



DETERMINING THE USE OF SHORTHAND IN SECRETARIAL SERVICES WITHIN POLYTECHNICS IN TARABA STATE

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Abstract

The notion among Office Technology and Management students is that Shorthand, one of the core courses in Office Technology and Management should be eliminated. This is as a result of innovation taking over modern office works. This paper was written in order to determine the use of Shorthand in secretarial services within polytechnics within Taraba state. Three research questions guided the study. Descriptive research design was used for the study. The population for the study comprised of 60 secretaries/office managers from Federal Polytechnic Bali and Taraba state Polytechnic, Jalingo both in Taraba state. All secretaries were used for the study, hence there was no sampling technique adopted for the study. The instrument for data collection was questionnaire which was validated by three experts from Office Technology and Management department. Mean and Standard deviation were used for analyzing data from the research questions. The study identified the uniqueness of shorthand in secretarial services from the two polytechnics. It was concluded that good knowledge of Shorthand prepares secretaries for the real world of work and enhanced secretaries' ability to draft all correspondences in the offices. It was recommended among others that Shorthand should remain as one of the core courses to be use in preparing secretaries for the office works, as the knowledge of shorthand enhance better presentation of secretaries as a good image of the organization.

Key Words: Determining, Use of Shorthand, Secretarial Services

Introduction

Shorthand is a rapid means of writing as compared with language handwriting or typewriting. It is the art of representing spoken words (sound) with signs in form of strokes, curves, dots and dashes. Shorthand is known to be any form of rapid writing using signs or symbols to replace letters of the alphabet, phrases and words (Russon, 2017). It is the system of writing known as narrow writing, short writing and swift writing (Ager, 2015). It is being described by Sun (2015) as invisible communication.

The art of shorthand writing can be traced to 350BC in the ancient Egypt and Greek civilization. The Greek historian, Xenophon used shorthand to write down the memoirs of Socrates (Russon,2017). In Great Britain, Shorthand evolved as a mean of taking down confidential reports in coded forms, the system which over time developed and become a trade of an academic study (Russon, 1982 in Ogwang, 2020). The contribution of Isaac Pitman gave rise to writing of shorthand in English language using phonographic approach thereby writing words according to how they sounded instead of abbreviated spelling. In Pitman system the principle of position writing, length and thickness of the strokes are very important (Pitman, 1912 in Ogwang, 2020).

Pitman shorthand system is dominant in Nigeria, having come from Britain through colonization. It is one of the most important geometric systems of shorthand invented in 1937 and spread in Nigeria in the mid-19th century. Pitman shorthand has continued to shape the world of business and office administration/management. The merits of the art have also been reaped. Busy business executives engage the service of trained shorthand writers (confidential secretaries, stenographers or shorthand typists) to handle their correspondences, especially those that are somewhat routine. The executive simply dictate letter, memo, report and other forms of correspondences to the shorthand writer and within the



shortest time produce the document for signature (Kwaghbo, 2022). To function well as a secretary, ability to write and transcribe shorthand is required and it was observed that those secretaries proficient in the art of shorthand writing were highly sought after in the organization in the 1900s with high salaries.

Every organization, either small offices or large international companies, there is one group of people that can be seen as indispensable. They are those that provide secretarial services. They are referred to as secretaries, and are described as the life wire of a company and are usually at the front line of the day to day business tasks ensuring the smooth running of the workplace. The secretaries take on a number of demanding roles in today's office (Garry, 2022). Secretarial services are job for those who are strong willed. The external and internal secretarial services mainly refer to liaising with employees and incoming messages and phone calls from clients. Services of this nature rely on the secretaries' communication skills, verbal and written. Taking meeting notes, drafting of correspondences in form of letters, memos recording and transcribing online meeting and so on are part of secretarial service that have their bedrock from the study of shorthand. Although transcribing using an AI assistant in the era of innovation may be easier, but they tend to mess up more often than humans. A human secretary is indispensable, especially for recognizing speech nuances and heavy accent. That is why a knowledge of shorthand is indispensable to secretarial service (Derek, 2021).

Shorthand to Secretarial Service

Writing in shorthand is much quicker than standard writing. Standard handwriting reaches speeds of 20 to 30 words per minute, which is too slow to record someone speaking. The average shorthand speed of some people has been recorded at over 200 words per minutes. This makes shorthand better for taking notes. Due to the difference in speed, shorthand is an important skill to learn to keep up with lecturers or when taking note. Shorthand has also proven to be useful in many lines of work. Personal assistants and secretaries use it for minutes taking, while journalists use it when documenting a news story. Court reporters use it when typing on a stenotype machine. Stenographers who transcribe letters and documents are often employed in law offices. Shorthand is helpful for taking down important details when getting instruction from the boss or conveying a phone message. Often, voice recognition software makes mistakes, especially if someone gets words mixed up or names wrong. A person using shorthand can identify and rectify such mistakes. Shorthand provides personal benefits such as improving your listening, summarizing and memory skills. Shorthand reduces the time spent by secretaries on writing and the time saved can be utilized for other tasks (Adam, 2015).

Shorthand is a mean of earning a living, one can be employed as a shorthand typist, Confidential Secretary, Private Secretary, Lawyer of Personal Assistant. The sky is the limit for a such shorthand writer. Many shorthand writers have become commercial become manager, commercial training officers, doctor of law, permanent manager (Inalegwu, 2016).

Shorthand can be used for jotting down conclusion at meetings and conferences, it helps in reducing normal writing time to the minimum because signs are written with great speed when practiced daily and shorthand helps in improving spoken and written form of English language (Inalegwu, 2016).

The mastery of shorthand as an office skill can be 'sine qua non' to effective and efficient discharge of secretarial duties. The competence of a secretary lies on the ability to take shorthand note and transcribe correctly. A secretary who cannot take accurate dictation and transcribe correctly is tantamount to a typist. That is why so much emphasis is laid on the study of shorthand as a core course in secretarial study (Amoor and Aliyu, 2014).

Enhancing Business productivity using Shorthand Skill

Adam (2015) listed the followings on how modern Secretaries can enhance business productivity through shorthand skill

1. **Shorthand is used for minute taking:** Secretaries at all level today have to be able to take minutes of meetings. Minutes can be taken in longhand or using a lap-top, but the ability of a secretary to keep up with what is being said and take accurate notes quickly, is often best done by using shorthand. Modern devices such as audio machines simply cannot record what is being said in a meeting, then make meaningful notes out of what is recorded, by summarizing what is important and what is not important. The shorthand secretary, however can summarize "real time" in the meeting, and interpret what is being said – at the same time as listening actively. More so, taking minutes in shorthand is effortless, whereas using a PC or longhand can be very fatiguing. Shorthand allows accurate notes to be taken effortlessly over a long period of time, and enables



the minute-taking secretary to feel more confident that they are getting everything down and not missing anything in their course of taking minutes.

2. **Shorthand is used for recording instructions and to-dos from the Executives:** Executives rattle off instructions and things that needs doing at enormous speed; they can often shout out several items that need attending to, incorporating instructions along the way of how those things should be done, in the space of just a few minutes. The secretary who can take all of these down in shorthand during a face-to-face meeting with the executive of ever the telephone, save their executive an enormous amount of time. The only way that so many facts, instructions and deliberation can be carried out is not by entrusting them to memory, as thing could be forgotten or misinterpreted, but by recording them in shorthand.
3. **Shorthand combines the Skills of active listening, Summarizing, Recording and Making sense out of Chaos:** In a situation whereby, the executive does not speak clearly or slowly or gets distracted, or goes off the track. These executives do not go well with voice-recognition software, because the software would not be able to understand them. Yet the skilled shorthand secretary knows when the executive gets their words mixed up, or calls someone the wrong name in a letter when they mean someone else. The shorthand writer not only takes down notes, but they also listen and then apply logical and rational thought to what is being said. They make sense of nonsense and ensure that information is communicated appropriately, and with diplomacy. This start from a simple shorthand note that the secretary take then regurgitates into a report or an email on behalf of the executive.
4. **Shorthand helps Secretary to “know” and learn:** Modern Secretary need to be aware of the business world’s strategy as the boss do, and when they sit in a meeting, or with their executive, and take nots using a paper, they will be surprised at what they know and pick up just by listening properly and making notes. Shorthand therefore is back in vogue because it helps secretary to learn and develop strategic thinking. By writing down things using pen and paper, one digest and absorbs. This does not happen when using a keyboard or computer. When a secretary wants to learn more about a company, by simply sitting in a management meeting and taking note the old-fashioned way (in Shorthand), the secretary knowledge of business and what is going on will increase tenfold (Adam, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

There is this recent notion among Office Technology and Management (OTM) students that shorthand is no longer in vogue and cannot be used after graduation and for that reason they are of the opinion that shorthand should be expunged from the curriculum of Office Technology and Management. The student also, see it as an old fashioned course. The technological method of taking notes through recording in the modern business office has made the idea of taking note and minutes of meetings through dictation an old and archaic method that is no longer needed in the era of innovation. This had made the learners of shorthand develop a cold attitude towards the course. One of the basic requirements for becoming a secretary or an office manager is the ability to communicate and write fluently in English Language. This is the reason why the minimum of credit pass in English language is a necessary requirement to study OTM. Correspondence in form of letters, memos, circulars are all drafted in English language and shorthand dictation sounded with English phonetics (phonetic symbol and sound, in addition to phonetic structure in English language). The system helps in facilitating secrecy in business transaction and for quick recording and processing of information. The question to be answered now is, is shorthand knowledge useful in the course of taking down note and minutes of meeting in the contemporary office? Does the knowledge of shorthand help to improve vocabulary level and exposure of secretary to the modern business office? Is the knowledge of shorthand useful in composing letter, memo and all forms of office correspondence in today office? It is therefore based on this note that the researcher intends to find out the use of shorthand in secretarial services within polytechnics in Taraba state

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study

1. To what extent is the knowledge of Shorthand useful in the course of taking down note and minutes of meeting?
2. In what way does knowledge of shorthand help in improving vocabulary level of a secretary?
3. In what way does the knowledge of shorthand useful in composing letters and office correspondences?



Methods

The researcher adopted the descriptive research design for the study. The researcher drawn the population from two Polytechnics in Taraba state (Federal Polytechnic Bali and Taraba state Polytechnic Suntai). The population of the study comprised of thirty (30) secretaries from Federal Polytechnic Bali and thirty (30) secretaries from Taraba state Polytechnic, Taraba state making 60 secretaries. There was no sampling technique adopted for the study because the entire population were used for the study due to the manageable size of the population. The instrument adopted for the study was a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers.

Research question one was structured on Extent of Useful of Shorthand Knowledge in Note Taking (EUSKNT) and on a 4-points rating scale of Very High Extent (VHE) 4 points, High Extent (HE) 3 points, Moderately High Extent (MHE) 2 points and Not High (NH) one point. Research Question two was structured on the Knowledge of Shorthand Help Improve Vocabulary Level (KSHIVL) and a 4-points rating scale of Very High Level (VHL) 4 points, High Level (HL) 3 points, Moderately High (MH) 2 points and Not High (NH) one point. Research Question three was structured on the Knowledge of Shorthand Useful in Composing Letters and Correspondences (KSUCLC) and a 4-points rating scale of Strongly Agreed (SA) 4 points, Agreed (A) 3 points, Disagreed (D) 2 points and Strongly Disagreed (SD) one point. Three experts validated the instrument from Office Technology and Management Departments. The copies of questionnaire were administered and collected by the researchers. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The decision rule was that any item from 2.50 and above was regarded as accepted while below 2.50 was regarded as rejected.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on responses on Extent of Usefulness of Shorthand in Note Taking and Minutes of Meeting.

S/N	Item Statements	X	SD	Remark
1	Using Shorthand helps to records speeches better than a Dictaphone	3.08	1.75	Very High Extent
2	Shorthand improve consecration when taking minutes of meeting	2.91	1.70	High Extent
3	Increase the speed of writing	2.91	1.70	High Extent
4	Shorthand allows accurate note to be taken effortlessly over a long period of time	3.08	1.75	Very High Extent
5	Shorthand gives secretary confident of getting down every information	3.00	1.73	Very High Extent
6	Shorthand knowledge helps secretary to recall words and write well	3.08	1.75	Very High Extent
7	Employment of different signs in shorthand encourage speed writing and useful in note taking and minutes writing	3.25	1.80	Very High Extent
8.	Taking minutes in shorthand allow keeping pace with the speaker during meeting	3.25	1.80	Very High Extent

Source: Field Work, 2023

Table 1 revealed the mean responses on the extent of usefulness of shorthand in note taking and minutes of meeting. Based on cut off points of 2.5, the result implies that 6 items from the responses indicated very high extent and two items indicated high extent. The mean score obtained ranges from 3.25 to 2.91. The indication shows that shorthand knowledge is useful to a very high extent in the course of taking note and during write minutes of meeting.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on responses on Knowledge of Shorthand Improving level of Vocabulary

S/N	Item Statements	X	SD	Remark
1	Knowledge of Shorthand helps in learning new words	2.91	1.71	High Level
2	Improve language skills	3.1	1.76	Very High Level
3	Short forms, phrases in shorthand improve vocabulary level	3.11	1.76	Very High Level
4	Grammalogues learnt in shorthand improve vocabulary	3.58	1.88	Very High Level
5	New words learnt exposed one to world of opportunities	3.18	1.78	Very High Level



6	Shorthand knowledge help secretary's penmanship	2.87	1.69	High Level
7	Shorthand help secretary to be skilled in the use of language	3.38	1.84	Very High Level

Source: Field Work, 2023

Table 2 revealed the mean responses on the knowledge of shorthand improving level of vocabulary. Based on cut off points of 2.5, the result implies that 5 items from the responses indicated very high level and two items indicated high level. The mean score obtained ranges from 3.38 to 2.91. The indication shows that shorthand knowledge is useful to a very high level in improve level of vocabulary of secretary.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation on responses on Knowledge of Shorthand useful in Composing letter and Office Correspondences

S/N	Item Statements	X	SD	Remark
1	Knowledge of Shorthand is useful in report writing	2.70	1.64	Agreed
2	Most of the dictated passages in Shorthand helps in drafting most of the official letters.	2.91	1.71	Agreed
3	Knowledge of Shorthand impacted the formation of memorandum and circular	3.25	1.80	Agreed
4	Idea used in correspondence comes from the knowledge of shorthand	2.80	1.67	Agreed
5	Most grammars leant in shorthand are useful when composing official correspondences	3.38	1.84	Agreed
6	Shorthand characters stored on memory cannot be forgotten and are useful in official correspondences.	2.45	1.57	Disagreed
7.	Knowledge of shorthand help secretary to correct inaccuracies of speeches that may occur in official correspondences	2.91	1.71	Agreed

source: Field Work, 2023

Table 3 revealed the mean responses on the extent of usefulness of shorthand in note taking and minutes of meeting. Based on cut off points of 2.5, the result implies that 5 items from the responses indicated very high extent and two items indicated high extent. The mean score obtained ranges from 3.25 to 2.91. The indication shows that shorthand knowledge is useful to a very high extent in the course of taking note and during write minutes of meeting.

Discussion of Findings

1. On Extent of usefulness of Shorthand in note taking and minutes of meeting, the responses showed to a very high extent indicated that shorthand is still useful and relevance. Like one of the constructs, stating shorthand is still use in taking note and this help to keep pace with the speaker during meeting. This is line with the study Chip (2014), stating that shorthand will continue to be needed and still a useful tool for contemporary secretaries.
2. On Knowledge of shorthand improving level of vocabulary, the responses showed very high level of knowledge of shorthand improving level of secretary's vocabulary. This is in line with the study of Dosunmu and Akinola (2019), stating that shorthand has educational values as it works through the medium of language and for many students it is often a key to understanding English language, which help in developing language and spoken ability of the secretaries.
3. On of shorthand useful in composing letter and office correspondences, responses indicated that knowledge of shorthand is useful in composing letter and office correspondence. This is seen in one of the constructs stating that shorthand helps in correcting inaccuracies of speeches that may occur in official correspondences. This is in line with the opinion of Ma'aji, Adamu and Istifanus (2020) saying that secretaries need shorthand skill to carry out the day-to-day responsibilities and routine in offices, in area of receiving instructions and getting update information and pointing out the way in which both secretaries and executive can realize a higher level of success in achieving the organizational goals. The statement above justified the opinion of Adebayo (2006) in Dosunmu and Akinola (2019) that good communication skills make secretary more productive and the ability to communicate well allows secretaries to better compose correspondence and capture what is expected of them by the management. This was supported by Oguntimilehin and Oludele (2017)



stating that availability of auto-recording facility does not remove the usefulness of shorthand in taking down oral information via telephone, neither do computer voice recognition software, spell and grammar check facility displace the usefulness of shorthand.

Conclusion

In conclusion the paper concluded that good knowledge of Shorthand prepares secretaries for the real world of work and enhanced secretaries' ability to draft all correspondences in modern offices. As it can be seen that a good secretary with good knowledge of shorthand stands the chance of been a good composer of correspondences, and have a command of the English language. In today's world of work all correspondences are written in English language and good mastery of shorthand skill put secretary in better position for the world of work.

Recommendations

The followings are the recommendations for the study

1. The curriculum planners should ensure that shorthand remain as one of the core courses to be use in preparing secretaries for the office works, as the knowledge of shorthand enhance better presentation of secretaries as a good image of the organization.
2. The curriculum planner should not expunged shorthand from the school curriculum of secretarial education at secondary school level, this would enable learners expose to the course and have better background of shorthand before proceeding to higher institutions of learning.
3. For learners who aspire to be professional secretaries in the near future need to have passion for the study of shorthand and such desire would put the would-be secretaries on a firm footing.
4. Executives should once in a while dictate to their secretaries, this would help in refreshing their knowledge in the use of shorthand.

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