



EVALUATION IN BUSINESS EDUCATION: CHALLENGES OF MASTERY OF SHORTHAND SKILLS

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Abstract

Shorthand is one of the courses offered at all levels of the secretarial studies. A greater percentage of secretarial students have always performed very poorly in shorthand. This situation has resulted in a number of students calling for either the reduction of credit load allocation to shorthand or total removal of the course from the OTM/Secretarial Studies curriculum. Various reasons have been advanced as causes of the disturbing rate of failure which include teachers and student's factors, lack of interest, accidental entry into the programme, assessment procedure, lack of qualified teachers, population of students, lack of facilities and equipment. Although some of the factors are being adequately addressed, there are some other very serious factors that contribute to student's inability to achieve shorthand objectives of the programme. The study adopted the survey research design. The population of the study was 15 lecturers/Instructors and eighty-five HND IFT and HND II FT students in OTM department of Federal Polytechnic, Ede. The instrument for data collection used was a 4-point Likert Rating scale titled "Evaluation of Mastery of Shorthand Skills Questionnaires for students (EMSSQS) and "Evaluation of Mastery of Shorthand Skills Questionnaire for lecturers (EMSSQL). The reliability of the instrument was determined using cronbach alpha with a co-efficient value of 0.86. The data generated was analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The findings of the study revealed that the objectives of shorthand programme/course are not being adequately met and that many strategies are employed by teachers to give the students the false impression that they are doing well. It was concluded that lecturers should encourage their students to work hard and students should disabuse their minds that shorthand is no longer used in offices because shorthand skill is the only skill that differentiate them from other students. It was recommended that the number of hours allocated to Shorthand should be increased and that lecturers should use various methods of teaching to impart the skill to the students.

Keywords: Evaluation, Business Education, Shorthand Skills



Introduction

Shorthand as a cornerstone course of business education falls within the secretarial programme and office option of business education. It is offered in both secondary and post-secondary levels in our private and public institutions. It is also offered in some of the registered and unregistered commercial institutes abound our cities. At the Junior Secondary Schools, it is offered as an integral part of Business Studies as a subject while at the Senior Secondary School, it is offered as a subject. Shorthand is taught as a major course in Office Technology and Management Department of Polytechnics, it is also a core course in Office Option of Business Education Department of Colleges of Education, while at University level, it is one of the course offered in the Business Education Department.

The concept “Shorthand” has been variously defined by scholars. Canning (1981) defined Shorthand as the art of representing spoken words in a faster way. Davies and Oladunjoye (1990) opined that Shorthand means the art of writing symbols that represent sounds. According to Pitman (1975) an inventor of Pitman Shorthand which was published in 1837 defined Shorthand as the art of representing spoken sounds by writing signs”.

There are numerous Shorthand systems. According to Davies and Oladunjoye (1990), Crank, Anderson, Peterson, (1982) said that a lot of individuals have tried to invent new systems or perfect older systems which they thought would reduce the learning difficulty associated with earlier Shorthand System. Crank et. al gave the list of such Shorthand systems and their publication dates thus: Pitman (1837; Gregg (1883), Machine Shorthand (1910); Speedwriting (1923); Stenoscrypt (1950); Forkner (1972); Stenospeed (1953); Briefhand (1957)' Century 21 (1974); and Quickhand (1974). Out of these Shorthand systems mentioned by Crank et. al. Pitman Shorthand is the most widely used presently by vast majority of Shorthand writers.

Shorthand could be said to be a subject which is designed to enable the beneficiaries to keep pace with the speakers of the readers and record accurately words spoken or read. It is a system of writing rapidly and speedily by substituting strokes (light or heavy, horizontal, vertical or curve strokes) dots (light or bold), dashes (light or bold) and signs in abbreviation for words, letters or figures pronounced.

Another uniqueness of Shorthand skill is employment opportunity. Oladunjoye (1988) had observed that today, armed with good shorthand skills, the world is



indeed in the armpit of shorthand writers and secretaries. However, whether this assertion is appreciable today is difficult to substantiate. Also, Aina and Anyaduba (1989) reported that Shorthand is the answer and insurance against unemployment. When graduates of other courses would be looking for jobs, jobs would be looking for proficient shorthand writers. These assertions are fundamentally true and the position of the secretary with adequate shorthand skills are in demand and everywhere and a look through daily papers in Nigeria today confirms this. Up till this present moment, various organisations still advertise in the newspapers for the position of various categories of secretaries stating the speeds based on the cadre of secretaries they want. On the part of the students, most of them reported back to confess that they were made to take dictation and transcribe anytime they have the opportunity to go for the interview. It is against this background that the researcher discusses challenges militating against students' mastery of Shorthand skills and the strategies to be adopted for effective teaching and learning in the classroom.

The Office Technology and Management (OTM) programme was designed by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) to replace the Secretarial Studies programme which had been on stream since 1989. According to NBTE (2006) Curriculum, the programme was designed to equip its graduates to acquire vocational skills in OTM and socio-psychological work skills for employment in various fields of endeavour.

As a result of this change, much emphasis was laid on computer related courses while Shorthand as a course was de-emphasized in which just four contact hours was allocated for the teaching of the course per week. Ever before the introduction of the new curriculum, nearly everybody especially students have been agitating for the removal of the course from the curriculum. The reason for this desire was that Shorthand is a difficult subject, a hard nut that is difficult to crack. High failure rate is another reason why students always agitating for the removal of the course. Some reasons were also advanced for the high failure rate in Shorthand which have been expressed in various ways ranging from lecturer's personality, incompetence in English Language, inappropriate teaching method, lack of instructional facilities, school environment, textbooks to mention a few are discussed below:

A teacher is the central point of learning in a classroom situation. This is because he decides whether the subject will be of interest to the students or not. A student may like a particular subject very well but because of the poor teaching method of the



teacher such a student may lose interest in such a subject (Adedokun, 2014). There are many factors that influence the teachers and students relationship towards the teaching and understanding of shorthand such as aptitude, attitude, subject mastery, teaching methodology, personal characteristics, the classroom environment, general mental ability, personality, relationship with the students, preparation and planning, effectiveness in presenting subject matters, relationship with other staff, self-improvement, relationship with parents and community, poise, intellect, teaching techniques, interactions with students, teaching competence demonstrated, motivational skills, fairness in grading and teachers' attitude towards the students etc.

In Nigeria, English Language is the official language of communication and it is used as a second language. It is the language of instruction at primary, post primary and post-secondary levels. The importance of English Language a medium of expression and instruction cannot be over-emphasized. According to Ademiluyi (1998), Pitman shorthand especially was accidentally discovered while Pitman was working on English phonetics. Thus, shorthand is an advanced, twisted form of the written English Language. Anyone who has attained mastery in English Language is well on the way to mastery in Shorthand. Not only must a student understand all the laws of grammatical construction, the student must have a rich stock of English vocabulary.

Teaching is a process by which a learner is led to understand and acquire the knowledge, which he is expected to have. Ekpenyong (1990) stated that teachers' contribution in the high failure rate in shorthand has been expressed in various ways ranging from inappropriate teaching method to non-teaching of essential aspects of shorthand such as transcription and penmanship. The lecturer requires a variety of methods and instructional materials to enrich his instruction and the students learning process. There are varieties of methods and each has its own strengths and weaknesses.

Oyinloye and Oluwalola (2014) described instructional facilities used in Office Technology and Management as various office machines, equipment and devices for the purpose of imparting knowledge and training to students. According to NBTE (2004), Onah and Okoro (2010), instructional facilities for teaching OTM courses include lecture rooms, digitalized laboratories, workshops, model offices, projectors, player recorders, digital cameras, phones, modem, compact disks, radio and television, personal computer etc. The use of instructional facilities does not only help to facilitate teaching and learning but also results in more cooperative



learning activities among the students. Adequate use of instructional facilities provides lecturers with the interesting and compelling platforms for transmitting information in order to motivate students to learn more (Amiaya, 2013).

Ayelotan and Solagbade (2014) opined that clean, quiet, safe, comfortable and healthy environment constitute an important component of successful teaching and learning process. Evidences shows that students lag behind because of collapsed school buildings, inadequate typewriter, inadequate ICT laboratories, ventilation and faulty heating system.

Textbook is a medium of instruction which have two distinct functions that of reference source of information and that of a sequenced medium of instruction or learning. Few textbooks are approximately sequenced for independent study and written in a self-instructional style. When the student is studying, he will need to have both the text and the supplementary material side by side and continually oscillate from one to the other. Apart from the instructional textbook, students do not buy other supplementary textbooks that they will use to supplement the instructional textbook they are using in the classroom. This also affects their performance and rate of failure in Shorthand.

Statement of the Problem

Experience has shown that the rate of failure of students in Shorthand has always been a great concern for the students, lecturers, parents and society at large. In spite of the ten hours allocated for the course in the old curriculum NBTE (1989) students' performance in transcription has been woeful over the years. In the new OTM curriculum, the number of hours had been reduced to four hours per week, making the situation worst. Many research studies have been conducted on the causes of students' poor performance in Shorthand by reputable scholars with remarkable expertise in the course. Ademiluyi (1998) citing Laurie, indicated that 62% of students who attempt shorthand examinations every year in U.S. always fail. Ademiluyi further asserted that failure in Shorthand in Osun State Polytechnic, Iree in 1997 session was around 90%. Babalola (1994) asserted that during the 1991 summer session in Pitman College, London, twenty out of the twenty-seven candidates that sat for Shorthand failed and out of the many candidates that sat for Shorthand at 140 wpm in the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) examination of June, 1988 throughout the numerous centres in the then eleven Northern States, only 7 candidates came out with flying colours. He also said that out of the 60 final year ND



students that registered for Shorthand in 1977 in the Secretarial Studies Department, Federal Polytechnic, Bida only six (10%) graduated. Bukar (1994) in her research concluded that students do achieve much below expectation in Shorthand and that they cry aloud and disbelieve their results each time they are examined.

In order to help the students to pass and have fair result, lecturers help their students by dictating passages below the required speed, giving more than required time for transcription, palliating severity of penalties, introducing derivative outlines for difficult words but all the efforts have not yielded a good result. It is against this background this paper discusses the challenges militating against students' mastery of Shorthand skills and strategies to be adopted in teaching and learning of Shorthand in the classroom.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated for this study:

What are the factors militating against students' mastery of Shorthand skills?

What are the coping strategies required for solving problems of teaching and learning Shorthand skills?

Methodology

The population of this study comprised all the 15 lecturers in Office Technology and Management Department and HND I and HND II students of Office Technology and Management

Department of Federal Polytechnic. Ede. No sample was drawn because of the smallest number of lecturers and the sample size was considered sizeable and not too large for the study. Out of 89 students in HND I and 72 students in HND II, 53 students in HND I and 50 students in HND 1 and HND 11 totaled 103 students. The descriptive survey design was employed for this study. The major instruments used for eliciting responses from the respondents were questionnaire designed for the lecturers and students separately. The questionnaire contained two sections (A and B). The Section A contains demographic characteristics of the respondents such as sex, age, marital status, class level and for lecturer's questionnaire, Section A consists of sex, male, age, marital status, years of experience, qualifications and course(s) taught. The instrument for data collection was a 4-point Likert rating scale titled "Evaluation of Mastery of Shorthand Skills Questionnaire for students (EMSSQS) and "Evaluation of Mastery of Shorthand Skills Questionnaire for Lecturers"



(EMSSQL). The questionnaire for the students consisted of 29 items which were meant to answer the research questions 1 and 2 while questionnaire for the lecturers comprise 25 items meant to answer the research questions 1 and 2. The respondents were made to answer separate questions based on the study. The reliability of the instrument was determined using cronbach alpha with a coefficient value of 0.86. The data generated was analysed using mean and standard deviation. To answer research questions 1 and 2, the respondents were provided with a 4-point rating scale of Strongly Agree = 4 points, Agree = 3 points, Disagree = 2 points and Strongly Disagree = 1 point. As basis for decision, any item with mean that is 2.5 and above was considered positive and accepted while any item with less than 2.50 will be considered negative or rejected.

A total number of 103 questionnaires were administered to the students and 15 questionnaires were distributed to the lecturers and instructors. 103 questionnaires distributed to the students were filled and returned while 13 questionnaires out of 15 questionnaires distributed were retrieved from the lecturers and instructors. The decision rule was that any item with 2.50 and above was regarded as Agreed while any item with mean score of less than 2.50 was regarded as Disagreed.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Students' Response on factors militating against the Mastery of Shorthand Skills

S/N	Items	Mean	S.D	Remark
1.	Student's lack of interest	3.02	0.006	Agree
2.	Poor knowledge of English Language	3.00	0.009	Agree
3.	Late admission of students affect the students	2.90	0.039	Agree
4.	Strike action affect the students	3.00	0.009	Agree
5.	Inadequate number of hours allocated to the course per week	2.50	0.357	Agree
6.	Lack of penmanship	2.83	0.072	Agree
7.	Lack of practice and drill	2.68	0.175	Agree
8.	Lack of constant drilling	4.16	1.129	Agree
9.	Lack of concentration on the part of the students	3.31	0.045	Agree
10.	Lack of mastery of shorthand Principles	3.21	0.013	Agree
11.	Inability to sound spell	3.07	0.001	Agree
12.	Overcrowded students in class	2.99	0.012	Agree
13.	Lecturers teaching shorthand are too harsh/strict	3.93	0.692	Agree
14.	Inadequate facilities e.g. Digitalized Shorthand Laboratories/lecturerrooms etc.	3.12	0.001	Agree
15.	Poor implementation of curriculum and policies	2.75	0.121	Agre

Source: Field Survey 2019

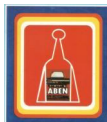


Table 1 above which shows the factors militating against the students' mastery of shorthand skills. All the items 1-15 show a significant result since their mean scores are all above 2.5

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Lecturers' Response on factors militating against students' Mastery of Shorthand Skills

S/N	Items	Mean	S.D	Remark
1.	Lecturers reduce speed without letting the students know Marks are not fully penalized as required by NBTE marking Scheme	3.31	0.421	Agree
3.	Marks are sometimes awarded across boards	2.83	0.028	Agree
4.	Transcription time is increased	2.69	0.001	Agree
5.	Invigilator is not strict with students copying themselves	2.31	0.123	Disagree
6.	Shorthand outlines are not checked against the transcript Lecturers who are not skilled in shorthand are appointed as external examiners or moderators	1.92	0.549	Disagree
8.	External Examiners pass those who fail in order to be retained	2.00	0.437	Disagree
9.	External Examiners pass those who fail in order to be retained Students buy grades from lecturers and clerks The objective of 95% accuracy set for students are not strictly adhered to	2.08	0.338	Disagree
11.	Students buy grades from lecturers and clerks The objective of 95% accuracy set for students are not strictly adhered to	1.79	0.759	Disagree
11.	Number of hours allocated to the course per week is inadequate Laziness on the part of the students is another important factor for not meeting shorthand speed	3.15	0.239	Agree
	Student's failure to buy additional textbooks apart from Shorthand Anniversary	0.85	0.036	Disagree
	Inability on part of the students to master short forms, phrases, intersections etc. Affects the students' performance and prevent them from mastering the skill	3.46	0.638	Agree
15.	Non-mastery of English Language which is the second language	3.76	1.208	Agree
		3.31	0.421	Agree

Source: Field Survey 2019

Table 2 above which focuses on the lecturers' response on factors militating against the students' mastery of shorthand indicates all the variables affect the teaching and learning of Shorthand. The results in Table 3 showed that items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 10 had mean above 2.50, this indicated that respondents considered the items acceptable. While items 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 had mean below 2.50, which indicated that the respondents considered those items insignificant. This means that these variables does not have anything to do with students' mastery of shorthand.

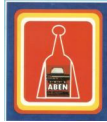


Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Students' Response on Suggested Solutions to the Problem of Teaching and Learning Shorthand

S/N	Items	Mean	S.D	Remark
1.	Students to develop interest	3.65	0.073	Agree
2.	Improvement on English Language	3.4	0.004	Agree
	Inculcate the habit of reading novels and develop grammatical ability	3.88	0.256	Agree
4.	Master the principle of shorthand	3.58	0.042	Agree
5.	Practise regularly	3.62	0.061	Agree
6.	Learn how to write good outlines (penmanship)	3.61	0.056	Agree
7.	Reduction of student's population	3.05	0.105	Agree
	Employment of qualified lecturers with requisite skills and experience	3.15	0.050	Agree
9.	Proper implementation of the curriculum	2.97	0.163	Agree
	Lecturer's positive attitudes towards new ideas, teaching methodology can enhance teaching and learning	3.23	0.021	Agree
	Sponsorship of lecturers to attend seminars, workshops and Conferences can enhance teaching and learning	3.32	0.024	Agree
	Purchase of textbooks apart from anniversary textbook which is Meant for beginners	3.05	0.105	Agree
13	Master how to recognize sound (sound spelling)	3.21	0.027	Agree
14.	Provision of shorthand laboratories and adequate classrooms	3.57	0.038	Agree

Source: Field Survey 2019

Data in Table 3 shows that all the respondents used for the study agreed with these items as strategy to be adopted in solving students' problems in teaching and learning of Shorthand in the classroom. The mean revealed that respondents accepted all the items as solutions to the challenges to teaching and learning of Shorthand with a mean score of

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation of Lecturers' Response on Suggested Solutions to the problems of Teaching and Learning of Shorthand Skills

S/N	Items	Mean	S.D	Remark
1.	Professional should be employed to teach shorthand	3.76	0.024	Agree
	Showing personal interest in students and inculcate in them how to develop interest in the course	3.53	0.006	Agree
	Lecturers should be approachable and fairness in dealing with the students	3.53	0.006	Agree
4.	Giving due recognition to each student's ability and personality	3.15	0.207	Agree
5.	Adoption of appropriate method of teaching shorthand	3.53	0.006	Agree



Showing acceptance not embarrassing or humiliating students, no matter their attitude	3.46	0.021	Agree
Availability and utilization of modern Shorthand Laboratory will enhance effective teaching and learning	3.77	0.027	Agree
Number of hours should be increased for for effective teaching and learning	3.62	0.000	Agree
Maximum of 35 students in a class should be adopted for effective teaching and learning of Shorthand	3.85	0.060	Agree
Giving assignments regularly will help the students to grasp the Rudiments of the course	3.85	0.060	Agree

Source: Field Survey 2019

As indicated by the grand mean of in table 4, the data shows that all the respondents used for the study agreed with these items as solutions to the challenges faced by the students. The item by item mean shows that all the items with mean ranging from 2.97 to 3.88 are acceptable.

Discussion of Findings

From the findings, it was found out that the respondents agreed with all the items all the factors militating against the mastery of shorthand skills, having the mean score of 2.5 except items 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 12 which indicated that the respondents considered those items insignificant. The results agreed with the opinion of Ehirheme (2019) that lack of interesting the part of students, poor knowledge of English Language, inabilities of the students to practise regularly and drill, laziness due to negligence at their work, cane of nomenclature of Secretarial Studies to Office Technology and Management programme delayed admission process into tertiary institutions, inadequate facilities and over-population, are all factors militating against the mastery of shorthand skills. While the respondents disagreed with the opinion that invigilators are not strict, shorthand outlines were not checked against the transcript, lecturers' wo were not skilled in shorthand were appointed as external examiners/moderators, external examiners pass those who failed in order to be retrained, students buy grades from lecturers and clerks and tat laziness on the part of the students is another factor for not meeting shorthand speed.

The results of research question two revealed the possible solutions to the problems of teaching and learning Shorthand. The respondents agreed with all the items 1-10 receptively. These include English Language trouble reading of novels and development of grammatical ability, mastery of shorthand principles, reduction of student's population, hiring of qualified lecturers, proper implementation of the



curriculum and policies, using of appropriate methods of teaching, sponsoring lecturers to attend seminars, workshops, and conferences, purchase of textbooks, mastering sound spelling, and provision of shorthand laboratories and adequate classrooms. The finding corroborates that of Ankwandu, Okoro and Ozoemenam (2016) that teacher's attitude and behavior are very important factor and that teachers can do a lot of help learners develop motivation in learning.

Summary of Findings

The result of data collected in respect of the 2 research questions formulated for this study were analysed using the arithmetic mean and Standard Deviation revealed the following major findings:

Student-teacher relationship has a significant effect in the effective teaching and learning of Shorthand

Personality of the teacher goes a long way in effective management of classroom in teaching and learning of Shorthand.

Arousing the students' interest by the teacher enhances effective teaching and learning of Shorthand.

Professional lecturer should be employed in the teaching of Shorthand.

Adoption of appropriate method of teaching enhances effective classroom management in the teaching and learning of Shorthand,

Utilisation of appropriate instructional facilities enhances effective classroom management in the teaching and learning of Shorthand.

Period allotted and proper seating arrangement enhances effective classroom management in the teaching and learning of Shorthand.

Conclusion

From the findings of this study it can be concluded that there are many factors militating against students' mastery of shorthand skills. Since the objective of the teaching and learning process is to bring about behavioural changes in the learners, therefore, proper attention and consideration must be given to eliminate all factors that can hinder effective teaching and learning processes as well as effective classroom management.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to reduce the factors militating against mastery of shorthand skills in the classroom:



Interest is very important in whatever course one wishes to pursue. It is advisable to admit students who have genuine interest in the profession. In other words, students who do not make Office Technology and Management as their choice should not be offered admission for the course.

Manageable class size must also be considered when admitting students into the programmes. A situation whereby the class is over-crowded, it will be difficult for the teacher to manage them effectively. Teaching and learning would be difficult to take place.

Learning atmosphere should be made more conducive, well ventilated and well equipped laboratories with constant electric power supply should be provided in all Shorthand laboratories.

Experienced lecturers should be given Shorthand to teach. It would be a little difficult for a layman to handle the course.

Government should provide fund to the institutions so as to enable them purchase materials, equipment and machines for the students' use. This will enable them to be taught well and gain their good image as Office Technology and Management products.

Lecturers should understand the peculiar nature of Shorthand and apply it in teaching the students. Assignments should always be given to students and when assignments given must be checked and marked appropriately.

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