

# THE RELEVANCE OF SHORTHAND TO THE NEEDS OF THE EMPLOYERS OF LABOUR

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to find out from employers of labour in private and public sectors the relevance, adequacy and suitability of secretaries with shorthand skills. The study was a survey research in which a questionnaire was used to gather data for the study. The population consists of 75 respondents drawn from selected government and business organizations in Delta State. The results of the study show that employers/chief executives and directors of private and public sectors prefer secretaries with shorthand skills and that the shorthand speeds rate dictated to secretaries by chief executive/employers vary from, 40 w.p.m to 70 w.p.m. The researcher made useful recommendations that would encourage prospective secretaries to pay proper attention to the study of shorthand while in schools.

## **Introduction**

The National Policy on Education (FRN 2004 edition revised) made the teaching and learning of vocational business studies compulsory at the junior secondary school level. As an integrated subject, vocational business studies comprises shorthand, typewriting, book-keeping, office practice and commerce. Although business subjects were partially in the Nigerian school curriculum, yet it was not emphasized during British Colonial administration.

However, as the need for shorthand increased, Esene (2004) notes that private business schools were established to teach the subject as a vocational subject. These schools were also known as commercial schools. They provided typists and stenographers for the civil service and the private business organizations in the country. The schools actually prepared candidates for the Royal Society of Arts (R.S.A) examinations. Successful candidates of these examinations were thus employed by government and businesses.

Although more than thousand rapid writing systems have been invented and developed in advanced countries, it is on record that only a few shorthand systems survived the rigorous test of use. In Nigeria, the three popular writing systems are Pitman New Era; Gregg and Speed Writing. Because of the great difficulties usually experienced by students, Edison (1999) predicated that the end of shorthand was not far away because of the invention of the phonograph. This statement has been subjected to critical analysis. Looking from other point of view Tonne (2002) says:

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...”it would be not only unwise but contrary to all the evidence to assume that shorthand will drop to a negligible subject in the secondary schools. All the evidences of job needs as found in the newspapers and employment agencies and the eagerness with which even marginally competent stenographic students are hired indicates the contrary...”

From the above extract, it seems that the demand for shorthand has not decreased. An extract of a recent meeting in Houston of business teachers and representatives of the US employment services states:

... we have almost given up trying to do anything about calls for shorthand writers; the demand is so great and the supply is about non-existent...

The aims and objectives of offering shorthand in institutions of higher learning vary from one institution to the other. The shorthand speeds vary a great deal, e.g 50, 60, 80, 100, 120, 140, 150 and 160 words per minute. By the acquisitions of these practical competencies, secretarial studies graduates are adequately and sufficiently prepared for the world of work (Kennedy and Oliverio 2002). Gartside (2001) notes that the business education for which shorthand is included should provide instruction in the training of office techniques, procedures and practices that provide the setting for the acquisition of basic skills and much of the knowledge in other subjects.

In a study conducted to determine the level and types of shorthand speed dictation by businessmen, Green and Klein (1998) found that the speed at which a businessman and boss dictate varies in relation to (a) whether he is a slow, average rapid, or very fast speaker, and (b) whether he is in the groping, thoughtful, confident, or sprinting phase of education. Table 1 shows the dictation speeds by such type in each phase.

**Table 1**  
**Dictation Speeds by Superior Officers**

Phase of Dictation	Slow Dictators	Average Dictators	Rapid Dictators	Very fast Dictators
Cropping (15% of time)	0 – 30 wpm	0-40 wpm	0 – 40 wpm	0-50 wpm
Thoughtful (45 of time)	40 – 60 wpm	50 – 80 wpm	50 – 90wpm	60 – 100 wpm
Confident (30 of time)	75 – 90 wpm	85 –105 wpm	100 – 130 wpm	110 – 190 wpm
Sprinting (10% of time)	100 wpm up	120 wpm up	140 wpm	150 wpm up

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Source: Green, H.H. & Klein, A. (1998). Analysis of the office dictation A Ph.D Dissertation submitted to the New York University, U.S.A, 4 – 5.

Ehiamentalor in Esene (2001) observes that the business organizations have much work to be done but with little time, hence the need to employ qualified secretaries that will make judicious use of time, space and effort: Ndinechi (2000) refers to shorthand as one of the trees in the forest of title under business education rubric which has grown steadily over the years, and is dying a slow and aimless death caused by packets of irrelevancies. On his part, Azuka (1999) notes that nobody can qualify as a professional secretary without adequate knowledge of shorthand Otobo and Makeri-Yahaya (2001) argued that though currently managers/chief executives in offices rarely use shorthand, it was their opinion that shorthand should not be dropped since it is required in verbatim reporting, shortnotes, speeches and the recording of minutes of meetings and reports.

### **The Problem**

Shorthand is one of the key subjects in business education curricula offered and taught in educational institutions. However, it has been noted that the teaching and learning is not done the way it should be. Some of the factors assumed to be militating against the subject are lack of high-class automated machines for teaching and learning and the use of processing documents by CIT gadgets.

The objectives of the study are to find out whether shorthand is still useful and relevant to the needs of the employers of labour in private and public sectors: and to find out the speed levels a superior office dictates in work-place

The results of the study will benefit the students in terms of ensuring that they are trained to acquire the skills and competencies for the world of work; the business teachers who ensure that the right skills and competencies are imparted to student-trainees and the curriculum designers who ensure that the curriculum is regularly reviewed, revised and adjusted in order to meet the test of time.

### **Research Questions**

Two research questions guided the study in line with the objectives of the study.

1. To what extent do employers of labour need a secretary with shorthand skill?
2. To what extent do Chief Executives give dictation commensurate with the ability of the secretary?

The study was limited to Chief Executives/Personnel Officers and Directors in both private and public sectors. The study covered selected government and business organizations in Delta State.

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### **Research Method**

This study was an opinion survey research. The population of the study is consisted of 75 respondents. It is made up of 40 directors in government departments and 35 chief executives/managers in private business organizations.

**Table 2**  
**Distribution of Zones of Respondents**

Private organizations and locations	Number	Public organizations and locations	Number
Agbor	4	Agbor	4
Asaba	4	Asba	5
Kwale	4	kwale	4
Ughelli	4	Ughelli	5
Koko	3	Koko	4
Warri	4	Warri	5
Sapele	4	Sapele	4
Abraka	4	Abraka	5
Ogwashi-Uku	4	Ogwashi-Uku	4
Total	35		40

Source: Field trip, 2009.

Data collected through the use of a questionnaire was analyzed using the descriptive statistics. A self-designed four point means rating scale was constructed as stated below:

Highly Relevant	(HR)	4	points
Relevant	(R)	3	points
Not Highly Relevant	(NHR)	2	points
Not Relevant	(NR)	1	point

This formula was calculated as:

$$4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 10 \div 4 = 2.50$$

This means that any item receiving 2.50 above will be accepted, while those items with less than 2.50 was rejected.

The data in Table 3 and 4 answered the questions raised for this study

### **Question 1**

To what extent do employers of labour need a secretary with shorthand skills?

**Table 3****Shorthand Skills Needed by Employers N = 75**

Q/I	Shorthand skills	Total		Decision
1	Skill of writing	72	4.48	HR
2	Skill of reading	74	4.85	HR
3	Skill of facsimile reading	74	4.19	HR
4	Skill of transcribing	75	4.54	HR
5	Skill of transcribing from tape recorder	75	4.07	HR
6	Skill of dictation	74	4.16	HR
7	Skill of magnetic transcription	75	4.05	HR
8	Skill of non-magnetic transcription	74	4.43	HR
9	Skill of receiving shorthand instruction	74	4.75	HR
10	Skill for preparing memos, reports, minutes and letters from shorthand dictated passages.	74	4.25	HR

**Source:** Field Survey, 2009.

This table (comprising 10 questionnaire items) identified shorthand skills and other related competencies which employers of labour expect secretaries to perform. Items 3,5,6 and 7 had a mean rate scale below 4.20, while items 1,2,4,8,9 and 10 had between 4.25 to 4.85. It thus appear from this analysis and interpretation of the data generated from the field that all the shorthand skills acquired by the secretaries while at schools are highly relevant to the employers/chief executives.

**Question Two**

What is the shorthand speed rate dictated by Chief Executives/employers?

**Table 4**  
**Shorthand Speed Rate Dictated by Employers N = 75**

Q/I	Shorthand skills	Total		Decision
11	Between 40 – 50 wpm	75	4.50	HR
12	Between 50 – 60 wpm	75	4.46	HR
13	Between 60 – 70 wpm	68	3.34	NHR
14	Between 70 – 80 wpm	-	-	-
15	Between 80 – 90	-	-	-
16	Between 90 – 100	-	-	-
17	100 and above	-	-	-

**Source:** Field trip conducted, 2009.

In this table 4 consisting of 7 items, items Nos 11, 12, & 13 recorded mean rating scopes of 4.50; 4.46; and 3.34. With such high mean scores, it does appear that chief executives of business organizations dictate between 40 – 70 wpm. Items 14,15,16 and 17 did not elicit responses from the respondents

In conclusion, it seems that Employers/Chief Executives dictate to their secretaries shorthand speed of a minimum of 40 and a maximum of 70 words per minute.

### **Results and Discussions**

The major purpose of this study was to ascertain whether shorthand skills possessed by secretaries are relevant to the employers/chief executives in the light of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) equipment now found and used in work-places. The results of the study show that all the shorthand skills identified are useful and relevant to employers and chief executives of business organizations.

This result was supported by earlier studies by Tonne (2002) and Ehiametalor (1990) which noted that business organizations have much work to be done but with little, hence the need to have qualified secretaries with relevant shorthand skills so as to make judicious use of time, space and efforts. It was also found that employers/chief executives dictate to the secretaries a minimum of 40 w.p.m to a maximum of 70 w.p.m. This finding was supported by earlier studies by Kennedy and Oliverio (2002) which noted that institutions of higher learning prepare students for shorthand speeds of 80 – 160 words a minute so that when employed in the world of work, they would have the ability and practical skills to excel in their work-places.

### **Conclusion**

Shorthand is one of the core business studies subjects in Nigerian schools system. As a subject where practical skills and competencies are acquired, secretaries with such skills are basically needed in business organizations to help employers and Chief Executives in the conduct of their businesses. There is no gainsaying the fact that employers of labour rate highly secretarial studies graduates who possessed the right skills which can be put at the services of their employers for the benefit of the workers, organizations and the society.

## **Recommendations**

On the basis of the result of the study, and the conclusion reached, it is recommended that:

- (a) shorthand speeds should be de-emphasized. Such less emphasis on speed acquisition will encourage young school leavers into the secretarial studies profession, and also to concentrate in the areas of organizational ability and the operations of ICT equipment.
- (b) feedback by employers/Chief executives of business organizations should influence the revision, review and adjustment of school curriculum in meeting the needs of the individual workers, organizations and the society.
- (c) that teachers should regularly be trained and retrained in order to adequately prepare him/herself to meet the challenges posed by the dynamism of business organizations and the society

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