

Executives' Perspectives on the Competencies of Secretarial Staff at the Student Development Division, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University

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Abstract

This study explored executives' perspectives on the competencies of secretarial staff at the Student Development Division, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. A quantitative research design was employed, utilizing a structured questionnaire distributed to 20 executives within the division. The questionnaire assessed competencies across five domains: professional, organizational, communication, digital and technological, and problem-solving and decision-making. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, and inferential statistics such as t-tests and ANOVA to examine differences based on demographic factors. The findings indicate that secretarial staff demonstrated very high professional competency and high organizational and communication competencies, while digital and technological skills and problem-solving abilities were rated slightly lower, suggesting areas for improvement. Executives recommended targeted training and professional development programs to enhance digital literacy and strategic problem-solving skills. The study provides insights for enhancing secretarial staff performance, contributing to the efficiency and effectiveness of administrative operations within the Student Development Division.

Keywords: Secretarial competencies, Professional skills, Digital literacy, Problem-solving, Higher education administration

1. Introduction

1.1 Principles and Rationale

In contemporary higher education institutions, secretarial staff play a pivotal role in supporting administrative operations, facilitating communication, and ensuring the smooth functioning of organizational units (Cunningham, 2016). Their responsibilities extend beyond traditional clerical tasks to include information management, coordination of events, digital communication, and support for strategic initiatives. Consequently, the competencies of secretarial staff are critical to the efficiency and effectiveness of administrative divisions in universities (Dessler, 2020).

At Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, the Student Development Division is tasked with promoting student welfare, facilitating personal and professional growth, and organizing various development programs. Secretarial staff within this division serve as the backbone of administrative operations, managing documentation, scheduling, communications, and other essential support functions. Executives within the division rely heavily on the skills,

knowledge, and behaviors of these staff members to ensure that the division achieves its objectives effectively (Boyatzis, 2008).

Research has highlighted several key competency areas necessary for administrative and secretarial personnel, including organizational skills, communication skills, digital literacy, problem-solving abilities, and interpersonal competencies (Goyal, 2019; Yasin & Dzulkifli, 2013). With the increasing integration of technology in administrative work, digital and technological competencies have become essential for managing information systems, maintaining records, and facilitating virtual communications (Nadler & Tushman, 1997).

Despite the recognized importance of secretarial competencies, there remains limited research examining executives' perspectives on the actual competencies exhibited by secretarial staff, particularly in the context of Thai higher education institutions. Understanding these perspectives can provide insights into current strengths, gaps, and areas for professional development, ultimately contributing to improved organizational performance and student services (Cunningham, 2016; Junnuan & Rojanapanich, 2022; Srihera et al., 2025).

Therefore, this study aims to explore executives' perspectives on the competencies of secretarial staff at the Student Development Division, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, with the goal of identifying areas of strength and opportunities for enhancement. The findings are expected to inform targeted training programs, professional development initiatives, and strategic workforce planning within the division.

1.2 Research Objective

The primary objective of this study is to explore executives' perspectives on the competencies of secretarial staff at the Student Development Division, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Identify the key competencies that executives consider essential for secretarial staff in supporting administrative and student development functions.
2. Assess the perceived performance levels of secretarial staff in demonstrating professional, organizational, communication, and digital competencies.
3. Determine areas for improvement or skill development, based on executives' evaluations, to enhance efficiency, effectiveness, and organizational performance.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Competencies

The concept of competency has evolved to encompass not only knowledge and technical skills but also behavioral attributes and personal characteristics that enable individuals to perform effectively in their roles (Boyatzis, 2008). Competencies are typically categorized into technical, cognitive, behavioral, and interpersonal domains, which collectively define an employee's ability to meet organizational objectives (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). In administrative contexts, competencies extend to include organizational skills, communication, problem-solving, digital literacy, and adaptability to changing work environments (Dessler, 2020).

2.2 Competencies of Secretarial Staff

Secretarial staff serve as the backbone of administrative operations in organizations, ensuring efficient workflow, timely communication, and coordination among departments (Cunningham, 2016). Their competencies can be classified into several key areas:

Professional Competency: Includes knowledge of administrative procedures, office management, and adherence to organizational policies (Goyal, 2019). Professional competence ensures accuracy and efficiency in routine administrative tasks.

Organizational Competency: Involves planning, scheduling, time management, and multitasking abilities that enable secretarial staff to manage workloads effectively and support departmental goals (Boyatzis, 2008).

Communication Competency: Encompasses written and oral communication, interpersonal skills, and the ability to liaise effectively with internal and external stakeholders (Cunningham, 2016). Effective communication is critical in facilitating smooth operations and fostering collaborative work environments.

Digital and Technological Competency: Includes proficiency in office software, Learning Management Systems (LMS), digital communication platforms, and data management. With the increasing digitalization of administrative work, technological skills are essential for efficiency and accuracy (Goyal, 2019; Nadler & Tushman, 1997).

Problem-Solving and Decision-Making Competency: Refers to the ability to analyze situations, identify challenges, and propose practical solutions in dynamic work environments (Yasin & Dzulkifli, 2013).

These competencies are interrelated and collectively contribute to the effectiveness, responsiveness, and overall performance of secretarial staff in higher education institutions.

2.3 Importance of Secretarial Competencies in Higher Education

In universities, secretarial staff not only perform administrative duties but also support academic and student development functions, which are central to institutional effectiveness (Dessler, 2020). Competent secretarial staff enable timely coordination of student programs, effective management of records, and seamless communication between faculty, students, and external stakeholders (Cunningham, 2016). Studies have emphasized that deficiencies in secretarial competencies can lead to operational inefficiencies, delays in service delivery, and reduced organizational performance (Yasin & Dzulkifli, 2013).

Furthermore, executives' perspectives provide critical insights into the actual competencies demonstrated by secretarial staff and help identify gaps between required and observed skills. Understanding these perspectives is particularly important in the Thai higher education context, where administrative staff are expected to adapt to evolving educational technologies, diverse student needs, and organizational reforms (Nadler & Tushman, 1997; Goyal, 2019).

2.4 Training and Development for Enhancing Competencies

To maintain and enhance competencies, targeted training and professional development programs are essential. Research indicates that continuous skills development, particularly in digital literacy, communication, and problem-solving, improves performance and job satisfaction among administrative staff (Goyal, 2019). Moreover, alignment of training with organizational goals ensures that staff contribute effectively to the strategic objectives of the

institution, including student development, quality assurance, and administrative efficiency (Dessler, 2020; Cunningham, 2016).

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to explore executives' perspectives on the competencies of secretarial staff at the Student Development Division, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. Quantitative research is appropriate for systematically measuring perceptions and identifying patterns or trends in evaluative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A descriptive survey method was applied to collect structured information regarding executives' assessments of secretarial competencies across multiple domains, including professional, organizational, communication, digital, and problem-solving skills.

3.1 Population and Sample

The population comprised all executives and managerial staff within the Student Development Division of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. The study employed total population sampling, including all available executives who directly supervise or work with secretarial staff. This approach ensures comprehensive coverage and captures the perspectives of those most familiar with the performance and competencies of the staff (Etikan et al., 2016). In total, 20 executives participated in the study, representing department heads, program coordinators, and senior administrative officers within the division.

3.2 Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire was developed based on established competency frameworks and prior studies on administrative staff competencies. The questionnaire included five key competency domains:

Professional Competency: knowledge of administrative procedures, adherence to rules, and ethical conduct.

Organizational Competency: time management, scheduling, multitasking, and workflow coordination.

Communication Competency: written and verbal communication, interpersonal skills, and collaboration.

Digital and Technological Competency: proficiency in office software, LMS platforms, and digital communication tools.

Problem-Solving and Decision-Making Competency: ability to identify issues, propose solutions, and make informed decisions.

Respondents rated each competency on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), indicating their level of agreement with statements describing the secretarial staff's abilities. Content validity was ensured through review by five experts in human resource management and higher education administration. Reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach's alpha, with a result of 0.91, indicating excellent internal consistency.

3.3 Data Collection

The questionnaire was distributed in both electronic and printed formats, depending on executives' preference. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of

confidentiality and anonymity. Respondents returned completed questionnaires directly to the research team for analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, and frequency, to summarize executives' perspectives on each competency domain. Inferential statistics, such as independent t-tests or one-way ANOVA, were applied to examine differences in perceptions based on demographic variables, such as position, years of experience, and gender. The results were interpreted in the context of existing literature on secretarial competencies and organizational performance, with findings used to identify areas for development and potential strategies to enhance staff effectiveness.

4. Results

The results highlight key areas of strength, identify gaps, and propose improvements for refining the operational processes to align with performance outcomes.

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

A total of 20 executives from the Student Development Division participated in the study. Among them, 55% were female and 45% male. The age distribution was as follows: 30–39 years (20%), 40–49 years (50%), and 50 years and above (30%). Regarding years of experience, 40% had 1–5 years, 35% had 6–10 years, and 25% had more than 10 years of supervisory experience. Most executives held managerial or departmental leadership positions, ensuring they had sufficient exposure to assess secretarial staff competencies.

4.2 Descriptive Analysis of Secretarial Competencies

Table 1 summarizes executives' evaluations of secretarial staff competencies across five key domains, using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Table 1 Mean Scores of Secretarial Staff Competencies

Competency Domain	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Professional Competency	4.35	0.52	Very High
Organizational Competency	4.20	0.58	High
Communication Competency	4.15	0.61	High
Digital and Technological Competency	3.95	0.65	High
Problem-Solving and Decision-Making	3.80	0.70	Moderate-High

The results indicate that secretarial staff were rated very high in professional competency, particularly in adherence to administrative procedures, ethical conduct, and task reliability. Organizational and communication competencies were also rated highly, reflecting the staff's ability to manage schedules, coordinate events, and communicate effectively with executives, colleagues, and students. Digital and technological competency received slightly lower ratings, suggesting that staff could benefit from additional training in software applications, digital communication platforms, and data management. Problem-solving and decision-making competency received the lowest rating among the domains, though it remained above average, indicating potential areas for improvement.

4.3 Differences in Perceptions by Demographic Factors

To examine whether perceptions of secretarial competencies differed based on executives' demographic characteristics, independent t-tests and one-way ANOVA were conducted.

Gender: No significant difference was observed between male and female executives in their evaluation of overall competencies ($t = 0.85$, $p > 0.05$).

Age: Executives aged 40–49 and 50+ rated digital and technological competencies slightly higher than younger executives ($F = 3.12$, $p < 0.05$), possibly due to greater appreciation of technological proficiency in administrative work.

Years of Experience: Executives with more than 10 years of supervisory experience rated problem-solving and decision-making competency higher than those with less experience ($F = 4.05$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that experience influences the evaluation of staff's strategic capabilities.

These findings indicate that while demographic factors generally do not create major differences in perceptions, age and supervisory experience may influence how executives evaluate specific competencies, particularly in digital skills and problem-solving.

4.4 Areas for Improvement

Based on both quantitative ratings and qualitative feedback provided by executives, areas for development include:

Digital and Technological Skills: Training on advanced office software, LMS platforms, and data management tools.

Problem-Solving and Decision-Making: Workshops to enhance critical thinking, proactive decision-making, and adaptive strategies for administrative challenges.

Professional Development Programs: Continuous development programs aligned with organizational goals to improve overall competencies.

These areas for improvement align with prior research emphasizing the evolving role of secretarial staff in higher education, which increasingly demands technological proficiency and strategic problem-solving abilities in addition to routine administrative skills.

5. Conclusion

This study explored executives' perspectives on the competencies of secretarial staff at the Student Development Division, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. The findings indicate that secretarial staff possess high levels of professional, organizational, and communication competencies, which enable them to perform administrative and coordination tasks effectively, supporting the division's objectives (Boyatzis, 2008; Cunningham, 2016). Executives also acknowledged the staff's strong adherence to administrative procedures and ethical standards, reflecting their reliability and professional behavior (Dessler, 2020).

However, the study identified areas for improvement. Digital and technological competencies were rated slightly lower, suggesting a need for targeted training in advanced office software, Learning Management Systems (LMS), and data management tools (Goyal, 2019; Nadler & Tushman, 1997). Additionally, problem-solving and decision-making competencies were perceived as moderate, indicating that staff would benefit from programs

designed to enhance critical thinking, proactive decision-making, and adaptive strategies in dynamic administrative contexts (Yasin & Dzulkifli, 2013).

Overall, executives perceive secretarial staff as competent and reliable in core administrative functions, but enhancing technological proficiency and problem-solving abilities would further strengthen their performance and contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of the Student Development Division. Implementing continuous professional development programs focused on these areas is recommended to optimize staff competencies and support the division's broader goals in student development and institutional excellence (Cunningham, 2016; Dessler, 2020).

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