

**PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND MORAL STANDARD OF FEMALE SECRETARIES
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN, OYO STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The study examined professional ethics as well as the moral conducts of female secretaries in the University of Ibadan. Total enumeration technique was adopted to select 78 secretaries as respondents to the study instrument (questionnaire) titled “Professional Ethics and Moral Standard Questionnaire” (PEMSQ) that was used for data collection. Descriptive statistics that comprised of simple percentages and mean was used in analyzing the study research questions while inferential statistics as Pearson’s product moment correlation (PPMC) was used to analyse the hypothesis. It was revealed that appropriate behaviour/attitude/communication, corporate appearance, adherence to codes/regulations/protocols, punctuality, membership of professional body, confidentiality and intellectual development were the professional ethics found among female secretaries in University of Ibadan. The major moral standards are completing task as at when due, good team work abilities and avoiding using official time for leisure. A significant positive relationship was established among professional ethics and moral conduct of secretaries in the university of Ibadan ($r=0.203$; $p < .05$). To get the best out of secretaries, their employers should always remind them of the ethics of their profession through the human resource office..

Keywords: Professional Ethics, Moral Standard, Gender Inequality, Tertiary Institution

Introduction

Over the decades, the concept of professional ethics among secretaries has been seen as a burning issue that has pervaded most academic discusses especially as it relates to academic circles like the university of Ibadan currently ranked number one in Nigeria and a highly rated institution both in Africa and to a large extent in the world. Poor secretarial conduct can lead to a decline in secretarial standards seen today as a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the goodwill of most organization which is inhibiting the growth of many functional organizations. According to

Kehinde (2010), many firms are facing issues in today's world, as indicated by unlawful and unethical secretarial transactions. As is well known, the secretary is the eye of any administration hence if there is a challenge with secretarial duties, the organization has commenced a downward decline.

Organizations have created ethical codes to deal with difficult ethical dilemmas instead of the aforementioned. Professional ethics can be defined as a collection of moral guidelines developed by an organization to influence employee behavior both inside and outside of the organisation or workplace. No doubt, displaying professional ethics in the workplace have been seen to have aided companies to meet up with their envisaged profit margin over the years. As described in the literature on organizational performance, such evaluations serve as common measures of organizational performance (Amakiri & Gogo, 2018). Every organization places a high value on ethics. Any organization's ethical conduct or legislation are just as important as its mission statement. Managers do not appear to be interested in determining if their activities are correct or incorrect. Again, it indicates that they are less concerned with employees' comprehension of the phrase ethics, despite the fact that compliance looks to be low (Oladunni 2002).

It is observed that as organizations attempt to uphold ethical standards, there is a level of agreement around the world which according to Steinberg (1994), described ethics as "everyday decency" that encompasses integrity, honesty, and fairness. According to Segunda (2019), some of the professional ethics expected of secretaries that must be adhered to includes but not limited to confidentiality, honesty, loyalty, reliability, responsibility, work unsupervised, multi-tasking, flexibility among others. It is further expected that adherence to professional ethics and moral standards could assist secretaries and improve secretaries in the performance of numerous office functions including administrative, human relation functions, information and communication technology functions among others (Ikelegbe, 2018).

Behaving ethically is considered as part of an organization's social responsibility, which is based on the notion that businesses should have an impact on society that goes beyond the traditional profit maximization goal (Onyije & Nweke, 2017). It frequently affirmed that acting in a way that

recognizes the importance of moral and ethical substance in managerial decisions is in a company's best interests because it will help the organization in the long run.

Review of Related Literature

Professional ethics on the other hand is the own values and principles of a profession, while secretarial ethics is the values and principles of secretaries and authorities. Morals and ethics, on the other hand, have a close original meaning. Morals and ethics are derived from the Latin words "moralis" and "ethos," respectively. Both phrases refer to "a way of life or a custom." Morals and morality, on the other hand, refer to the behavior itself, whereas ethics and ethical refer to the study of moral behavior or the system or code that is followed (Ilori, 1994). The term "ethics" refers to a set of norms and guidelines that are intended to serve as guiding principles for any profession or organization (Adeyinka, 2014). It is also a rational investigation into or theory of the criteria of right and wrong, good and evil in terms of character and conduct, that should be recognized by a group of people. It is worth noting that the goal of ethics is to determine the laws that regulate human behavior. Every ethical decision is based on the underlying and guiding principles of individual values.

The ethics of a professional secretary or office manager, according to Ugoji (2006), are those moral principles connected to the office manager's employment that he is required to adopt upon accepting the appointment. The following ethics are elucidated:

Confidentiality is derived from the latin derivative of the term "secretarius," which means "confidential employee." A secretary must always keep information about the firm he works for and its clients discreet. Even if you are in a discussion where everyone is asking what is going on and you have facts, never share critical information.

Honesty: don't take credit for something you didn't do, and don't give credit to someone else for your efforts. It also entails always stating the truth. As a result, you establish credibility with your supervisor and coworkers.

Loyalty: Be loyal to your boss and your organization at all times. At all costs, do not sell them out.

Your employer, on the other hand, must demonstrate that he is deserving of your trust. Do not get swept up in office rumors.

Reliability: demonstrate your dependability by completing tasks or jobs on schedule. Also, always strive to be on time for work and meetings, and remember to bring any pertinent documents with you.

Responsibility: demonstrate your responsibility by prioritizing duties and completing them on time. To put it another way, always meet death lines. **Work unsupervised:** always keep your work up to date and be productive. Meet deadlines. Everyday write out the list of tasks you need to perform to ensure none is overlooked.

Cooperative: Be willing to help and share your professional knowledge with colleagues when the situation calls for it, but know when to politely decline.

Flexibility: Your work schedule and arrangements with your supervisor must be flexible. The best jobs are those that require you to give and take. You never know when you'll need to take a break.

Multi-Skilling: Make it a point to learn on the job, particularly about computer programs and various job responsibilities inside the company. You might need this information if you apply for a promotion.

Bribery: keep an eye out for Greek gifts or favors from clients in case there's a hidden agenda. Always make an effort to follow the company's policies and procedures.

A study conducted by Obi (2013) on the professional ethics of secretaries in Southeast Nigeria found that professional ethics and office etiquette are the foundation for good human relation in modern day office work. In another study conducted by Christensen (2009) on professional ethics of secretaries who revealed that the application of professional ethics has succeeded in enhancing and increasing the output and productivity of secretaries and office managers. Agholor and Agholor (2020) did a study on application of professional ethics on job effectiveness of secretaries in Delta state polytechnics and found that application of professional ethics has positive impact on moral standard among secretaries. The author affirmed that organizations should always lay emphasis on the need for their secretaries and office managers to uphold and always apply all professional ethics in the delivery of official assignment for effectiveness and improved performance. Joe (2019) examined moral standard of secretaries in Nigeria and found that good behavior, diligence, obedience, loyalty and courtesy, and maintaining and defending security were

some of the moral standard exhibited by secretaries. The author affirmed that the good and bad image of the secretary depends on the ethical reflection of the secretary.

Statement of the Problem

Several studies have been conducted on professional ethics and moral standard, but limited studies have been conducted on professional ethics and moral standard of female secretaries. secretarial profession has come a long way from change in gender dominance (female) to technologies that have improve work output and increased job opportunities, and administrative office roles have also remained an integral part of business operations, and all signs indicated that the secretarial profession is here to stay. However, there are set backs as observed by literature that there was no empirical evidence to show that the objectives of the office technology and management curriculum are realized especially with respect to professional ethics and moral conduct. Also employers of labour have often complained of absence of professionalism in most trained secretaries that, some of those employed have not performed to expectation and are without ethical standard expected from them. There are death of study that examined professional ethics and moral standard among female secretaries, this is the gap to be filled in this study.

Aim of the Study

The main aim of the study was to examine the professional ethics and moral standard of female secretaries in University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to;

- i. examine the professional ethics of female secretaries in University of Ibadan, Nigeria.
- ii. examine the moral standard of female secretaries in University of Ibadan, Nigeria.
- iii. investigate the relationship between professional ethics and moral standard of female secretaries in University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following were the research questions:

1. What are the professional ethics of female secretaries in University of Ibadan, Nigeria?
2. What are the moral standards of female secretaries in University of Ibadan, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following were the null hypothesis

H₀₁: There will be no significant relationship among professional ethics and moral standard of female secretaries in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria?

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was adopted in the study. This type of design is usually preferred for these type of research where the researcher cannot manipulate the variables of interest. It is also very useful in analyzing large populations. One of the advantages of survey research and relevance to the present study is the fact that it makes evaluation of existing conditions as well as collection of factual information possible. The study population comprised of seven (78) female secretaries in the University of Ibadan. Total enumeration technique was employed to ensure a robust participation of all female secretaries in the university. The use of total enumeration technique is further in line with the position of Byrman (2003) who posited that the use of this technique arises when the respondents for the study are relatively large.

The questionnaire which was the instrument used in the collection of data was titled “Professional Ethics and Moral Standard Questionnaire” (*PEMSQ*). The questionnaire is preferred because of the high literacy level of the study population. In a non-experimental study, the questionnaire is an acceptable instrument. *PEMSQ* consisted of open and closed item questionnaire made up of four parts ‘A to C’. Part A contained information on the demographic characteristics of respondents while part B consisted of items on professional ethics and moral standards of female secretaries that was researcher (10) test items. Face and content validity of the instrument was established by sending copies of *PEMSQ* to two test and measurement professionals in the Department of Office Information Management, Lead City University, Ibadan. The instrument was well validated as it was found to measure what it designed to measure as it established the instrument in clarity and adequacy. The final draft of the questionnaire used in this study was drafted based on their

suggestions. In testing the reliability of the scale, a trial test was conducted on other subjects outside the target group of the study in Lead City University, Ibadan. Responses were subjected to the statistical tool Cronbach Alpha that yielded a reliability coefficient of ' r ' = 0.79.

The researcher administered the instrument to the respondents in their respective departments in the university with the help of a trained research assistant. 68 questionnaires well responded questionnaires were retrieved representing 87% considered good enough were used for the study. Descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation were used to answer research questions 1 & 2 while inferential statistics of Pearson's product moment correlation (PPMC) was used to analyse hypothesis 1.

Results and Findings

Table 1: Demographic information of the Respondents

Variables		Frequency	Percentage
Educational qualification	OND	11	16.2
	HND	21	30.9
	B.Sc	27	39.7
	Masters	4	5.9
	Others	5	7.4
Years of service	0-5	13	19.1
	6-11	31	45.6
	12-17	16	23.5
	18 and above	8	11.8

Table 1 revealed that 16.2% of the respondents had OND as their highest educational qualification, 30.9% had HND, 39.7% had B.Sc while 5.9% had masters and the rest 7.4% had other qualifications. This means that respondents who had B.Sc as their highest educational qualification participated more in the study. Also, 19.1% had spent between 0-5 years as secretaries, 45.6% had spent between 6-11 years while 23.5% had spent between 12-17 years and the rest 11.8% had spent 18 years and above. This means that respondents whose years of service fell between 6-11 years participated more in the study.

Answer to Research Questions

Research question 1

What are the professional ethics of female secretaries in University of Ibadan, Nigeria?

Table 2: Professional ethics of female secretaries in University of Ibadan, Nigeria

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
1	Adherence to codes/regulations/protocols	36 (52.9%)	29 (42.6%)	3 (4.4%)	-	3.49
2	Corporate appearance	35 (51.5%)	28 (47.1%)	1 (1.5%)		3.50
3	Appropriate behavior/attitudes/ communication	38 (55.9%)	28 (41.2%)	2 (2.9%)	-	3.53
4	Membership of a professional body	31 (45.6%)	35 (51.5%)	1 (1.5%)	1 (1.5%)	3.42
5	Punctuality	37 (54.5%)	25 (36.8%)	6 (8.8%)	-	3.46
6	Confidentiality	30 (44.1%)	25 (36.8%)	13 (19.1%)	-	3.25
7	Maintaining accountability	28 (41.2%)	36 (52.9%)	3 (4.4%)	1 (1.5%)	2.75
8	Qualification	23 (33.8%)	40 (58.8%)	3 (4.4%)	2 (2.9%)	2.60
9	Admitting and correcting mistakes	29 (42.6%)	36 (52.9%)	2 (2.9%)	1 (1.5%)	2.91
10	Intellectual development over-time	22 (32.4%)	27 (39.7%)	16 (23.5%)	3 (4.4%)	3.00

Result from Table 2 revealed the professional ethics of female secretaries in University of Ibadan, Nigeria. It showed that appropriate behavior/attitudes/ communication ($\bar{x} = 3.53$) was ranked highest by the mean score rating and was followed in succession by corporate appearance ($\bar{x} = 3.50$), adherence to codes/regulations/protocols ($\bar{x} = 3.49$), punctuality ($\bar{x} = 3.46$), membership of a professional body ($\bar{x} = 3.42$), confidentiality ($\bar{x} = 3.25$), intellectual development over-time ($\bar{x} = 3.00$), admitting and correcting mistakes ($\bar{x} = 2.91$), maintaining accountability ($\bar{x} = 2.75$) and lastly qualification ($\bar{x} = 2.60$).

It could be inferred that some of the professional ethics of female secretaries in University of Ibadan are; appropriate behaviour/attitudes/ communication, corporate appearance, adherence to

codes/regulations/protocols, punctuality, membership of a professional body, confidentiality, intellectual development over-time.

Research Question 2

What are the moral standards of female secretaries in University of Ibadan, Nigeria?

Table 3: Moral standards among female secretaries University of Ibadan, Nigeria

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
1	Loyalty to your boss and organization	20 (39.7%)	27 (39.7%)	12 (17.6%)	9 (13.2%)	2.51
2	Completing task as at when due	21 (30.9%)	37 (54.4%)	7 (10.3%)	3 (4.4%)	3.35
3	Maintaining cordial relationship with your colleagues	29 (42.6%)	36 (52.9%)	3 (4.4%)	-	2.56
4	Commitment to your job	27 (39.7%)	31 (45.6%)	7 (10.3%)	3 (4.4%)	2.38
5	Good team work abilities	21 (30.9%)	37 (54.4%)	6 (8.8%)	4 (5.9%)	3.07
S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
6	Avoid using office time for leisure	17 (25.0%)	30 (44.1%)	12 (17.6%)	9 (13.2%)	2.76
7	Accept mistakes when they occur	16 (23.5%)	24 (35.3%)	15 (22.1%)	13 (19.1%)	2.50
Average mean: 2.73						

Result from Table 3 revealed the moral standards of female secretaries in University of Ibadan, Nigeria. It showed that completing task as at when due ($\bar{x} = 3.35$) was ranked highest by the mean score rating and was followed in succession by good team work abilities ($\bar{x} = 3.07$), avoid using office time for leisure ($\bar{x} = 2.76$), maintaining cordial relationship with your colleagues ($\bar{x} = 2.56$), loyalty to your boss and organization ($\bar{x} = 2.51$), accept mistakes when they occur ($\bar{x} = 2.50$) and lastly commitment to your job ($\bar{x} = 2.60$).

It could be inferred that the moral standard of female secretaries in University of Ibadan is high with an average mean of 2.73. The major moral standards are completing task as at when due, good team work abilities and avoid using office time for leisure.

Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1

There will be no significant relationship among professional ethics and moral standard of female secretaries in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria?

Table 4: Relationship between professional ethics and moral standard

Variable	Mean	SD	N	Df	r	Sig	Remark
Professional ethics	15.56	3.42	68	66	203**	0.000	Sig.
Moral standard	13.30	2.41					

*significant at 0.05

Table 4 shows the relationship between professional ethics and moral standard of female secretaries. Result revealed that there is significant positive relationship between professional ethics and moral standard ($r = 0.203^{**}$; $p < 0.05$). This means that being aware and abiding by ethics of the profession could make secretaries to be morally upright in their various organisations.

Discussion of Findings

Result from research question one showed that the professional ethics of female secretaries in University of Ibadan are; appropriate behaviour/attitudes/ communication, corporate appearance, adherence to codes/regulations/protocols, punctuality, membership of a professional body, confidentiality, intellectual development over-time. The finding lends credence with that of Segunda (2019) who found in his study that some of the professional ethics which secretaries must adhere to include confidentiality, honesty, loyalty, reliability, responsibility, work unsupervised, multi-tasking, flexibility and so on. Result also revealed that moral standard of female secretaries in University of Ibadan is high with an average mean of 2.73. The major moral standards are completing task as at when due, good team work abilities and avoid using office time for leisure. The finding corroborates that of Joe (2019) who examined moral standard of secretaries in Nigeria and found that good behavior, diligence, obedience, loyalty and courtesy, and maintaining and defending security were some of the moral standard exhibited by secretaries.

The author affirmed that the good and bad image of the secretary depends on the ethical reflection of the secretary. Result also showed that there is significant positive correlation between professional ethics and moral standard. The finding supports that of Agholor and Agholor (2020) did a study on the influence of application of professional ethics on job effectiveness of secretaries in delta state polytechnics and found that application of professional ethics has positive impact on moral standard among secretaries.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It could be concluded that professional ethics and moral standards are a worldwide phenomenon which has become so crucial for every employees and employers of labour to keep tab on. It is a critical issue for business organizations, and corporate executives must take aggressive actions to address it. Unethical office practices have cost organizations the ability to improve their performance. However, it is a well-known fact that ethical behavior in the workplace leads to improved performance and, in the long term, organizational growth. It could be recommended that:

1. Employee of labour should build an ethically pleasant workplace for all employees, address ethical concerns, serve as role models, and put in place mechanisms for employee development.
2. Organizational ethics and punishments for their breaches should be clearly explain and made available to each employee on the first day of his/her resumption of duty in the organization, while at the same time organizations should always enlighten their employees about ethical standards and create ethical awareness and reasonings.
3. To get the best out of secretaries, their employers should always remind them of the ethics of their profession through the human resource office.
4. Secretaries should join their professional bodies, to enable them to be involved in their activities in order to have new insight on new areas of training and development.
5. Employees should be educated on ethical standards, proper behavior, and how ethical issues will be addressed by their employers. This will set the tone for all decision-making at all levels and under all conditions.

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