



A comparison of the effects of mentorship and self-efficacy on the career advancement of office managers/secretaries in Nigerian polytechnics and universities

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Abstract

Professional and personal fulfillment of office managers/secretaries emphasizes the need for all office managers/secretaries to keep their skills and competencies current through career advancement opportunities. Career advancement serves as a tool that supports secretarial excellence. However, emerging evidence suggests that office managers/secretaries progress relatively slowly through the career ladder and participate less in professional development opportunities compared to their counterparts. Mentorship and self-efficacy are major determinants of career advancement, but the influence of these two variables on career advancement of office managers/secretaries is yet to be explored. This study seeks to understand how mentorship and self-efficacy have influenced office manager's participation in career advancement activities. This study used a descriptive survey design and content analysis of open-ended questions to examine differences in levels of mentoring functions and self-efficacy of office managers/secretaries. Results showed that demographic characteristics of the respondents closely matched the office managers/secretaries workforce reported in other studies. There were similarities in some career advancement measures, significant disparities were noted in others. Considerable work is needed to bridge the gaps in career advancement between office managers/secretaries and other professions. This study demonstrated that the structure of secretarial profession might hinder career growth of office managers, something that needs investigation in further details. Further research is necessary to validate these findings and understand the mechanisms that underlie these disparities.

Keywords: mentorship, self-efficacy, career advancement, office managers, secretaries, secretarial profession

1. Introduction

Office managers/secretaries constitute a growing proportion of the secretarial workforce in Nigeria and contribute significantly to meeting the secretarial needs of public and private organizations. The increased recognition of office managers/secretaries as valuable members and leaders of multi-disciplinary secretarial teams, it is important to understand factors that influence office manager's/secretaries participation in career advancement. There is clear evidence in the literature supporting the idea that mentorship and self-efficacy are major determinants of career advancement (Abele & Spurr, 2009; Kay, Hagan, & Parker, 2009) ^[1, 18]. However, the influence of these two variables on career advancement of office manager's/secretaries is not well understood. This study will begin to bridge that gap by exploring the association among mentorship, self-efficacy, and career advancement of office manager's/secretaries.

Mentorship is critical for career development, as it serves as a mechanism for information exchange and acquisition of new knowledge (Mullen, 1994) ^[19]. Mentorship promotes individual self-efficacy by enhancing self-confidence, competence, and self-esteem (Day & Allen 2004) ^[8]. Another important ingredient for career development is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy influences how professionals set career goals, influencing not only the initiation of behavior and effort expended, but also the persistence of behavior in the presence of impediments (Pajares, 2002) ^[23]. Self-efficacy is mediated by individuals' beliefs or expectations about their ability to accomplish certain activities successfully (Bandura, 1984) ^[3]. Self-efficacy has been shown to have a positive influence on an individual's desire to engage in career

advancement (Day & Allen 2004; Schyns, 2004) ^[8, 32]. Lower self-efficacy limits the extent to which individuals participate in progressive endeavors, serving as a barrier to career advancement (Hackett & Betz, 1981) ^[12]. Similar association is reported between self-efficacy and mentorship. Self-efficacious individuals accept their roles as mentees with greater receptivity and willingness to engage in new activities, learning new skills and enhancing their competencies more so than less efficacious individuals (Poon, 2006) ^[26]. Mentored individuals have higher self-efficacy from vicarious learning and verbal persuasion (Day & Allen 2004) ^[8]. The extent to which mentorship and self-efficacy may influence career advancement in office manager's/secretaries, deserves careful study. The objective of this study is to determine the association of mentorship and self-efficacy with career advancement among office managers. The overall purpose of this study is to identify how differences in levels of mentorship function and self-efficacy influence participation in career advancement opportunities among office managers providing evidence for the development of programs to foster greater participation in career advancement.

Career advancement serves as a tool that supports secretarial excellence through the conferment of higher secretarial status to those office managers/secretaries who meet the requirements. In order for office managers/secretaries to advance through the career ladder, they must show evidence of enhanced or new competency in their practice. More importantly, with emerging evidence to suggest that disparities exist in levels of participation in career advancement among office managers based on their

secretarial education, it is imperative for the secretarial profession to identify the factors responsible for these differences and address them. Mentorship and self-efficacy have been identified in the literature as essential ingredients for professional growth and development. This study has been useful in addressing questions about some of the causes of disparities between office managers/ secretaries in their levels of participation in career advancement opportunities. Study outcomes have provided research evidence to support the development of appropriate interventions to promote active engagement in career advancement opportunities by all office managers/ secretaries.

2. Literature Review

Organizations use career advancement programs to support office managers/ secretaries to enhance their skills for professional excellence on an ongoing basis. These programs are intended to enhance office managers/ secretary's participation in career advancement activities and to strengthen their competencies. The literature identifies mentorship and self-efficacy as key elements in career advancement (Brown, Jones, & Leigh, 2005; Kay, Hagan, & Parker, 2009)^[6, 18]. Thus, the effects of mentorship and self-efficacy on career advancement deserve a careful study. It is quite evident that office managers/ secretaries participate less in ongoing professional development activities and progress more slowly through secretarial career ladders.

2.1 Career advancement in secretarial profession.

Career advancement refers to the process professionals undergo to achieve changes in performance, job roles, and promotions, and to develop a better relationship with management (Ismail & Arokiasamy, 2007)^[16]. Career advancement is greatly influenced by interpersonal, intrapersonal, and human capital determinants. Interpersonal determinants of career advancement include concepts of self-efficacy, personality traits, and other psychological factors. Intrapersonal determinants of career advancement include concepts of mentorship, supportive work environment, and peer network. Human capital determinants of career advancement include personal investment in education, family support, and participation in professional development (Apospori, Nikandrou, & Panayotopoulou, 2006)^[2]. Career advancement in secretarial field constitutes any form of professional promotion that recognizes and rewards talent in secretarial or administrative practice (Adam 2011). Career advancement provides opportunities for office managers to enhance their competencies through ongoing professional development. In order for office managers to advance through the career ladder, they must show evidence of enhanced or new competencies in their practice (Adam 2011). Thus, career advancement serves as a tool that supports secretarial excellence through the conferment of higher secretarial status to those secretaries who meet certain requirements.

Despite the overwhelming advantages of career ladder or advancement programs in promoting office managers engagement in career advancement activities only scant research has focused on the evaluation of these programs. There is a gap in the literature with regards to identifying factors that influence office managers/secretaries participation in career advancement activities. In most professions, income or salary increase has been identified as a career advancement measure (Abele & Spurk,

2009)^[1]. Although secretaries income can change dramatically from switching job roles or positions, it is usual for secretaries income to increase with more experience. Income also increases with advancement through a career ladder (Shermont, Krepcio, & Murphy, 2009); added increases also occur with higher educational qualifications or specialty certifications (Lee, 2006).

2.2 Office managers/secretaries in Nigerian workforce

The word, "Secretary" has been defined variously by different authors and employers. Ugiagbe (2002)^[33] defined a secretary as an assistant to an executive, possessing an impressive mastery of office skills and ability to assume responsibility without direct supervision, who displays initiative, exercises judgment, and makes decisions within the scope of his/ her authority. Boladele (2002)^[4] expressed that a secretary is a warm, endlessly helpful and understanding individual whose sole aim is to alleviate, solve, prevent or soften problem workload and upsets for his/her executive. He/she is the means by which the executive initiates, handles and completes a project. Generally, a professional secretary coordinates the daily routines of an office and organizes the office schedules and paper work. A secretary's duties require analysis of the situation, judgment, technical knowledge and creativity. The number and type of activities secretaries are assigned to depend on whether they are generalists (multifunctional secretaries) or specialists (such as legal or word processing secretaries). Secretaries use many different talents and work with many different people. Modern professional secretaries are now referred to as office managers by some people because of their activities, education, skill acquisition, knowledge and even expectations from their bosses, customers, clients and the general public.

Igbidoin (2010) identifies the secretary's responsibilities to include; taking dictation and transcribing it into correspondence which is at once dispatched to its business destination. He highlights of some forms of these correspondence to include: letters, memos, circulars, orders, quotations, acceptances, contractual terms, and conditions, invitations, etc. Each of these items he claimed will invoke a response from the addressees, who will perhaps order materials, proceed to manufacture, insure cargoes, book hotels or engage in some other expensive activity which forms part of the intricate network of business life.

2.3 Mentoring

Mentoring occurs when a more experienced person (mentor) guides, teaches, and protects an inexperienced person (mentee) (Sands, 2006)^[30]. The concept of mentoring is used in a variety of applications that enhance personal, professional, career, and organizational developments (Yoder, 1990)^[36]. The term mentor originated from Greek mythology (Oliver & Aggleton, 2002)^[21]. Mentor was the name of a trusted friend and tutor who had the responsibility of teaching and giving wise counsel to Odysseus' son, Telemachus (Prestholt, 1990)^[27]. Mentor's role was to prepare Telemachus for his future position as King while his father was away fighting in the Trojan War (Apospori, *et al.*, 2006)^[2].

The literature offers numerous definitions of mentoring. Mentoring according to (Schlee 2011; Nwabueze and Ozioko 2012)^[31, 20], is a process whereby someone with experience and expertise provides support, counselling and advice to a less experienced colleague. (Osemevege 2011; and Ugwuanyi 2011)

^[34], view mentoring as a development-helping relationship in which a person invests time, expertise and effort to enhance and improve another person's growth, knowledge and skills. It is a professional relationship in which an experienced person (the mentor) assists another (the mentee) in developing specific skills and knowledge that will enhance professional and personal growth. Evidently, the constructive outcomes of mentoring are capable of fostering a satisfied and 'well-groomed' professional workforce.

2.4 Mentoring in office managers/ secretaries.

Mentoring, according to Pan and Hovde (2010) ^[24], is a process of learning and development based on a personal relationship in which an experienced secretary called a mentor helps a new office manager called mentee to develop as a professional and achieve professional goals. A core feature that defines mentoring relationship and distinguishes it from other types of personal relationship is that it is a developmental relationship embedded within the career context. While learning, growth and development may occur in many different types of work and close personal relationships. Mentoring relationships are unique because their primary focus is on career development and growth (Ragins & Kram, 2008) ^[28].

In the secretarial literature, mentoring has mainly been described as a relationship that can positively influence career outcomes, psycho-social outcomes, and organizational and professional outcomes (Oliver & Aggleton, 2002) ^[21]. Oliver and Aggleton (2002) ^[21] described mentoring as a pedagogical approach, where learning occurs through relationships in which individuals engage in dialogue and experiences that enhance the development of critical thinking capacities. Mentoring affords the transfer of skills which people can apply in diverse professional circumstances, promotes productive use of knowledge, clarity of goals and roles, career success, career growth, salary increases and promotions, career and job satisfaction (Okurame, 2002; Okurame & Balogun, 2005). Mentoring is a developmental, empowering, and nurturing relationship that extends over time, resulting in mutual sharing, learning, and growth in an environment of respect, collegiality, and affirmation (Vance & Olson, 1998). "A mentor is a wise and trusted advisor, counselor or teacher, who has something to offer that meets the immediate needs and/or future needs of another" (Dorsey & Baker, 2004, p. 260) ^[9]. Mentors offer knowledge, insight, perspective, and wisdom intended to be useful to mentees, creating and facilitating an environment for selfdevelopment and self-reflection (Parse, 1998) ^[25]. A good mentor serves as a wise consultant during a mentees' career journey (Wills & Kaiser, 2002) ^[35]. The benefits of mentoring in secretarial profession cannot be overemphasized.

2.5 Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy as a concept evolved from Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) of behavior (Bandura, 1977a). Self-efficacy is the "belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required for managing prospective situations" (Bandura, 1982, p. 122). An individual's perception plays an essential role in behavioral outcomes since there is personal efficacy in exercising influence over what is done and the outcome of the events (Bandura, 1982). An individual's level of confidence or perceived self-efficacy influences how that individual sets professional goals, influencing not only the

initiation of behavior, the expended effort, and also the persistence of behavior in the presence of impediments (Bandura, 1982; Bandura, 1984).

The concept of self-efficacy has been used in several domain of research, such as academic achievement, and professional development. These studies explored how individuals choose what to engage in and how they utilize resources available to them (Buchanan & Likness, 2008; Heale & Griffin, 2009) ^[5, 13]. The findings from these studies have demonstrated the critical value of self-efficacy in life achievements. Generally, people will avoid activities they believe exceed their capabilities and engage in activities they judge themselves competent to handle (Bandura, 1977b). Although no study was found to have examined the influence of office managers self-efficacy on career advancement, several studies explored the influence of self-efficacy on career advancement in other fields.

3. Methodology

This study used a descriptive survey design and content analysis of open ended questions to examine differences in levels of mentoring functions and self-efficacy of office managers/ secretaries educated at the Nigerian universities compared to office managers/ secretaries educated in the Nigerian polytechnics. It also explored the association among mentorship, self-efficacy, professional development and career advancement of both groups of secretarial staff. Questionnaire was used to reach potential participants through an online survey. The sample size for this study comprised a total of 200 office managers/secretaries (n = 145) and (n =55).

3.1 Measurement of Variables

The study used four distinct instruments in addition to an initial screening questionnaire. The initial screening questionnaire consisted of five questions with Yes/No responses related to the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the study.

3.1.1 Mentorship instruments.

The mentorship instruments encompass three sub sections of the survey, 1A, 1B and 1C. The mentorship instruments help to identify participants who had a mentor during their professional career. It also obtained some demographical information about the identified mentor, as well as information about the level of mentoring functions that participants received.

3.1.2 self-efficacy scale

The self efficacy scale was developed and validated by Chen, Gully, and Eden (2001) ^[7]. It is an 8-item, 5-point Likert type scale, with response categories ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5. This scale was used to measure the level of self efficacy of the participants. The scale is suitable for this study, as it was developed using Eden's (2001) ^[7] definition of general self-efficacy. Reliability of the scale has been demonstrated in previous studies (Chen, Gully, & Eden, 2001) ^[7]. The scale has been reported to have internal consistency of the items ranging from .85 to .90. The stability coefficient ranges from r = .62 to r = .65.

4. Results and Discussion

A total of 200 participants were eligible for the analyses. Among these, (n = 145) were polytechnics educated office managers,

while the rest (n = 55) were university educated office managers/secretaries. For any missing data among the eligible participants, a pair wise deletion approach was adopted, whereby all available data from the subjects were used in the analyses.

Determining the differences in the level of Mentorship and Self-efficacy between polytechnics graduates and universities graduates. Hypothesis 1: UGSP will report a lower level of mentorship and self-efficacy compared to PGSP.

The study measured the level of mentoring received by participants on three mentoring relationship functions: 1) career development; 2) psycho-social support; and 3) role modeling. Results from the data analysis of this study indicated a Chronbach’s alpha of 0.88 for the Mentorship scale and 0.94 for the Self-efficacy scale. Therefore, for the current study, both the scales were highly reliable.

The first hypothesis was supported by the results. No statistically significant differences were noted between the groups for Career Development (p = 0.80) and Psycho-social Support (p = 0.90); however, the score of the function of Role Model was significantly different (p = 0.02) between the groups. As evident from the means scores, UGSP were less likely to look up to their mentors as role models.

Table 4.1: Comparison of Mentorship and Self-Efficacy between the Polytechnics and Universities (N = 200)

Variable	PGSP (n= 145) Mean (SD)	UGSP (n =55) Mean (SD)	p value
Mentorship subscales			
Career Development	24.3 (4.3)	24.4 (3.5)	0.8
Psycho-social Support	16.2 (3.7)	16.1 (4)	0.9
Role Model	17 (2.7)	16 (2.2)	0.02*
Self-Efficacy	34.3 (3.1)	34.4 (3.7)	0.9

* p < 0.05

4.1.2 Career Advancement

Measures of career advancement and results from the group comparison are summarized in Table 4.1.2. Data met the assumptions of the chi-square analysis.

Hypothesis 2: UGSP with lower levels of mentorship and self-efficacy will report lower levels of CA than PGSP with higher levels of mentorship and self-efficacy.

Table 4.1.2: Regression Analysis between Mentorship, Self-efficacy

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Interaction of Group with Mentorship and Self Efficacy	8.5	23	3.7	.5	.91
Error	7.1	10	7.1		

For testing hypothesis 2, the outcome variables representing career advancement were gross annual income, pay, and number of times promoted through the career ladder. A general linear model approach to multiple regression analysis was used to test whether the relationship of mentorship and self-efficacy to income and pay differed by group (UGSP vs. PGSP). Results indicated no significant interaction between mentorship, self-efficacy, and group for gross annual income (p = 0.91) and pay rate (p = 0.38). This implied that the associations of mentorship and self efficacy with annual and monthly income were not

significantly different between universities graduates in secretarial profession and polytechnics graduates.

The results of this study partially supported Hypothesis 1, as both UGSP and PGSP were able to identify a mentor in their secretarial career. Mentors were operationalized as high ranking, influential individuals with advanced experience and knowledge in the profession, who make a commitment to provide upward mobility and support to the mentees or inexperienced individuals’ careers (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). While results of the study revealed that both groups were similar in the psycho-social support function and the career development functions of mentoring, disparities existed in the role model function of mentoring.

The second hypothesis was not supported by the findings of this study, as the relationship of mentorship and self-efficacy to career advancement was not statistically different between the groups. Several studies have demonstrated the relationship between self-efficacy and successful performance in life to include personal goals, career success, job performance and satisfaction, higher salary or promotions (Abele & Spurk, 2009)^[1].

5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis and discussions of results of this study. The findings from this study bridge some of the important gaps in the literature by providing the foundation for understanding both the professional and personal barriers that continue to impact career advancement in secretarial profession. Findings from this research study provided valuable information on office managers/secretaries career advancement and raised some important issues on office managers engagement with professional growth that warrants further attention.

5.1 Implications of the Study

The study has revealed that the benefits of mentoring are enormous. This implies that, if different mentoring strategies are available and in use and mentoring programmes established, office managers’ professional and career development needs will be met. Their job performance will increase, so also their professional growth, career success and self-esteem.

5.2 Limitations of the study

The findings from this study must be interpreted in light of its limitations. First, the cross sectional design limits the inference that can be drawn from the findings. Further, this study was based on a relatively small sample size and must be replicated with larger samples to further validate the results. This study involved only office managers/secretaries working in federal polytechnic and universities only. This also may affect the generalization of the findings.

6. References

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