

EVALUATING THE NEED FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING OF SHORTHAND IN BUSINESS EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

BY

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Abstract

It is obvious that the use of shorthand is not so common in today's business environment. Many people believe that non-use of shorthand has been due to emergence of Information and Communication Technology facilities which have engulfed the business world. Thus, shorthand seems to be a subject that has outlived its usefulness. To find out the status of shorthand in the present day business environment, questionnaires were used to elicit responses from respondents to proffer solutions to the three research questions raised. The study covers tertiary institutions in the state, where Business education is being offered. Relevant literature were reviewed. The data collected were analyzed with mean ratings and standard deviation. It was thereafter found out that ICT facilities cannot replace shorthand and that reduced use of shorthand in offices is due to the fact that modern-day secretaries have risen to the challenges faced by the early secretaries and are now more educated and more highly qualified. It was found out that secretaries still use shorthand to keep records. Based on these findings, it was recommended that shorthand should still be part of the curriculum for the training of secretaries among others.

Key words: *Shorthand, ICT, Teaching, Learning, Business Education, Tertiary Institutions*

Introduction

The world is generally undergoing a series of change and development across every facet of human endeavour. This wind of change covers areas of economy, politics, business, technology, culture, education and so on. It has been observed that this change is not sudden but due to development and advancement in information technology which has brought about changes in the way things are handled and the way issues are addressed. The emergency of information and communication technology has gradually influenced the way and manner business activities are carried out. Thus, Adebayo (2006) opines that the advances in information technology as regards the introduction of sophisticated telecommunication equipment, electronic mail, computers and word processors, as well as the modern managerial techniques is gradually affecting the business, daily lives and secretarial profession.

Shorthand is the method of representing the spoken words or sounds with signs or symbols. Writing by sound means writing words as they are pronounced, and not according to their long 'hand (i.e. English) spelling. For example, the word 'knee' is written as 'nee' while the word bowl becomes boh-!'. Thus, it-could be noted that silent letters are not represented in the pronunciation.

Generally speaking, there are fewer letters used to represent the pronunciation of words than the spelling e.g k-aw-t (caught) because many words contain letters that are not pronounced, a shorthand writer could therefore write much faster than his longhand counterpart. For this reason, shorthand is used to take dictation or record what someone says. Ajayi (2003) explained “that even in modern times, shorthand has been the tool of many men who rose to prominence. She stated that men like the popular Billy Rose at one time earned his livelihood by writing shorthand while James Bymes found shorthand very useful during his term as secretary of state”.

It is a general opinion that it is a very difficult subject. A good number of business education students dread shorthand as a result of many factors, thus, leading to students' poor performance which has been a source of concern in the academia. Now that information technology has engulfed the world of business, it has been widely speculated that it may likely put an end to shorthand usage in our offices. Even to some well educated individuals, business executives across different professions, it is viewed that, shorthand will die a natural death. Ezoem (1995) asserted that the impression had been that with the emergence of computers in business establishments, many workers will be relieved of their jobs to become unemployed. A pertinent question is that, will computer system operate itself? The popular slogan “gabbage in, gabbage out” denotes that people will still be needed to feed in data before it can be processed by the machine. The divergent opinion is a signal that problems may arise, hence the need for further clarification or explanation through empirical studies. Much as there will definitely be changes and re-organizations in the offices and businesses as a result of the adoption of the computer and other ICT facilities, such changes may not lead to dismissals and retrenchments. It will rather entail re-adjustments and re-training of staff and engagement of those trained to use the facilities.

In light of the above, a change at the implementation level will naturally require a change at the training level of the operators of the business environment. It is obvious that shorthand is one of the core courses of business education curriculum. Till today, the subject still remains unique in the training process of business education students. It is also listed as stereography under Trade/Entrepreneurship subject in 2013 revised National Policy on Education.

The recognition of a gap between the western education and the non-formal education (which dwell in skill acquisition) led to agitation for reforms in education. Reports and recommendations of different committees and commissions such as Taiwo Commission, Ashby Commission etc later gave birth to the National curriculum conference of 1969. The outcome of the conference were compiled and published as National Policy on Education was first published in 1977 and had been revised up till 2013 being the 6th edition which had incorporated skill acquisition to formal education programme.

The foregoing scenario led to the vocationalization of education in Nigeria. This was conceived as ‘education for living’ and ‘education for life’ by different schools of thought. In an attempt to make education more relevant and more vocational in nature, Technical Vocational Education (TVE) curricular were incorporated into formal education programme which deals with acquisition of practical skills and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of the economy. Ekpenyong (2006) observes that vocationalization simply means integrating the vocational aspect with the general education content in order to give the students the needed employable skills.

Thus, Ekpenyong (2006) observes that the broad goal of vocational and technical education (of which business education is an integral part) is directed to the development of practical skills and knowledge required in specific occupation or groups of occupation. Also, NERDC (2004) views Technical and Vocational Education as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of

the educational processes involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. Thus, it is a means of preparing for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world of work. It is therefore instructive to state that shorthand is a component of business studies integrated curriculum at the JSS level. At the SSS level, each of the component subjects are separated. It must be noted that today's shorthand writers are more educated than the olden-day secretaries with little formal education before receiving secretarial training. At the university and college of education levels, Accounting Education, Marketing or Distributive Education and Secretarial or Office Technology and Management Education are the major areas of business education. In practice, they are prepared for teaching and office work, it is therefore expected that every business education graduate from either colleges of education or the universities should learn and be able to teach all the five components of business studies, which are, principles of accounts, commerce, office practice, typewriting and shorthand; and produce competent office workers hence, the curricular of these tertiary institutions revealed that, regardless of the students' area of specialization, all the students must offer the same course for the first two years to prepare them for the task ahead.

The inclusion of shorthand by NUC and NCCE in the curricular of NCE and University Business Education Programme is a sign that the two bodies seemed still find some relevance in the subject. It is on the foregoing background that the researcher wants to find out whether the emergence of information technology equipment, which is to aid effective performance of secretarial services in business world, will remove the writing technique in business education programme.

Statement of the Problem

There has been clamour for the removal of teaching and learning of shorthand from the curriculum of business education programme. Even to non-business executives, who do not have any dealing with the use of shorthand, at its mention, the popular notion is that it has outlived its usefulness. It has been argued that it is too difficult to understand. Some observed that the emergence of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has put an end to shorthand usage as it has brought about changes and innovation in the way office procedures and processes are being carried out. It has been argued too that most of the office executives, do not call their secretaries for shorthand dictation again, hence, they believed that it is no more relevant. In Nigerian educational setting, there is scarcity of textbooks and research investigating the usefulness of shorthand in the era of information and communication technology. Despite this, there is a widespread of insinuation that ICT will put an end to shorthand recognition and usage in business circle.

The researcher is however in doubt if the concerns of these views and thoughts could be enough to remove the teaching and learning of shorthand from the curriculum. Thus, the researcher is interested to find out whether the subject is still relevant or not.

The questions that arise are what are those ICT facilities that can be used in place of shorthand? Will the emergence of ICT remove the learning of shorthand in business environment?

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to evaluate the relevance of teaching and learning of shorthand in business education in tertiary institutions in Ekiti State. Specifically, the study sought to:

- (i) find out whether the teaching and learning of shorthand should be eliminated in business education curriculum?
- (ii) ascertain the ICT facilities that can be used in place of shorthand in offices.
- (iii) determine the influence of today's shorthand writers' academic qualifications on the use of shorthand in offices.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to give focus to the study.

- (i) should the teaching and learning of shorthand be eliminated from business education curriculum?
- (ii) what are the ICT facilities that can be used in place of shorthand in offices?
- (iii) what is the influence of today's shorthand writers academic qualifications on the use of shorthand in offices?

Methodology

The descriptive research design of the survey type was used for this study. The study adopted the use of questionnaire to elicit responses from the study's sample. The population of the study was 150 made up of all 21 shorthand lecturers from College of Education, Ikere Ekiti, the Federal Polytechnics and Ekiti-State University, Ado Ekiti and 129 final year Business Education/Office Technology and Management students from these institutions. The entire population of 150 was used as the sample of the study.

The instrument for data collection consists of a structured self administered questionnaire titled "Relevance of shorthand in Today's Business Education Programme" (RSBEP) which was developed by the researcher. The instrument was divided into two sections. Section 'A' contained items designed to obtain personal data about the respondents, while section 'B' consisted of items that are related to the three research questions earlier posed.

The instrument was validated by lecturers in business education. The split half method was used to ascertain the reliability of the instrument which was administered on 20 respondents. The data collected were further analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and the reliability coefficient of 0.81 was obtained. The instrument was personally administered to the sample through visits to the institutions and the offices.

In taking decision for the research questions, any item with the mean of 2.50 and above was considered as 'agree' and any item with a mean less than 2.50 was considered as 'disagree'. The data collected were analysed using frequency count, mean rating and standard deviation to answer the three research questions.

Results

Research Question 1: Should the teaching and learning of shorthand be eliminated from business education curriculum?

To answer this research question, the mean and standard deviation were calculated from the frequencies obtained. The results of the computations are presented in the table below:

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of respondents on whether to eliminate the teaching and learning of shorthand from business education curriculum.

S/N	Items	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1.	Shorthand is a difficult subject to learn	2.69	0.53	Agreed
2.	Removal of shorthand from curriculum will not create gap in business education programme.	1.56	0.66	Disagreed
3.	Secretarial practitioners can still perform effectively without shorthand	2.07	0.80	Disagreed
4.	Caring of shorthand improves one's grammatical competencies	2.78	0.51	Agree
5.	Shorthand knowledge is helpful in keeping official secrets	2.64	0.76	Agreed
6.	Use of shorthand for office dictation by executives has reduced	3.15	1.17	Agreed
7.	Knowledge of fast writing in shorthand can be transferred to other areas use	2.50	1.33	Agreed

Source: 2015 field work

Grand mean 2.48

From Table 1 above, it was agreed that shorthand is a very difficult subject to understand. Items 2 and 3 revealed that its removal from business education curriculum will create learning gap in business education programme and that this may reduce effective performance of secretarial practitioners in areas of record keeping and secrecy.

Analysis of items 4 to 6 revealed that most of the respondents agreed with the statements as the mean ratings of the items are above the 2.50 earlier set for decision making. The computed grand mean of 2.48 shows that most of the items listed in the table are all important and inevitable in the training and education of well-groomed business educators.

Research Question 2: What are the ICT facilities that can be used in place of shorthand in offices?

In response to the above research question two, the results of the calculated mean and standard deviation are presented below:

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents on ICT facilities that can be used in place of shorthand

S/N	Items	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
8.	Computer system can be used to do what shorthand is being used for	2.33	1.00	Disagreed

9.	Internet facilities/services can be used instead of shorthand writing.	2.18	0.92	Disagreed
10.	Word processing package is a better alternative to shorthand skill.	1.96	0.81	Disagreed
11.	Knowledge of ICT is closely related to knowledge of shorthand.	1.76	0.98	Disagree
12.	ICT facilities like tape recorder, CD, midget can be used to write shorthand in offices especially where verbatum reporting is needed.	1.19	0.72	Disagreed

Source: 2015 field work

Grand mean 1.12

It can be observed from table 2 above that all the items listed to find out a suitable replacement for shorthand from the ICT facilities were disagreed with by the respondents. Thus, a grand total of 1.12 was recorded which was below the cutoff point of 2.50. This is a clear indication that there is no ICT facility that can be used in place of shorthand in business offices.

Research Question 3: What influence does academic qualification of shorthand writers have on their use of shorthand in offices?

The mean and standard deviations calculated from the obtained frequencies used to answer the research question three are hereby presented in the table below:

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents on Influence of Academic Qualification on use of Shorthand in Offices

S/N	Items	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
13.	I don't take shorthand dictation frequently from my boss	2.23	0.69	Disagreed
14.	I do prepare memo/draft for my boss instead of dictation.	3.96	0.72	Agreed
15.	My boss can depend on my ability to write routine letters on his behalf.	3.73	0.85	Agreed
16.	I can write shorthand very well	2.45	0.64	Disagree
17.	Today's secretaries/shorthand writers are well educated to reduce note taking.	3.97	0.21	Agree
18.	I am versed in written and oral communication	3.82	0.96	Agree

19.	Todays secretaries are more qualified educationally than the olden day secretaries	3.91	0.32	Agree
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Source: 2015 field work

Grand mean 3.44

Table 3 above revealed that there is great influence of academic qualification on the use of shorthand by the modern day secretaries. Out of the seven items used to elicit responses on the research question, the responses from two items were below the 2.50 cut off point while five items were above the cutoff point. In all a grand mean of 3.44 was calculated.

Discussion

The findings of the study on research question one revealed that shorthand should not be eliminated from business education curriculum. Even though, item one in Table 1 showed that the subject is perceived to be difficult with a mean of 2.69 but analysis of responses in items 2 and 3 showed that its removal from business education programme will create learning gap and may affect the effectiveness of secretarial practitioners as the mean responses are 1.56 and 2.07 respectively which are below 2.50.

The analysis of items 4 and 5 revealed that shorthand can be used to improve learners' grammatical competencies, helpful in keeping official secrets as can be seen from the calculated mean in Table 1. It was also revealed that the use of shorthand for office dictation by the office executives has reduced nowadays. The grand mean was 2.48 which was below the 2.50.

The National Policy on Education (2004) revised edition stated that shorthand is one of the pre-vocational subjects at the junior secondary school level. The inclusion of the subject in the curriculum for the training of secretarial professionals and business educators at the University and Colleges of Education is a pointer to the fact that the subject is still relevant in business environment, because it is assumed that both NUC and NCCE had conducted some researches before they deem it fit to retain the subject in their curricular despite the current technological development. Thus, Olusola (2005) opines that shorthand remains one of the core courses that constitute the nucleus and bedrock of secretarial training in our institutions.

The findings revealed that since shorthand is a writing technique, it can be put into use at one's private life. It can be used to keep records of events which are personal to the writer.

The study further shows that all the ICT components earlier listed in Table 2 were not capable of replacing the use of shorthand. Though, it was noted that ICT facilities can enhance effectiveness of secretaries on areas of getting quick access to needed information, processing and storing data and faster dissemination of information to aid decision making especially on policy matters, the study however revealed that they can only assist in processing data that were collected. Hence, ICT is a means to an end, not an end in itself in the secretarial world.

On whether academic qualifications of shorthand writers have any influence on the frequency of use of shorthand in offices, it was revealed in Table 3 that shorthand is not frequently used in offices nowadays because the secretaries have improved in their communication skills due to acquisition of higher educational qualifications. To this end, it was observed in Table 3, items 14, 15, 17 and 18 that most of the secretaries can competently write routine memos/letters on behalf of their bosses rather than waiting to receive dictations on the subject matter. Thus, the higher level of educational attainment of today's secretaries has reduced the burden of the Chief Executives on constant dictation on routines matters that can be easily handled by the secretary.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

Shorthand usage in offices has drastically reduced. The reason advanced for this was that most of the secretaries are well educated to write routine letters/correspondences on behalf of their bosses.

It was also concluded that reduction in the use of shorthand in today's office was not solely as a result of emergence of ICT, rather, it was as a result of attainment of higher qualifications of secretaries which enabled their bosses to delegate some responsibilities to them in form of memo writing instead of calling the secretary for dictation. Also, it was concluded that there was no ICT facility that can be used to replace shorthand writing.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made, based on the findings previously presented and discussed in the study.

1. Shorthand should not be eliminated in the curriculum of business education as no ICT gadgets was found to be a good replacement of the subject.
2. Business educators should always aspire to develop themselves academically in order to fit into the electronic world of business which emergence of ICT has brought to office procedures.
3. ICT facilities should be provided and incorporated into the teaching and learning process of shorthand to improve students' understanding of the subject in order to reduce learners' perceived difficulty of the subject.
4. Shorthand lecturers should carry out research on issues relating to shorthand and ICT to guide the supervising organizations/bodies like NUC and NCCE in decision making on the subject.

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