

**Assessment of Secretaries' Perception on Relevance
of Shorthand in their Functions in an Era of Advanced
Office Technology and Information Systems**

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Abstract

This study is entitled "Assessment of Secretaries' perception on relevance of shorthand in their functions in an era of advanced office technology and information systems". The study had four objectives as a guide and four hypotheses. The researchers adopted descriptive survey research design. The study covered three tertiary institutions: Ahmadu Bello University, Federal College of Education and Nuhu Bamali Polytechnic, Zaria, Kaduna State offering shorthand. The population of the study consisted of 30 lecturers and 30 practicing secretaries in the selected institutions. Four rating scale structured questionnaire were used to generate data from the respondents.

Data collected were coded in SPSS using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to test null hypotheses one and two, while t-test was used to test null hypotheses three and four. All the null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The study shows, among others, that listening skill and consciousness for speed and accuracy acquired in shorthand play significant roles on secretaries' duties in this era of advanced office technology and information systems. The researchers recommended, among others, that seminar/workshop should be organized to educate the government, policy makers and students on the importance of shorthand for effective and efficient performance of secretaries in this crucial dispensation.

Keywords: *Shorthand, Advanced Office Technology, Secretaries*

Introduction

Shorthand is a core and an anchored course for secretarial educators and administrators. It is a system of rapid handwriting employing symbols to represent words, phrases, and letters. The training of secretaries in Nigeria has been associated with shorthand for many years now. This is because shorthand is useful in taking instructions from a boss down quickly and accurately and has been known to improve the concentration and ability to increase the secretaries' memory, which enhances the listening ability as opined by <http://blog.secsinthecity.co.uk> (2013). This opinion was previously stressed by Ezugwu (2001), Onwukwe and Uteh (2009) that even in the era of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), shorthand is still relevant and has educational value. The researchers emphasized that shorthand is of direct services as mental discipline, effective medium for training in English and increase in vocabulary. The importance of shorthand in secretarial functions in office occupation cannot be over-emphasized. Shorthand inculcates into the graduate secretaries the skills for speed, accuracy and competence to utilize time maximally for high productivity. These skills enhance efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery in office occupation.

The researchers observed that every professional secretary with versatile knowledge in the application of modern office technologies

has the ability to produce error-free documents, using minimal time. Therefore, acquisition of knowledge of office technology and information system is an added advantage to a professional secretary who also is skillful in shorthand writing. Amoor (2009) maintained that Shorthand inculcates in secretaries listening skills, facilitates their note-taking and inculcates in them the consciousness for speed, accuracy and creative ability to utilize time maximally for high productivity. This therefore means that despite the usefulness of modern office technology and information systems in office administration, shorthand still plays significant role in the functions of secretaries in office occupation.

However, in recent times, there have been discussions at seminars, workshops, conferences and media houses on the relevance of shorthand in the era of advanced office technology and information systems. Scholars such as Wofersohn (2001), Anyakoha (2002) and Akpomi (2003) opined that modern office technology and information systems have more convenience in office service delivery than shorthand. Secretaries now have many technologically advanced office gadgets to ease their jobs and enhance proficiency and productivity leading to improved access to goods and services globally. As a result of these innovations, Asogwa (2002) recommended that the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) should urgently reconsider de-emphasising shorthand and introducing full computer studies in secretarial education.

This opinion was also in line with the report of Ozuruke and Ogolo (2008) who observed that students and most lecturers do not seem to understand why such a terrorizing course like shorthand should be integrated among educational courses, more specially even at this present “touch button information and communication gadgets are almost everywhere and can be used by many people too. Jubril (2011) suggested that shorthand should be removed from the curriculum of secretarial education. This decision also agrees with the suggestion of Ademiluyi (2012) who maintained that in the next round of curriculum review, shorthand should be expunged to give way to modern office technology and information systems. This decision was also endorsed

by Udoh (2006) who opined that the 21st century job skills required the replacement of shorthand with computer education. The situation led many scholars to recommend that modern office technology and information systems should be integrated into the curriculum of secretarial education as shorthand has lost its relevance. The scenario led the researchers to conduct this study so as to determine the: (i) relationship between listening skill acquired from shorthand and secretaries' functions in an era of advanced office technology in the 21st century; (ii) relationship between consciousness for speed and accuracy acquired from shorthand and secretaries' functions in an era of advanced technology in the 21st century; (iii) difference between the perception of lecturers and secretaries on the relationship between listening skill acquired from shorthand and secretaries' functions in an era of advanced office technology in the 21st century; and (iv) difference between the perception of lecturers and secretaries on the relationship between consciousness for speed and accuracy acquired from shorthand and secretaries' functions in an era of advanced office technology in the 21st century.

Research Hypotheses

The researcher tested the following hypotheses

- Ho₁ There is no significant relationship between listening skill acquired from shorthand and secretaries' functions in an era of advanced technology in the 21st century
- Ho₂ There is no significant relationship between consciousness for speed and accuracy acquired from shorthand and secretaries' functions in an era of advanced technology in the 21st century.
- Ho₃ There is no significant difference between the perception of lecturers and secretaries on the relationship between listening skill acquired from shorthand and secretaries' functions in an era of advanced technology in the 21st century
- Ho₄ There is no significant difference between the perception of lecturers and secretaries on the relationship between consciousness for speed and accuracy acquired from shorthand

and secretaries' functions in an era of advanced technology in the 21st century.

Literature Review

The study was based on theoretical framework of Teeline (2008) who opined that shorthand remains an important skill which all reporters should pursue. The advocates of the theory maintained that shorthand is a vital tool for secretaries and journalists. To them, despite the digital age, shorthand is still regarded as an absolutely essential skill that makes journalists and secretaries more productive. In Nigeria, this theory had the support of Ezugwu (2001), Onwukwe and Uteh (2009), Ozuruoke and Ogolo (2008) who opined that despite the technological innovations of this, shorthand skills enhance efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery in office occupation of secretaries. The theorist maintained that shorthand skills enable secretaries to be committed, dedicated to their duties and grammatically sound. Shorthand also creates the manager's confidence in his/her secretary. Emphasizing this theory, Amoor (2010) opined that shorthand skills foster cohesive bonds, commitment, and trust between secretary and the boss. Amoor stressed that shorthand skills tend to reduce the frequency of workload in the office and promote confidentiality in the office. The summary of the theory underpinning this study is that through shorthand skills secretaries are encouraged to listen to managers when receiving instructions and getting update information, and it helps them to understand the advantages of good listening skills by pointing out the ways in which, through shorthand skills, both the secretary and boss can realize a higher level of success. Ozuruoke and Ogolo (2008) conducted a research work on utterance technology for "shorthand" a re-perception of the Consonant strokes: for coping with e-activity and ICT changing Environment in business education. The researchers observed that society generally is witnessing a lot of phenomenal development changes in almost every sphere of human endeavours, Information Communication Technology (ICT) taking the lead. In all fact of life concepts, attention on ICT becomes most pronounced. The fact that these new evolutionary developmental

patterns flow along with verbal communication (talk) calls for more concentrations on the area. A specific focus on utterance and its intricacies enhance or even elevate the technological perspective of ICT and enhance entrepreneurial living. The proposal here is highly in concordance to ICT compliances. The essential elements in utterances mastery will be fully understood in this presentation and if so passed on to the learners, will definitely result in perfect making of individuals who will be effective and efficient in the field. Hence the researchers concluded that recreating shorthand skill for utterance technology is indeed a welcomed idea.

Teeline (2010) conducted a research work entitled “*Shorthand—a vanishing sought after skill!*” The researcher observed that it is sad to see how shorthand is being neglected by today’s secretaries and Personal Assistants (PAs) despite the fact that senior managers see it as a critical skill. In our recent survey, we discovered that less than 15% of office personnel felt they had adequate shorthand skills. Some had been taught but had neglected to keep their skills honed whilst over two-thirds had never even learned it. The same survey however suggested that the vast majority of senior managers felt shorthand was important and wanted their support staff to be able to take down instructions, dictation and meeting minutes quickly and accurately. Hence it was concluded that Shorthand is very much the “cherry on the cake” in the skill set of the forward-looking contemporary Personal Assistant (PA) and a skill that will help you stand out from the crowd when looking for that career progression. Recruitment agencies go weak at the knees when they see shorthand on a curriculum Vitae (CV) because it is becoming so rare!

Onamade and Adedayo (2012) conducted a research entitled “*Skills improvement needs of secretaries trained in private institutions in south-west region of Nigeria*”. The researchers formulated four null hypotheses for the study. The study employed descriptive research design. The population for the study consisted of one hundred and thirty-three secretaries privately trained and two hundred and eighty-nine senior/management staff of

selected Colleges of Education in the south-western region of Nigeria out of which one hundred and fifty constituted the respondents. Random sampling technique was used to select thirty (30) secretaries and top senior/management staff (Deans, Head of Departments/Units, Coordinators/Directors of Programmes) across the schools in the chosen institutions. A self-designed questionnaire tagged: **Skill Improvement Needs of Secretaries Trained in Private Institutions (QSINSP)** was designed and used for data collection. The researcher personally visited the selected Colleges of Education to administer the questionnaire and t-test was used to test the three null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The result of the study reveals among others that there is a significant difference in the mean responses of male and female respondents on the employers' perception of professional competencies of secretaries in Nigeria. Hence it was recommended among others that institution of higher learning should endeavour to send secretaries to more computer technology/application workshops to update their knowledge and thereby become more relevant and IT compliant.

Methodology

The researchers employed descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 60 and all of them were used for the study. Thus the population comprised of 30 lecturers and 30 trained secretaries from the three institutions. A Four-point likert rating structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by the two experts in rank of professions in business education and two experts in research methodology. Their inputs were incorporated into the final copy. Pilot study was conducted to determine the reliability of the instruments with 10 lecturers and 10 students in Federal College of Education Kano, Nigeria. Data collected were analyzed, the result gave reliability coefficient of .82. Hence the instrument was found valid for the purpose in which it was constructed. The opinions of lecturers and graduates' secretaries in office occupation generated were coded, entered and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science

(SPSS) software to run Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to test the null hypotheses 1 & 2 and t-test to test null hypotheses 3 & 4. All the hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

4.0 Findings of The Study

Testing of Research Hypotheses

Results of test of null hypotheses raised is as presented in Table 1 to 4.

Null Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between listening skill acquired from shorthand and secretaries' functions in an era of advanced technology in the 21st century.

Result of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient used to test the null hypothesis is as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Test of Relationship between listening skills acquired from shorthand and secretaries' functions in an era of advanced office technology in the 21st century

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	r-cal	r-crit	Sig. (2-tailed)
Listening skills acquired from shorthand	2.87	0.86	60	1.98	1.96	.01
Secretaries' functions in an era of advanced technology	2.95	1.05				

From the Table, listening skills acquired from shorthand had mean score of 2.87, against 2.95 for secretaries' functions in an era of advanced technology and information systems. The standard deviation stood at 0.86 and 1.05 respectively. The r-cal stood at $1.98 > 1.96$. Based on the result, the null hypothesis was rejected. Hence, listening skills acquired

from shorthand has significant influence on the functions of secretaries' in the era of advance technology in the 21st century.

Null Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between consciousness for speed and accuracy acquired from shorthand and secretaries' functions in an era of advanced technology in the 21st century.

Result of test of null hypothesis two is as presented in Table 2

Table 2: Test of Relationship between consciousness for speed and accuracy acquired from shorthand and secretaries' functions in an era of advanced technology in the 21st century.

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	r-cal	r-crit	Sig. (2-tailed)
Consciousness for speed and accuracy	2.90	0.96	60	2.60*	1.96	.04
Secretaries' functions in an era of advanced technology	2.95	1.05				

Analysis of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient used to test Null Hypothesis Two is as presented in Table 2. From the Table, mean score of 2.90 was recorded for consciousness for speed and accuracy acquired from shorthand against 2.95 for secretaries' functions in an era of advanced technology in the 21st century. Their standard deviations stood at 0.96 and 1.05 respectively. The r-cal was $2.60^* > 1.96$ r-crit. The analysis of the result shows that significant relationship exist between consciousness for speed and accuracy acquired from shorthand and secretaries' functions in an era of advanced technology in the 21st century. Hence the null hypothesis was rejected at 5% level of significance.

Null Hypothesis Three

There is no significant difference between the mean score of lecturers and secretaries on the relationship between listening skills acquired from shorthand secretaries' functions in an era of advanced technology in the 21st century

T-test analysis used to test Null Hypothesis Three is as presented in Table 3

Table 3: T-test showing the difference in the perception of Lecturers and Secretaries on relationship between listening skills acquired from shorthand and secretaries' functions in an era of advanced technology in the 21st century

Groups	N	X	SD	Df	t-cal	t-table	Decision
Secretaries	30	2.39	1.01				
Lecturers	30	2.65	1.13	58	1.52	1.96	Accepted

Table 3 presents the results of the analysis conducted to test null hypothesis three. The result clearly reveals that lecturers and secretaries shared the same opinion that there is relationship between listening skill acquired from shorthand and secretaries' functions in an era of advanced technology in the 21st century with (t.cal.= 1.52; t.crit.1.96; df=58; at 0.05 level), which means hypothesis (Ho1), is not rejected.

Null Hypothesis Four

There is no significant difference between the mean score of lecturers and secretaries on the relationship between consciousness for speed and accuracy acquired from shorthand and secretaries' functions in an era of advanced technology in the 21st century.

Result of t-test analysis used to test null hypothesis four is as presented in Table 4.

Table 4: T-test of difference in the perception of Lecturers and Secretaries on relationship between consciousness for speed and accuracy acquired from shorthand and secretaries' functions in an era of advanced technology in the 21st century.

Groups	N	X	SD	Df	t-cal	t-table	Decision
Secretaries	30	1.89	0.76	58	1.02	1.96	Accepted
Lecturers	30	1.76	0.69				

Result of t-test used to test null hypothesis four is as presented in Table 4. From the Table, the mean score of secretaries was 1.89 and that of lecturers was 1.76. The standard deviation was 0.76 and 0.69 respectively. The df was 58 with t-cal of $1.02 < 1.96$ t-table, hence the result reveals that both lecturers and secretaries agreed that shorthand writing provides students with consciousness for speed and accuracy. These skills significantly influence secretaries' functions in an era of advanced technology in the 21st century. Thus the null hypothesis is retained at the 0.05 level of significance.

Discussion of Findings and Conclusion

The result of the finding in Hypothesis One revealed that there was significant relationship between listening skills acquired through shorthand and secretaries' functions in office occupation. This shows that listening skill has influence on secretaries' functions in office occupation. The result is in line with the submissions of scholars like Nadig (2010), Moulesong (2010) and Olaofe (2013) who opined that good listening skills make workers more productive. The ability to listen carefully allows workers to better understand assignments they are given. They are able to understand what is expected of them by their management.

The study further revealed that Shorthand skills promote consciousness for speed and accuracy in Secretaries' functions in office occupation. This supports the observation of Adamu (2010) that shorthand develops secretarial students' consciousness for speed and accuracy. As secretarial

students continue to strive to write and transcribe shorthand with speed and with minimum errors, this creates in them the consciousness to do all things in the office setting with the same consciousness for speed and accuracy. Any secretary that possesses this skill handles his/her functions efficiently and effectively. He/she is indeed an asset to an organisation.

The result also shows that both lecturers and practicing secretaries shared the same opinion that listening skill has significant relationship with secretaries' functions in office occupation in this era of advanced office technology in the 21st century. As observed by Adamu (2010) the listening skill acquired in school through the teaching and learning of shorthand helps graduate secretary to cultivate the habit of listening attentively to the visitors in the office and politely providing solutions to their problems without seeing the boss. This, to a large extent helps the boss to concentrate on policy issues.

The result in Hypothesis Four revealed that both lecturers and secretaries agreed that shorthand provides consciousness for speed and accuracy for practicing secretaries. This implies that the learning of shorthand creates in secretarial students the spirit for consciousness and accuracy and this goes a long way to help graduate secretaries in office occupation to be very conscious of handling their functions with speed and accuracy. Practicing secretaries that have this skill are priceless and in high demand in any organisation.

Recommendations

In view of the inherent value of skills acquired through shorthand and its impact on secretaries' functions in office occupation in an era of advanced office technology and information systems, the paper made the following recommendations:

- I. Shorthand should not be expunged from the curriculum of secretarial education both at primary and post-primary institutions of learning.

2. The schools that offer shorthand should constantly organize seminars/workshops and invite seasoned business educators who are office-biased and professional counselors to educate business education students on the relevance of shorthand even in an era of advanced office technology and information systems. If business education students are well-informed on the relevance of shorthand, they will be interested to offer the course and perform well in it.
3. Curriculum designers should re-design the curriculum for secretarial education; simplify the teaching of shorthand by breaking down the course into modules that would attract the interest of the business education students.
4. Since the world economy today is entrepreneurial-driven, the three tiers of government should support secretarial students, both at secondary and tertiary institutions with scholarships. This would encourage the students to put in their best in the course.

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