



**PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF STUDYING SHORTHAND IN OFFICE
TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT, FEDERAL POLYTECHNIC,
BAUCHI**

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ABSTRACT

This study was carried out to assess the problems and prospects of studying shorthand in Office Technology and Management Department, Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi. In order to achieve this, two specific objectives were raised among which include examining the causes of learning/practical problems faced by shorthand students in OTM department Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi. As a guide for the research, two research questions were formulated. Survey design was used for the study. The study found among others, that poor punctuations, misinterpretation of words and inability to distinguish between heavy and light strokes constitute the major problems of studying shorthand to students. It was also found that shorthand is indispensable in the modern office management. Based on these findings, it was concluded that the role of shorthand in modern office management is indispensable irrespective of the level reached by the 21st century technology. In view of these findings and conclusion, it was recommended among others that; there is the need for students of shorthand to have constant practice in order to master the heavy and light strokes in shorthand so as to reduce the academic problems of studying shorthand. It was also recommended that there is the need for government at all levels and stakeholders to show commitment to secretarial education by provision of facilities (e.g. shorthand textbooks, dictation machine, and tape recorders) to Office Technology and Management departments in the Polytechnics.

Keywords: Management, Office, Problem, Prospect, Shorthand and Studying

Introduction

Education can be seen as the totality of the experience that man acquired by his interaction, mentally and physically, with the environment to enable him cope with and get satisfaction from the environment, the world he lives in. Audu (2010) declared that education describes the total process of human learning by

which knowledge is imparted, faculties trained and skills developed. Aboychi (2007) viewed Business Education as education for business or training in business skills which are required for use in business offices, clerical occupation and business policy analyses. Aliyu (2005) defined Business Education as the intellectual and vocational preparation of people for earning a living in a contemporary industrial and business environment.

Business Education programme encompasses the following courses: Business Administration, marketing, purchasing and supply, accountancy, Business Studies, Secretarial Studies and others. At the teacher education level, it is grouped into three: Accounting Education, Distributive Marketing Education and Office/Secretarial Education. Shorthand is a business education subject in the area of office education. It is defined by Pitman (1974) as the art of representing spoken sounds with written signs. Shorthand has plenty utility in the business world, Secretaries in both public and private organizations use it to records minute of meetings, telephone messages and spell checking which leads to the increase of their vocabularies.

The twenty four (24) consonants are equally known as strokes which students must first learn before proceeding to any aspect of shorthand. These consonants are written in two ways, heavy strokes and light strokes. These strokes sound differently when they are to be written down in the paper. The heavy sounds are known through the way a teacher pronounces a word(s) such as "D" and "T". The letter "D" sound heavy while the letter "T" sounds light. The vowels sounds are what will make students to know where dots or dashes should be placed. Whether above, middle and through the line. These dots and dashes go along with the corresponding heavy and light strokes for easy identification.

Shorthand is taught right from junior secondary schools in Nigeria under business studies to tertiary institutions such as Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and some universities. The acquisition of shorthand skills by a trained secretary makes him/her relevant in the Business world. There is no doubt that he is an indispensable figure in every aspect of an organization which perform secretarial duties most effectively (Arukwe, 2009). A successful shorthand student has brighter future ahead because shorthand is useful in almost all profession. For example, shorthand notes are legal documents that can be used in a court case. Shorthand is a vital skill for court reporters because in most jurisdiction cameras and recorders are not allowed in court during proceedings. Further transcripts are hard to get from court officials and they take time to be released to the media.

In developed world, like U.S, Britain etc. reporters are paid a bonus if they keep their shorthand up above a minimum speed requirement. Secretaries are needed in every organization; a competent secretary cannot do without shorthand, he/she master shorthand and embrace it very well because it serves as a relief in facilitating most of the office activities. For example, a confidential secretary takes down dictation of most of proceedings of a meeting in shorthand and transcribes it on the typewriter or computer into longhand for easier understanding.

However, as valuable as the usage of shorthand and the need for a trained secretary is, shorthand at ND level is faced with problems. These problems have also made a lot of students to run away from the course. These problems may include: awkward outlines, misinterpretation of words, lack of punctuation, low societal value for shorthand, lack of qualified shorthand teachers, and invention of new technologies.

Problems of shorthand, according to Audu (2010), include teachers' qualification, English language disability and the students' interest in the subject. Modern office management is an activity of controlling and organising the working an office with modern equipment. The effects of shorthand in modern office management cannot be over emphasised because; shorthand provides necessary skills for effective and timely co-ordination of clerical activities in the modern office. Though office automation such as computer, internet resources and audio recorder are important in modern office management, they cannot substitute shorthand.

It is against this background that this study tries to investigate the problems and prospects of studying shorthand in Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi.

Statement of the Problem

The aim of the Shorthand Teacher/Lecturer is to train students to be able to record the spoken words and usually to produce a perfect transcription in a readable manner. This is because final stage of shorthand writing is an error-free transcription even at the required speed into mailable copy (Audu, 2010). Shorthand is a skill that must be acquired by constant practice and several hours drillings everyday. In this computer age, students pay more attention to modern office automation. At the Junior Secondary Level of Education, many students dislike shorthand. Yabami (2010) observes that among 204 junior secondary students used as sample, over 90% of them disliked the subject. The disliking of the subject must have been as a result of frequent failures in tests and examinations; these also may have come from lack of understanding of the

technical subject. By implication, it could be seen that the teaching approach used by the teacher coupled with impatience, in ability to hear the phonetic sounds and lack of understanding ultimately affect the student.

At Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi, it is amazing that most students prefer other courses to Office Technology and Management because of shorthand. In line with this, Oyebode (2012) asserts that the factors that contribute jointly to determine students' achievement among experts on scholastic achievements continues to be a controversial issue. In line with this, the researcher's observation revealed that only few of Polytechnic students enrolled for OTM course because of fear of shorthand. Equally, based on the researcher's interaction with some lecturers and students of Office Technology and Management department, it was discovered that they seem not to be comfortable with mass failure in shorthand. They seem to be of the opinion that problems such as; inadequate facilities, poor teachers' qualifications, teaching experience, students interest, learners' motivation, among others, may be responsible for this deplorable state of shorthand. This, therefore, is the main problem faced by students of shorthand which the study wants to tackle with empirical evidence.

Objective of the Study

The aim of this study is to ascertain the problems and prospects of studying shorthand in

OTM department, Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the causes of the learning/practical problems faced by shorthand students in OTM department Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi.
2. Assess the prospects of shorthand students in OTM department Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi.

Research Questions

The research work provides answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the causes of the learning/practical problems faced by shorthand students in OTM department Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi?
2. What are the prospects of shorthand students in OTM department Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi?

Significant of the Study

The result of the study will be of significant to the following people/organizations:

1. **OTM Lecturers:** The result of the work will be of immense benefits to the OTM lecturers. This will go a long way to improve their shortcoming in shorthand and encourage student to be hard working in Shorthand practice.
2. **OTM Students:** The outcome of this study will greatly help students of Office Technology and Management to be focused and determined in their pursuit of education that all hope is not lost as far as secretarial profession is concern.
3. **Parents:** Some parents never wanted their wards/children to register for Office Technology and Management, therefore, the result of this study will encourage parents to allow the choice of their children in terms of future careers to stand for the end justify the means.
4. **Curriculum Planners:** These are National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), all stakeholders, States, Local Governments, etc. These Agencies of Government have the veto power to formulate what should be entrenched in the curriculum. They should look into the less attention given to the practice of shorthand and the knowledge inculcation to the students and encourage the use of it in both offices and schools.

Concept and History of Shorthand

Concept of Shorthand

(a) **Stenography in shorthand:** Shorthand is any system of rapid writing using symbols or shortcuts that can be made quickly to represent letters of the alphabet, words or phrases. It has been variously known as stenography (close, little or narrow writing). The Oxford Advanced learners Dictionary (1994) defines Shorthand as a method of writing what is being said as quickly as possible, using special symbols and abbreviations. Shorthand is now employed extensively in reporting the proceeding of legislative bodies, the trial of cases in courts of law and for taking dictated business correspondence (1990 Encyclopedia).

Isaac Pitman (1995) came up with his own publication of stenographic sound Hand marked a new era in the development of phonetic systems. Not only did he classify the sounds of the language scientifically and arrange his material for writing accordingly, but he also introduced simple expedients of abbreviations that made for rapidity. Since the system is phonetic, all words are written according to their sounds. The words: lain, deal, may, knife, would therefore be written as if they were spelt lan, del, ma, nif (Encyclopedia Britannica (1996)).

There are mainly two systems of shorthand which are widely used all over the world, namely; Pitman systems of shorthand and the Gregg system of shorthand.

(b) Pitman System of Shorthand: The Pitman system of shorthand became popular in the year 1837. This system was based on phonetics (the sound of words) rather than alphabets Pitman (1987). It is often termed a geometric system. It consists of 24 consonants and 12 vowels sounds. Straight lines and circular curves are used to form the outlines of the symbol for words. The outlines may be placed in one of three positions, above the normal line of writing, on the line and through the line. The position is determined by the first vowel sound of the word. By using various positions, the writer may use a single outline to represent different words. Shading of the character is used to indicate heavy consonants and vowel sounds. Vowels are disjoined from the outline and are indicated by dots and dashes. Abbreviations for common words and phrases are used in order to facilitate the fastness of writing shorthand. This system is used in several countries in the world, including Nigeria. The second system of shorthand is the Gregg system of shorthand.

(c) Gregg System of Shorthand: The Gregg system of shorthand is not as popular as the Pitman System. The Gregg system is mostly used in the United States of America and Canada. Glattes (2001) stated that it is rather cursive than geometric in nature, in an attempt to approximate the method more strictly. It uses straight lines, circles, hooks and curves to form the outline of the symbol for the word(s). The vowels in Gregg are joined to the straight lines and line position is of little importance. Unlike Pitman Shorthand, shading is eliminated; all symbols are of the same thickness. Abbreviation for common words and phrases are used, all characters are written with the same thickness on the single line of writing and few abbreviated principles applied.

According to Holland (1979) a great number of people all over the world, including our dear country, Nigeria have used and still using shorthand system at various levels of higher institutions and some individuals use it for livelihood. Shorthand therefore, becomes an indispensable tool in the life of a Secretary, as he uses it to write minutes in shorthand and dictation from his boss. In this research work, the focus is on the Pitman system of shorthand.

History of Shorthand

Pitman shorthand is a system of shorthand for the English language developed by Englishman Sir Isaac Pitman (1813–1897), who first presented it in 1837. Like most systems of shorthand, it is a phonetic system; the symbols do not represent letters, but rather sounds, and words are, for the most part, written as they are

spoken. As of 1996, Pitman shorthand was the most popular shorthand system used in the United Kingdom and the second most popular in the United States. One characteristic feature of Pitman shorthand is that unvoiced and voiced pairs of sounds are represented by strokes which differ only in thickness; the thin stroke representing 'light' sounds such as /p/ and /t/; the thick stroke representing 'heavy' sounds doing this requires a writing instrument which is responsive to the user's drawing pressure: specialist fountain pens (with fine, flexible nibs) were originally used, but pencils are now more commonly used, Isaac (1997).

Pitman shorthand uses straight strokes and quarter-circle strokes, in various orientations, to represent consonant sounds. The predominant way of indicating vowels is to use light or heavy dots, dashes, or other special marks drawn close to the consonant.

Vowels are drawn before the stroke (or over a horizontal stroke) if the vowel is pronounced ahead of the consonant, or drawn after the stroke (or under a horizontal stroke) if pronounced after. Each vowel, whether indicated by a dot for a short vowel, or by a dash or a longer, more drawn-out vowel, has its own position relative to its adjacent stroke (beginning, middle, or end) to indicate different vowel-sounds in an unambiguous system. However, to increase writing-speed, rules of "vowel indication" exist whereby the consonant stroke is raised, kept on the line, or lowered to match whether the first vowel of the word is written at the beginning, middle, or end of a consonant stroke without actually writing the vowel. This is often enough to distinguish words with similar consonant-patterns. Another method of vowel-indication is to choose between a choice of different strokes for the same consonant. The sound "R" has two kinds of strokes: round, or straight-line, depending on whether there is a vowel-sound before or after the 'R'.

Problems of Studying Shorthand

Shorthand is a method of writing words in a way that is quicker than full English notation making it an ideal means of transcribing the spoken word. However, shorthand does have several inherent problems which prevent it from being the effective method of recording speech that it purports to be. In English, shorthand is broken into two distinct major forms Pitman's (with its U.S. cousin, Gregg) and Teeline--both with their own inadequacies. Some of the problems faced by students studying shorthand, according to Amoor (2009), are discussed as follows:

- a. **Awkward Outlines:** For some words, the curves and angles of shorthand notation are perfectly adept at representing the composite letters without breaking the flow of your writing. Even relatively long words like transcription can be represented without your pen leaving the paper and end in a convenient position to begin your next outline. However, other words such as exemplifier have such complex and awkward outlines that they become very difficult to represent without pausing for a moment and losing your place.
- b. **Misinterpretation of Words:** While Pitman's shorthand does include vowel signifiers in its outlines, many users of shorthand have found them cumbersome and inconvenient. Adding vowel signifiers means that a writer will have to remove their pen from the paper to add up to three individual symbols to a word, increasing the likelihood of the writer copying a word inaccurately or losing speed. Teeline shorthand eschews vowel signifiers and places its faith in the human mind's ability to deduce the word from its context. Consequently, the outlines of some words look identical to one another and, while the human brain can usually identify the word from context or memory, this does often cause problems.
- c. **Lack of Punctuation:** The lack of punctuation in shorthand sentences causes a problem that leads to misunderstandings. The only form of punctuation in shorthand is the full stop, which is represented as the '\ ' symbol. Symbols which inform the reader of the enunciation of words -- such as exclamation points or question marks -- are omitted, leaving the person transcribing the piece to add these from context and memory. Commas, which help order sentences, are also omitted and added later only where they make sense. This occasionally causes problems when the sentence is ordered wrongly during the transcription. Speech marks are less important as shorthand is almost always used during quoted text (Amoor, 2009).
- d. **Inadequacy of Shorthand:** In the age of digital recording devices and audio reproduction, shorthand is becoming increasingly obsolete. Use of these devices to record speech is not only much more accurate than jotting it down in shorthand, it also allows the listener more time to take note of other important factors, such as the speaker's mannerisms and body language. Journalists in Britain now use shorthand only in courtroom scenarios, where recording devices are not permitted.

Prospects of Studying Shorthand

Shorthand has a lot of prospects, every graduates of shorthand has the potential to work in any organization: according to Fakuade (2003), shorthand notes are a legal document that can be used as evidence in a court case shorthand is a vital skill for court reporters because in most jurisdictions cameras and recorders are not allowed in court during proceedings; further transcripts are hard to get from court officials and they take time to be released to the media in some European countries (For example Spain) reporters are paid a bonus if they keep their shorthand up above a minimum speed requirement. Reporters are called upon to give evidence from their shorthand notes in many court cases; so this is a “just in case” type of argument in effect. The bonus is a matter of a handful of dollars a week.

Research Methodology

Survey research design was used for this study. Survey research design according to Nworgu (2006) is a way in which a group of people or items is studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people or items considered to be representative of the entire group. Also, Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh (2002) opined that survey design permits the gathering of information from a large sample of people relatively quickly and inexpensively. Corroborating this view, Olayiwola (2007) noted that survey design is an effective way of gathering data from different sources within short time at a relatively cheaper cost.

Summary

This chapter presents the summary, conclusion and recommendations of the study based on the result of the investigation. The study was carried out to examine the problems and prospects of studying shorthand in Office Technology and Management Department, Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi. In order to achieve this purpose, two specific objectives were set for the study which include examining the causes of learning/practical problems faced by shorthand students in OTM department Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi. Two research questions were raised in line with the specific objectives which include; what are the problems faced by shorthand students. The study of shorthand has been hindered by a lot of problems which include: awkward outlines, misinterpretation of words, lack of punctuation, lack of interest from students and others. These problems are caused by factors like, improper method of teaching by lecturers, lack of government commitment, low societal value. The prospects of shorthand were discussed in this study and the effects of shorthand

on office management. This study is designed to tackle the problems faced by students studying shorthand. Survey design was used for the study. Questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. The data collected were analyzed using frequencies, percentages and mean.

Findings

The findings of the study are that:

1. That inability to differentiate between heavy and light strokes, lack of punctuation, dictation in shorthand and misinterpretation of words are the major problems faced by students of shorthand.
2. In appropriate method of teaching shorthand and invention of new technologies are the major causes of the problems faced by students of shorthand.
3. It was found that shorthand has great prospect to provide skills in a way of capturing quotes and notes, vital for court reporters, essential for journalists and enables secretarial students to have good command of English.
4. It was found that shorthand skills are relevant in modern office management in recording Minutes of meetings, helps secretaries to communicate well in modern office management.

Conclusion

Based on the major finding of the study, it could be concluded that the problems of shorthand writing as identified in this study have led to poor students' enrolment into OTM course in Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi. It could also be concluded especially based on the last finding, that the role of shorthand in modern office management is indispensable irrespective of the level reached by the 21st century technology.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are made by the researcher:

1. There is the need for students of OTM to constantly practice through drilling in order to overcome the problems of shorthand identified in this study.
2. There is the need for government at all levels and stakeholders to show commitment to Secretarial/OTM education by funding and provision of facilities (e.g. shorthand textbooks, dictation machine dictation tape

- recorders) to OTM Department in the Polytechnic. This will go a long way in reducing the causes of the problems faced by shorthand students as identified in this study.
3. Students of shorthand should embrace shorthand by devoting their time to its study because of its prospects which are vital for court reporters, minutes of the proceedings in the court, essential for journalist, enables secretarial students to have good command of English language.
 4. There is the need for public and private organizations to place emphasis on shorthand skills before employing secretaries because of its relevance in modern office management.

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