

Contributions of Self-Efficacy and Problem Solving Skills on Secretaries' Job Performance in Ogun State Public Service, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study is aimed at determining the contributions of self-efficacy and problem solving skills to the job performance of secretaries. The study also ascertained the relationship among self-efficacy, problem solving skills and job performance of the Secretaries. The study employed the descriptive research design. Ten (10) Secretaries were selected from thirty (30) government parastatals through simple random sampling techniques. Out of the 300 questionnaires distributed only 294 were returned. Three sets of instruments were used in collecting data, they are: General Perceived Self-Efficacy Scale (GPSS), Problem Solving Inventory (PSI) and Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER) Form. The data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), Multiple Regression, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The result obtained indicated that the predictor variables (self-efficacy and problem solving skills) accounted for 61.1% of the variance in the job performance of Secretaries in the public service of Ogun State which implies that there is a significant combined contribution of self-efficacy and problem solving skills in the prediction of job performance of Secretaries in the public service of Ogun State. Also, there are significant and positive relationship among self-efficacy, problem solving skills and job performance. The findings were discussed and it was recommended among others that there should be provision for in-service training for Secretaries in the public service which is expected to bring about improvement of their self-efficacy and problem solving skills.

Keywords: Self-efficacy, Problem Solving Skills, Job Performance, Secretaries, Public Service

1. Introduction

Performance is what an employee is hired to do for his organization. It is the totality of activity which an employee carries out to contribute a fraction of the inputs the organization needs to achieve its objectives. An employee's performance is observed at work and determined during job performance evaluation, with an employer taking into consideration components such as quality of work, quantity of work, cooperativeness/loyalty, resourcefulness and reliability, conduct, self-development/improvement efforts and experience to analyze each employee based on his or her merit. Job performance reviews are often done yearly and can determine whether an employee is due for promotion or is not fit to be on the organization's pay roll.

The quality of employees has important influence on their performance. Naturally, the person who possesses a high skill level such as unique skills, intelligence and work methods will succeed in his or her job. In public service sector, employees' job performance is very important because it will reflect the government performance. Employee performance standards were designed by the government to measure the performance of the organizations. Therefore, job performance becomes the most important focus of administrators and academicians because the performance level will deteriorate if the level of skill of employee drops and it is generally believed that employees are the "backbones" of the state government services. (Fauzilah, Noryati & Zaharah, 2011).

It is a standard practice to evaluate the performance of employees including Secretaries. An evaluation is an objective look at the performance of an employee based solely on efforts and the results, regardless of personal feelings (Price, 2010). A good Secretary should be detail-oriented and an evaluation of her job performance should measure overall organizational skills, including filing and record keeping, as well as administrative skills necessary to assist a superior in scheduling and managing appointments and meetings. A good Secretary is also expected to handle a variety of tasks, all of which are related to clerical and office work.

Public servants are workers in the government ministries, corporations, bureaus and parastatals whose ages range between nineteen and sixty or at most twenty-five and sixty-five. Government policies and programmes are usually executed by its workers; and so the success or failure of any government could be associated with the performance, proficiency and effectiveness of its workforce of which the Secretaries are not left out. This is the reason why the government of any State is always showing concern for the workers' welfare believing that such effort will enhance their performance.

Self-efficacy according to Bandura (1997) refers to the individual belief or assessment of one's

capability to deal with particular situation. Empirical studies on self-efficacy have yielded several consistent findings. For example, Barling and Beattie (1983) asserted that self-efficacy is associated with work related performance. Gist (1989) corroborates this assertion by saying that when self-efficacy is enhanced, attendant increases in performance are noted. There is a positive, significant relationship between Secretaries' self-efficacy and their job performance because self-efficacy influences: what tasks Secretaries perform, how much effort they put into it, and how persistent they are in the face of difficulties. Secretaries with low self-efficacy do not believe they have the skills to do well so they do not try and even when they do they fail. They often do not achieve at a level that is commensurate with their abilities. The link between self-efficacy and achievement gets stronger as Secretaries advance through workplace. By the time people are in office, their self-efficacy is more strongly related to their achievement than any measure of their ability.

Apart from the training that the Secretaries had earlier undergone to be so called cum their self-efficacy belief, they are also expected to possess other qualities and skills, which will help them to perform their jobs well. Problem solving skill is very essential in this respect. This is because the duties of a Secretary are beyond typing, filing and retrieving documents but also include other contextual performance as the need arises. A Secretary is to take total charge of the office whether or not the boss is around. This duty confers on the Secretary, certain administrative functions and in the process, issues will come up in form of problems yet some of them must be resolved without getting to the table of the boss. A Secretary is that warm, helpful and understanding individual whose sole aim is to alleviate, solve, prevent or soften problems; workload for his or her boss and without being in possession of these skills would not have been able to achieve this.

Hence, this study investigated the relationship among self-efficacy, problem solving skills and job performance of secretaries in the Public Service of Ogun State and it also examined the extent to which self-efficacy and problem solving skills will contribute to job performance of Secretaries.

1.1 Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to determine the extent to which self-efficacy and problem solving skills would contribute to job performance of Secretaries in Public Service of Ogun State. The other specific objectives are to determine; the combined contributions of self-efficacy and problem solving skills to job performance of Secretaries, the individual contributions of self-efficacy and problem solving to Secretaries' job performance and the relationship among self-efficacy, problem solving skills and job performance of Secretaries in the Public Service of Ogun State.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Secretaries are central to the achievement of organizational goals. This is because the Secretaries are the intermediaries between their executives and other members of staff on one hand and between the executives and the outside world on the other hand. Secretaries translate the vision and mission of the organization into practical reality and project the organization's image in good light to the outside world.

It has been observed however, that many organizations often complain about their Secretaries' job performance. Such complaints are not often directed at their practical skills, but rather at their inability to hold themselves together in the face of challenges and solving everyday problems which they encounter in the workplace. It is therefore in view of this, that this study investigated the extent to which self-efficacy and problem solving skills of Secretaries determine their job performance. This study also examined the relationship among self-efficacy, problem solving skills and job performance of the Secretaries.

2. Literature Review

This section deals with the review of related literature on both the independent and dependent variables:

2.1 Self-efficacy and Job Performance

The chances of performing a task successfully in an organization depend majorly on the level of self-efficacy of people. Empirical findings abound and many of have revealed that there is relationship between self-efficacy and performance accomplishments and other outcome-related behaviours (Barling & Beattie, 1983; Taylor, Locke, Lee & Gist, 1984; Hackett & Betz, 1989; Robertson & Sadari, 1993, Waldersee, 1994). Stajkovic and Luthans (1997) also discovered in a meta-analysis study they conducted that there was a high significant relationship between self-efficacy and performance in organizational settings. It was also observed in another meta-analysis study that there was a correlation between self-efficacy and work-related performance (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Although these findings demonstrate the importance of self-efficacy in predicting and improving work performance, much still remain unclear about the construct itself. Self-efficacy as defined by Ross and Gray (2006) is a set of personal efficacy belief that refers to the specific domain of the individual behaviour. This implies that self-efficacy is a person's belief in his ability to perform a particular task. Bandura (1986) discovered that optimal self-efficacy perception surpasses slightly the scope of one's capabilities, which will prepare an

individual with the willingness and abilities to take challenges and the motivation to develop and advance personally.

Oyewumi, Ibitoye and Sanni (2012) also found out that a strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal well-being in many ways. People with high assurance in their capabilities approach difficult tasks as a challenge which must be mastered rather than seeing them as threats to be avoided. This efficacious outlook helps to foster intrinsic interest and deep commitment. They are well able to heighten and sustain their efforts in the face of failure and are more likely to recover from failures and setbacks as quickly as possible. Bandura (2001) supporting this assertion further stated that such efficacious outlook will produce personal accomplishment, reduce stress and lower vulnerability to depression. Wilson, Kickul and Marlino (2009) were of the view that self-efficacy reflects an individual's self-assessment as to whether they have the ability to perform a particular task as well as the belief that they convert those skills into a successful outcome. The results of the study conducted by Randhawa (2004) showed significant positive correlation between job specific self-efficacy and work performance. This means that higher the job specific self- efficacy, the higher will work performance of employees be.

2.2 Problem Solving Skills and Job Performance

A problem is seen as any form of task, assignment or project that an individual needs to complete, which usually entails several different stages or steps. Some of which will require specific methods that are related to one's subject area or specialization. Problem solving strategies also referred to as problem solving cycle by Bransford and Stein (1993), are the steps that will be needed to find the problem(s) that are in the way to getting to one's own goal. Martinez (1998) as cited in Adeyemo (2010), explains that problem solving is the process of moving towards a goal when the path to the goal is uncertain. Cognitive psychologists described seven steps that comprise a problem solving cycle (Pretz, Naples & Sternberg, 2003). They asserted that problem solving cycle involves recognizing the existence of a problem, developing a strategy or planning to reach a solution, recognizing his or her knowledge, allocating mental and physical resources to the problem, monitoring progress towards the goal and evaluating the solution.

Complex problem solving, according to Buchner (1995) is the successful interaction with the task environment that is dynamic, that is, change as a function of user's intervention and/or as a function of time and in which some, if not all of the environment's regularities can only be revealed by successful exploration and integration of information gained in that process.

It is certain that where there is difficulty, there is a problem. Secretaries are therefore expected to possess the capability to identify, define and solve problems as they evolve in the workplace. Research findings have documented that relationship exists between the variables of study and thereby making it of great importance to the organization. It is one thing to have belief in one's ability (self-efficacy) and to have the ability to solve problems. However, when these two variables are at play in the lives of employees, good performance is recorded.

3. Hypotheses

To achieve the objectives of this study, three hypotheses were raised to guide this study:

- (1) There is no significant relationship among self-efficacy, problem solving skills and job performance of secretaries in the Public Service of Ogun State.
- (2) There is no significant combined contribution of self-efficacy and problem solving skills in the prediction of job performance of Secretaries in the Public Service of Ogun State.
- (3) There is no significant relative contribution of self-efficacy and problem solving skills in the prediction of job performance of Secretaries in the Public Service of Ogun State.

4. Research Methods

4.1 Research Design

The research design that was used for this study is the descriptive research design. It involves collection of the requisite data through the use of questionnaire which elicit information on how self-efficacy and problem solving skills serve as predictors of secretaries' job performance in Public Service of Ogun State.

4.2 Population and Sample

The population for this study comprised of all Secretaries in all the public establishments within Abeokuta in the Ogun State. The sample for this study consisted of 294 Secretaries selected through a multi-stage sampling technique. The first stage of sampling consisted of the selection of a Senatorial District. Ogun Central with the headquarters at Abeokuta was selected through a simple sampling technique out of the three Senatorial Districts in Ogun State while thirty (30) parastatals were randomly picked. Ogun Central Senatorial District incidentally has the largest number of government parastatals located there being the capital city of Ogun State. Ten (10)

Secretaries were initially selected through simple random sampling technique from each of the thirty (30) government parastatals.

4.3 Instruments

The questionnaire comprising of three (3) sets of standardized research instruments was used for data collection:

4.3.1 General Perceived Self-efficacy Scale (GPS)

Self-efficacy was assessed using the adopted General Perceived Self-efficacy Scale developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995). The scale has 10 items which was designed to measure self-efficacy based on personality disposition. It is a four-point Likert scale measurement ranging from 1= Not at all True (NT), 2 = Hardly True (HT), 3 = Moderately True (MT) and 4 = Exactly True (ET). For instance, it has sample items like: "If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution" and "It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals". The scale has a Cronbach's Alphas ranging from .76 to .90 as reported by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995).

4.3.2 Problem Solving Inventory (PSI)

Problem solving skill was measured using the Problem Solving Inventory (PSI) developed by Heppner and Petersen (1982). It is a self-rating scale of 32 items anchored on a 6-point Likert scaling style with options ranging 1 = Strongly Agree (SA), 2 = Moderately Agree (MA), 3 = Slightly Agree (SLA), 4 = Slightly Disagree (SLD), 5 = Moderately Disagree (MD) and 6 = Strongly Disagree (SD). There are three dimensions within the PSI: Problem Solving Confidence (PSC), Approach-Avoidance Style (AAS), and Personal Control (PC). The total score for the instrument measures total self-appraised problem solving ability. The inventory has alpha coefficients ranging from .70 to .89 as reported by Heppner and Peterson (1982).

4.3.3 Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER)

The adopted Annual Performance Evaluation Report for Ogun State Public Servants contains items on job performance. The APER scale is aimed at evaluating the job performance with consideration of seven (7) components, which include: quality of work, quantity of work, cooperativeness/loyalty, resourcefulness and reliability, conduct, self-development/improvement efforts and experience.

A revalidation of the instruments were however carried out by the researchers using test- re-test method and it yielded a reliability co-efficient of 0.68, 0.66 and 0.71 respectively at 0.05 level of significance.

4.4 Procedure

Data was collected using the three (3) sets of instrument compiled into a questionnaire as described above. Permission was sought from the Secretaries' bosses before administering the questionnaire on the participants at their various Departments. The instrument was personally administered by the researchers on the selected sample and explanations were given where necessary. 294 out of 300 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved back from the participants for data analysis. The researchers achieved a 98 percent response rate of return.

4.5 Method of Data Analysis

The data collected from the instrument administered on the sample were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient, Multiple Regression and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine the relationship among the variables and was tested for significance at the 0.05 level of significance.

5. Results

5.1 Preliminary Results

The results are as presented in Tables 1 – 4.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Job performance, Self-efficacy and Problem solving skills

	Mean	Std. Dev.
Job Performance	75.64	10.26
Self-Efficacy	32.23	5.25
Problem Solving Skills	135.87	18.02

Descriptive Statistics of the Variables of the Study

The results in Table 1 revealed the mean and standard deviation for job performance, self-efficacy and problem solving skills. For job performance (Mean = 75.64; SD = 10.26); for self-efficacy (Mean = 32.23; SD = 5.25); and for problem solving skills (Mean = 135.87; SD = 18.02).

5.2 Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship among self-efficacy, problem solving skills and job performance of Secretaries in the Public Service of Ogun State.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of the Relationship among Self-Efficacy, Problem Solving Skills and Job Performance of Secretaries in the Public Service of Ogun State

		Self-Efficacy	Problem Solving Skills	Job Performance
Self-Efficacy	Pearson Correlation	1	.336**	.674**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	294	294	294
Problem Solving Skills	Pearson Correlation	.336**	1	.603**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	294	294	294
Job Performance	Pearson Correlation	.674**	.603**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	294	294	294

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

Results in Table 2 revealed that there are significant and positive relationships between self-efficacy and problem solving skills ($r = .336$; $p < .05$); self-efficacy and job performance ($r = .674$; $p < .05$); and problem solving skills and job performance ($r = .603$; $p < .05$).

5.3 Hypothesis Two

There is no significant combined contribution of self-efficacy and problem solving skills in the prediction of job performance of Secretaries in the Public Service of Ogun State.

Table 3: Model Summary of the Multiple Regression Analysis for the Combined Contributions of Self-Efficacy and Problem Solving Skills in the Prediction of Job Performance of Secretaries in the Public Service of Ogun State.

REGRESSION	ANOVA					
		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Model						
R = .783	Regression	18939.419	2	9469.709	230.872	.000 ^b
R Square = .613	Residual	11935.973	291	41.017		
Adjusted R Square = .611	Total	30875.392	293			
a. Dependent Variable: Job Performance						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Problem Solving Skills, Self-Efficacy						

Multiple Regression Analysis of Self-Efficacy and Problem Solving Skills on Job Performance of Secretaries in the Public Service of Ogun State.

The results in Table 3 indicated that with all the predictor variables (self-efficacy and problem-solving skills) entered into the regression model at once, there was a significant prediction of job performance of Secretaries in the Public Service of Ogun State, ($R = .783$; $R^2 = .613$; $Adj R^2 = .611$; $F_{(2,291)} = 230.872$; $p < .05$). This showed that all the variables accounted for 61.1% of the variance in the job performance of Secretaries in the Public Service of Ogun State. The null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant combined contribution of self-efficacy and problem solving skills in the prediction of job performance of Secretaries in the Public Service of Ogun State was rejected by this finding. This implies that there is a significant combined contribution of self-efficacy and problem solving skills in the prediction of job performance of Secretaries in the Public Service of Ogun State.

5.4 Hypothesis Three

There is no significant relative contribution of self-efficacy and problem solving skills in the prediction of job performance of Secretaries in the Public Service of Ogun State.

Table 4: Beta Coefficients and t Ratio for Relative Contributions of Self-Efficacy and Problem Solving Skills in the Prediction of Job Performance of Secretaries in the Public Service of Ogun State.

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t-Ratio	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	9.368	3.185		2.942	.004
Self-Efficacy	1.037	.076	.531	13.726	.000
Problem Solving Skills	.242	.022	.424	10.960	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Job Performance

The results in Table 4 revealed that self-efficacy and problem solving skills are potent predictors of job performance of Secretaries in the Public Service of Ogun State. Self-efficacy was the most potent predictor ($\beta = .531$; $t = 13.726$; $p < .05$) followed by problem solving skills ($\beta = .424$; $t = 10.960$; $p < .05$). The null

hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relative contribution of self-efficacy and problem solving skills in the prediction of job performance of Secretaries in the Public Service of Ogun State was rejected by this finding. This implies that there is a significant relative contribution of self-efficacy and problem solving skills in the prediction of job performance of Secretaries in the Public Service of Ogun State.

6. Discussion of Findings

The results as presented revealed that there are significant and positive relationships between self-efficacy and problem solving skills; self-efficacy and job performance; and problem solving skills and job performance. The implication is that there is a significant and positive relationship between self-efficacy and problem solving skills; self-efficacy and job performance; and problem solving skills and job performance. This is in line with a study conducted by Aurah, Cassidy and McConnell (2014) whose findings revealed that a significant positive relationship between background knowledge, self-efficacy and metacognitive prompting and genetics problem solving ability indicating that students with higher scores on these variables tend to have higher genetics problem solving ability. It further underpins the finding of Erozkhan (2013) who found that interpersonal problem solving skills affect people's self-efficacy expectations, having indicated that there was a positive relationship among self-efficacy and problem solving skills.

The foregoing was supported by Randhawa (2004), Shockley, Ispas, Rossi and Levine (2011), Mathieu, Martineau and Tannenbaum (2003) who argued that, a significant positive relationship exist between self-efficacy and job performance, suggesting that the higher the job-specific self-efficacy, the higher will be the job performance of employees. It is evident therefore that there is a significant relationship between problem solving skills and job performance and was supported

by the finding of Rosen and Tager (2013) on collaborative problem solving, cooperative work and group work which reported a significantly positive relationship between problem solving skills and performance.

Furthermore, the results indicated that with all the predictor variables (self-efficacy and problem solving skills) entered into the regression model at once, there was a significant prediction of job performance of Secretaries in the Public Service of Ogun State. This showed that all the variables accounted for 61.1% of the variance in the job performance of Secretaries in the Public Service of Ogun State. This implies that there are significant combined contributions of self-efficacy and problem solving skills in the prediction of job performance of Secretaries in the Public Service of Ogun State. This finding did corroborate with the work of Oyewunmi, Ibitoye and Sanni (2012) where they discovered that a strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal well-being in many ways. In line with this, Gist (1989) found out that when self-efficacy is enhanced, attendant increases in performance are noted. In the same vein, Branford and Stein (1993), Blanchard-Fields (2007) and Buchner (1995) confirmed the importance of problem solving skills as a key skill necessary for every worker in solving everyday problems or issues in the work for better performance.

It is hereby deduced that the connection between self-efficacy, problem solving skills and achievement gets stronger as Secretaries advance in the office. By the time employees are in office, their self-efficacy and problem solving skills are more strongly related to their achievement than any measure of their ability. If high job performance is to be developed among Secretaries, it is essential that stronger self-efficacy and problem solving skills are built as early as possible.

Moreover, the results revealed that self-efficacy and problem solving skills are potent predictors of job performance of Secretaries in the Public Service of Ogun State. These are in agreement with the work of Bandura (1997) which stated that people with high self-efficacy helps create feelings of serenity in approaching difficult tasks and activities while people with low self-efficacy may believe that things are tougher than they really are. As a result of these influences, self-efficacy and problem solving skills are strong predictors of the level of accomplishment that individuals finally attained. The finding support the work of Akinboye (2003) who asserted that people who accept problems as challenges and think about them as something that can be resolved tend to see opportunities which others could not see. The result of the study is also in consonance with the Bandura's social cognitive theory with a postulation that perceived self-efficacy affects an individual in all aspects of life, including work related experiences; that people are more likely to view challenges as something to be mastered rather than avoided. The implication of this is that a Secretary with strong self-efficacy and high problem solving skills will approach tasks as a challenge to be surmounted and will be better equipped in solving everyday problems.

7. Conclusion

From the observation, it is obvious that although Secretaries are indispensable office workers, an office Secretary who lacks these abilities and skills (self-efficacy and problem solving) would not be of great value to the boss and organization. Whitehead (1977) as cited in Igbinedion (2010) noted that the office Secretary is the power behind the work of many executives, as she does more to promote the efficiency of the organization than any other occupation. Almost every day, new businesses emerge in our society and the demand for competent

Secretaries continues to increase. It is then necessary that the Secretary should be able to adjust to the office technology available and acquire new skills and competencies required to be able to discharge official roles effectively. Nwogwugwu (2002) opined that Secretaries who are not well equipped in terms of new skills and competencies, knowledge and abilities required for today and tomorrow's office are sure to be embarrassed as their inadequate skills will render them incapable or even throw them out of job. The benefits of these skills to the individual cannot be undermined; such benefits include improved performance, greater probability of job placement, job stability and possibly greater job satisfaction.

Considering the role of Secretaries in organizations the bulk of the blames of non-performance can be put on their doorsteps ranging from facilitating meetings and preparing official documents as most offices in the public service sector depend solely on paper works and thus relying heavily on the Secretaries for the day-to-day running of their affairs.

8. Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is hereby recommended that Secretaries should endeavour to maintain and improve these two skills so as to improve their job performance.

It is also recommended that in order to promote excellence in any organization, there should be provision for regular on the job or in-service training for Secretaries in the public service which will bring about improvement of their self-efficacy and problem solving skills and also lead to improvement of their job performance. Organizations should pay more attention to work environment in order to make it more favourable to the Secretaries since the work environment is significantly related to job performance.

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