjo to modify the NND into a 4-year programme while retaining its single tier nature. However as a result of continued agitation, the two-tier system was reinstated by the Shagari administration.

A major feature of the two-tier system was the retention of the Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) and introduction by the one year IT programme. According to Ugwuanyu (2010), SIWES and IT are designed to bridge the gap between theory and industrial work.

It is the practical supplement to the gaps in skills acquisition as it provides the student the opportunity of familiarizing their hands and getting exposed to the needed expertise in the handling of machinery and equipment that are usually not available in educational institution.

The SIWES scheme aims at minimizing the destructive handling of employer's machinery and equipment during the product's early contact in post-graduation employment as well as promoting technological know-how (Ugwuanyu, 2010, Odiagbe, 2002). SIWES is a cooperative arrangement among the Federal Government, which provides the funds; the ITF, which formulates SIWES guidelines and supervises students; the Institution which through SIWES Coordinating Units, prepare placement lists and organizes induction courses; the employers, who accept the students and treat them like permanent employees; and the collaborating agencies like the National Universities Commission and the National Board and Technical Education (Ugwuanyu, 2010).

The one year industrial attachment follows a different specification. On graduating, ND students are to source for internship places on their own (Wodi & Dokubo, 2009). They are not supervised; they are not expected to produce any report, they are not graded and all they have to produce when registering for the Higher National Diploma programme is a letter on the organization's letter-head indicating that the student has spent twelve or twenty four months, as the case may be, on industrial attachment in the organization. The reporting organizations are taken at their words (Ademiluyi, 2004).

Asikadi (2003) believes that the current arrangement for the one-year leaves much to be desired. "Many students simply go their own way for one year, returning with concocted letters attesting to industrial training that took place in default." Awe and Adebisi (2014), report that many returning HND student are worse off in many skills than they were while in school.

Zakaria (2014) found a positive relationship between internship and skill acquisition especially in the hospitality industry. Asapkerala (2015), reports that its 12-month internship has been very effective in leadership training. A Charles Sturt University study reports that internship provides one of the fastest routes to reach the autonomous stage of skill acquisition

Industrial Experience is expected to prepare secretarial students for mastery in secretarial skills. Harrison, Odina & Fosu (1986), state that a good secretary must be swift in typewriting and facile in shorthand. This postulate may however have been vitiated by the advent of information and communication technology. Ajala (2011) identified the major secretarial skills needed in the modern office as including word processing, office management, human relation/reception, communication skills and Shorthand/transcription skills. Fayemi (2012) also opines that the major responsibilities of the modern secretary cover communication, secretarial, personnel management and record management. The concern of the study was to determine, whether, and to what extent, students' competence and knowledge are buoyed by the one-year unsupervised industrial training scheme.

## Methods

A combination of the descriptive survey and the quasi-experimental research design were adopted. Quasi experimental designs are used when the experimental design cannot be used because some variables cannot be manipulated. The Descriptive Survey design is ideal for seeking perceptions, opinions and for investigating the status quo without treatment (Gay, 1996; Agboola, 2006).

The study was conducted in Osun State of Nigeria in South-western Nigeria. Osun state is one of the 36 states in the Nigerian federation where here are two polytechnics running Office Technology and Management in the State. These are: Osun State Polytechnic Iree and the Federal Polytechnic Ede. They both have National Diploma and Higher National Diploma programmes in Office Technology and Management and are identical in many respects.

The study was conducted at the end of the 2012/2013 session and at the beginning of the 2014/2015 session. In 2012/2013 session The Federal polytechnic Ede had 103 ND II students while Osun State Polytechnic Iree had 135 ND II students. They were all tested. At the beginning of the 2014/2015 session only 63 of the tested students returned to Federal Polytechnic Ede while 42 students returned in Osun State Polytechnic Iree. All the returnee students (105 in all) were retested. A structured questionnaire was also administered on the returning students to determine the intensity of the secretarial assignment undertaken by them during IT. This was followed by structured interview.

Table 1: Student Test/Retest Numbers

	TEST	RETEST
Fed Poly Ede	103	53
Poly Iree	135	47
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>110</b>

### *The Instrument*

Towards the end of the second semester of the 2012/2013 session all the ND II students were tested on the following major secretarial skills: Shorthand transcription, word processing, secretarial duties, communication and human relations/personnel management. The questions were designed by the researchers based on the current National Board for Technical Education curriculum. The questions were mainly practical in application, with theory constituting only about 25% in Secretarial Duties, Word processing, Communication and Human Relations. The Shorthand/transcription test was a shorthand passage of 1.3 Syllabic Intensity and dictated at 80 words a minute for three minutes and transcribed for thirty minutes. The questions were validated by three experts while the test/retest reliability test yielded a value of 0.89. The results of the tests were analyzed with percentage, mean and student t-test. The mean percentage changes were rated as follows: 0-4% not significant, 5-9% Significant, 10-14% very significant and 15% and above, extremely significant.

## **Results and Findings**

### ***Impact of one year IT on Students Word processing Skills***

The mean result shows a pretest score of 52.2% while the post-test was 60.5%. The score result showed a net gain of 9%. Students in Federal Polytechnic Ede showed a net gain of 8% while those in Osun State Polytechnic, Iree showed a net gain of 10%, which is very significant.

### ***Impact of IT on Office Management Skills***

The mean result of the pre-test score was 53% while the post test score was 66%, representing a net gain of 13%. Federal Polytechnic Ede's products showed a net gain of 13.5% while Osun State Polytechnic; Iree products posted a net gain of 12.5%.

### ***Impact of IT on Human Relations/Reception Skills***

The result showed a pre-test score of 59% and a post-test mean score of 68% representing a mean 9% increase. Students in both polytechnics had a similar mean rate of increase (9%).

### ***Impact of IT on Communication Skills***

The result showed a pre-test score of 48% and a post test score of 50%. Federal Polytechnic Ede has 48% pre-score and 49.5 in post score. Osun State Polytechnic has 47.5% in pre-test score and 50.5% on post-test score. The mean increase rate of 2% is not significant.

### ***Impact of IT on Shorthand/Transcription Skills***

The result showed a mean pre-test score of 47% and a mean post-test score of 22%. The results from both institutions are identical. The result represents a very steep decline of 15%, which is extremely significant.

## **Test of Hypothesis**

There is no significant difference in the mean score of respondents who undertook intensive secretarial assignment while on IT and those who did not.

Table 2: Statistical Computation of Test of Hypothesis

GROUPS	N	X	SD	DF	T-CAL	T-CRIT	REMARKS
Intensive IT	24	63	10.23	108	7.84	1.96	Not Significant
Non-Intensive	86	49	8.65				

The t-test calculation for the null hypothesis showed a calculated t value of 7.84 and a table value of 1.96. Since the calculated value is greater than the table value, the null hypothesis is supported.

### Summary of Major Findings

About 20% of the respondents did not undertake serious, consistent secretarial assignments during IT mainly because they were unable to get proper placement. In spite of the letters attesting to proper IT activities, many of them actually worked in restaurants, petrol stations and other sundry formations where secretarial work is of minimal importance. About 40% of the students were not paid while on internship; they worked pro bono. Word processing and office tasks represent the bulk of the responsibilities of those on genuine industrial attachment and students benefitted from this. Some were also deployed as receptionist, customer relations officers and in other posts demanding good human relations in the course of IT. This impacted positively on their career preparation. Eighty five per cent (85%) of the respondents reported that they never used shorthand at all in the course of industrial attachment

### Discussion

The result of research question 1 shows that the one-year internship has impacted quite strongly on the students' word processing skills. The result shows a 9% increase in students' mean scores, which is quite significant. This is not surprising since word processing appears to be one of the most important responsibilities of the student secretary on industrial attachment. Ohakwe (2012), reports that Word Processing represents the bulk of the secretary's duties today.

The results of the second research question shows a positive change of 13% in the students' mean scores in office management skills. This is very significant, indicating that the students had achieved measurable improvement in office/secretarial duties skills. This suggests that while on internship, the students acquired considerable knowledge, skills and experience on this very important secretarial skill.

The result of research question 3 shows a 9% improvement in Human relations/ personnel management. The mean pre-test score was 59% while the mean post test score was 68%. This indicates not only the level of secretarial involvement in man-management and human relations, but also the student-secretaries' interest in this chore.

The result of research question 4 shows a mean improvement of only 2% in communication skill. This difference is not very significant as it runs counter to the postulate that communication is a basic concern of secretaries (Ezenwafor and Okeke, 2011; Ibrahim-Ibe, 2012). Fayemi (2012) has, however, identified a national communication in English malaise arising from poor mastery of English Language. He writes: "The average Nigerian official has problem communicating in English. Left to his own devices, he would rather speak in Pidgin English or his mother tongue. The Nigerian office is not a place for anyone seeking improvement on his language skill" (Fayemi, 2012).

The result of research question 5 shows a very significant decline in students mean score in shorthand and transcription. This may be explained by the declining use of shorthand in Nigerian offices (Okoji, 2013); a situation, which may have sprung from the average Nigerian executive's poor mastery of the English Language. Shorthand is a language skill and, if, as this study suggests, the Nigerian office may is not a place to expect considerable improvement in English Language, then it cannot be a place to seek improvement in Pitman Shorthand.

The result of the test of hypothesis shows that the more intensive the level of secretarial assignment encountered at IT, the greater the level of improvement in secretarial skills. This is encouraging, for it shows that in spite of its limitations especially in the areas of transcription, shorthand and communication, the one-year industrial attachment is achieving its basic objective. The one-year Industrial attachment is, warts and all, an effective instrument for achieving considerable improvement, if not mastery, in secretarial skills.

## **Conclusions**

With the study results presented, the following conclusions are made: The one-year IT is a good instrument for achieving mastery in word processing skills. This is evident in the result of research question 1 which shows a net gain of 9% for student who undertook the IT. The one-year IT is very effective in achieving improvement/mastery in secretarial/office skills, as evident in the result of research question 2 which shows a 13% post-IT gains for the study subjects. The one-year internship is very effective in improving students' human relations/personnel management skill. The study shows a 9% increase in the scores of the subjects on completion of the IT. The one-year internship is not a very effective instrument for achieving mastery in communication skills. The result shows a mean increase of 2% which is not very significant. The IT scheme has negative impact on mastery of shorthand/transcription skills. The study shows a post-IT decrease of 15%, which is very serious. There is a significant difference in the mean scores of students who undertook intensive secretarial assignments while on IT and those who did not. This is evident from the result of the test of hypothesis which shows a calculated t score which is significantly higher than the table t value.

## **Recommendations**



With the conclusions presented, the following recommendations are proffered: The one-year internship should not only be retained but also strengthened. Institutions should be involved in student placement and supervision for students on IT. Greater attention should be paid to the appropriateness of industrial attachment organisations and assignments in admitting students into the HND programme. Reports, detailing the activities of students while on IT, should be presented by students and assessed by institutions as requirements for admission into HND programmes. Legislations compelling public and private organisations to engage and pay students on IT in line with the practice in SIWES should be enacted. A policy decision should be taken on what to do with shorthand. If Nigerian executives continue to regard shorthand as irrelevant to their need, the subject may have to be further downgraded as a secretarial skill.

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