

# **CONTINUED RELEVANCE OF SHORTHAND TO SECRETARIAL PRACTICE**

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## **Abstract**

This paper tried to examine the continued relevance of shorthand in secretarial practice. The paper highlighted the kind of recognition given to secretaries in the olden days and how they were being elevated in the world of works. It also examined some of the definitions of secretary, categories of secretary, concept of shorthand, reasons why shorthand is still relevant, some shorthand outlines, methods of gaining speed in shorthand – short-forms, phrases and intersections. Position of Shorthand in the work of secretaries in automated offices. This paper concluded that shorthand is still relevant and there is no other course or application which could be used to replace the writing of shorthand. The paper recommended among others, that secretaries in offices should always take dictations in shorthand so that administrators can appreciate the use of these rare skills especially the aspect of good communication, speed, accuracy and confidentiality of handling office correspondence and matters.

## INTRODUCTION

In 1970s shorthand was rated very high to the extent that employers looked for shorthand secretaries who were very scarce. By then if you were a shorthand typist or stenographer, you were hot cake. Employers used to find these types of secretary because of two major reasons: (i) speed and (ii) confidentiality.

During this period in higher institutions, shorthand was a core course which carried nothing less than five units in the secretarial studies curriculum. Fail in shorthand was fail in all courses and students were used to writing of lots of assignments and drilling day and night in order to have a good grade in shorthand which would in turn boost their GPA.

In Nigeria today, according to Awak (2015), shorthand is one of the subjects taught at the secondary and tertiary levels of education, and a close examination of the curriculum shows that shorthand is given more contact time in many tertiary institutions than other courses.

The American Association of secretaries (2014) as sighted by Awak (2015) emphasizes that, minutes as tangible records of meetings and a source of information for members who are not able to attend. This implies that minutes capture the essence of meetings, including details such as decisions made. In addition, the American Association of secretaries (2014) has pointed that minutes can act as reference point or example when a minutes' outcome impacts other collaborative activities or project within the organization, minutes can serve to notify individuals of tasks assigned to them and or timelines.

Shorthand is any system of rapid handwriting which can be used to transcribe the spoken words. Shorthand systems use a variety of techniques including simplifying

existing letters or characters and using special symbols to represent phonemes, words and phrases Aromolaran (2011) in Awak (2015). Shorthand is a core and an anchor 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 improve secretaries' memory, which enhances the listening ability as opined by Chip (2013) in Awak (2015).

The invention of writing, scribes have used various techniques to enable them to write easily. Ancient Egyptians devised two scripts, Hieratic and Demotic, as alternatives to their complex Hieroglyphic script, which was used mainly for monumental inscriptions. Peter (2010) noted in Awak (2015) that, during the 4th century BC, the Greeks devised a number of symbol systems which reduced letters to a single stroke and which could also be used to represent common words, suffixes and prefixes. Such systems are generally referred to as stenography (narrow writing), brachygraphy (short writing) or tachygraphy (swift writing). Their purpose was to make writing more compact and/or faster.

### **Definitions of Secretary**

A secretary has been conceptualized differently by different authors. Anderson in Oguejiolfor and Nworgu (2014) saw a secretary as one who can think for you, act for you, anticipate your whims, and increase your output phenomenally. The Professional Secretaries as an executive assistant who has mastery of office skills, demonstrates the ability to assume responsibility without direct supervision, exercises initiative and judgment and makes decisions within the scope of assigned authority. From the foregoing, a secretary could be defined as an officer, who is in charge of records,

correspondence, minutes of meetings, and related affairs of an organization. A secretary assists his boss and equally acts for the boss when directed. The secretary must accurately think and act fast especially in an automated office. This has informed the need for an assessment of the secretary's skills in electronic records management.

### **Categories of Secretary**

Joshua (2010) identified the following categories of secretary:

#### **1. Personal/Private Secretary**

This class of secretaries works of only one official. Unlike other types who may serve many bosses. At the same time, the private secretary attends to boss's personal/individual matters.

#### **2. Executive Secretary**

These perform fewer functions and have junior secretaries who possess the mastery of shorthand and typewriting, working under her. She performs more of secondary functions, gives instructions, is able to take decisions and even represent the boss on business occasions.

#### **3. Administrative Secretary**

This class of secretary is referred to a management assistant who specializes in non-typing task they deal with administrative secretaries. A Higher National Diploma in Office Technology and Management Administration from any recognized polytechnic or colleges of technology also qualified one for this position.

#### **4. Company Secretary**




The Company secretary must have a good knowledge of law and if possible have a degree or diploma in law. The basic skills of typing and shorthand are not pre-requisites of the assumption of this position.

## 5. Bilingual Secretary

This type of secretary can be bilingual or multi-bilingual. They are trained in the art of understanding and using two or more languages in discharging their secretarial duties.

### Concept of Shorthand

Shorthand is the representation of sounds by signs and symbols. In shorthand, we deal with sounds and not alphabets or letters. For example, in pay, p and a are represented by shorthand signs because y does not sound. Shorthand outlines cannot be written on plain sheets because we deal with positioning of outlines and this is done in three ways namely: first place outlines are written above the




line -  Second place outlines are written on the line  while third place outlines are written through the line. 

We also have some ways of gaining speed in shorthand:

(a) Short-form is a way of writing some common words using only strokes or




consonants without adding vowels – several  have  because 

(b) Phrase is the joining of two or more outlines or short forms together instead

of writing them separately e.g. to do the  to be the  because of the 

(c) Intersection is also a way of writing two outlines together but in a special way.

The first outline is written in full and in the normal way but a pronouncing or sounding or prominent consonant from the other outline is written across the

first one e.g. mail company  for the company  mail department 

### Reasons why shorthand is still relevant:

Anderson (2011) in Awak (2015) believed that shorthand skills will continue to be needed and that it is noteworthy that the purpose of training/development is to

enable an individual acquire the skills that will be relevant for his/her job performance and that every curriculum is expected to make beneficiaries apply the skills acquired in solving problems in the work place. Macnicol (2000) said that a sound skill of shorthand is essential to note taking-shorthand has the ability of moulding life and that it instils discipline by being careful when writing. It builds confidence into writers. Ogunyinka (2001) said that shorthand has come to stay. Though seen as a vocational and not educational course, yet it has been discovered 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. It also helps in the development of reading writing, language and spoken abilities. It is also useful to note taking in other subjects faster than longhand that is, the conventional handwriting. It can be used to record speeches at meetings or as a means of keeping secret writing. Whitecomb (2000) deserved that, shorthand has been a saving grace for many graduates roaming the streets without jobs, and have had to go for evening short courses in shorthand and typing to be employed as secretaries. Many women today who would have had nothing to do are now breadwinners because of the shorthand skills they have acquired. It is believed that shorthand skills will continue to be needed. It is noted that even with the support of word processors, it is questionable whether dictating equipment can make Shorthand achieve job requirement in the foreseeable future. It is also pertinent to state that there is no other method of note taking than shorthand.

Shorthand for all will mark the beginning of self-sufficient improved productivity in office. The emphasis given to shorthand is one of the glaring constraints that have existed in the process of the education of the secretary over

the years. Tombe (2007) noted, —the effect of the provision of excess number of hours of lecture for one single course a week is that it would not only be difficult to fix such an alarming number of hours of lecture in a general time-table but it would also limit the possibility of the inclusion of other essential general business education courses in the program if reasonable credit-load mix were to be attained.

Sunday (2005) said that it is worthy to note that shorthand is indispensable to the secretarial profession and much emphasis is given to it. For the secretarial student, shorthand helps in developing her reading and writing abilities, especially in the area of written and oral English. Shorthand is also used in recording speeches at meetings. And for the graduate secretary, proficiency in shorthand is very essential especially in situations where the job demands secrecy in business or where a quick recording of information is necessary. Unfortunately, from records available, the use of shorthand in modern offices is declining at an alarming rate and students' performance in shorthand has gone down too.

According to Ohakwe, (2001) in Awak on graduation the secretary is handicapped in the modern office because the shorthand skill acquired is hardly used, while she would be introduced to sophisticated office machines, which she was not trained to use. This contradicts the purpose of training, which according to Orobso, (2001) is the preparation for a job performance and the application of skills to the present job. Also Azuka (2009) opined that, a course is considered suitable if it meets the needs of an individual and relevant if it provides the student with the skills, which he perceives to be realistic according to goals and aspiration; and adequate if the skills acquired can be used to enter an occupation.

In today's modern offices, large numbers of data are created, processed, stored, retrieved and disseminated daily because of technological innovations. On this note, Nwosu (2002) opined that as new electronic equipment are introduced into the office; new methods of working are often needed. New skills and concepts have to be learned as new job opportunities arise. He further added that old job opportunities disappear, and the need for old skills often disappears with them. Obijole (2006) advised that teachers of secretarial studies and departments must adapt their methods; curricula, equipment and facilities to meet the growing demands for competent information/word processing personnel. Agbionu (2014) stated that, despite the automated machines being in offices, shorthand skills enhance secretary's ability to write comprehensive reports, describing in detailed how the information is obtained, difficulties encountered. He further emphasized that only secretaries with shorthand skills can follow the steps involved in report writing one at a time.

According to Prince (2004), before the advent of technology and even in the recent past, advertisement for the post of secretary was usually done with shorthand speeds as criteria and word-processing as an added advantage. But with the arrival of automation, the reverse is now the case, and in most cases, no mention is made of shorthand. It is difficult now to secure the post of a secretary in a business organization without excellent word processing and computer skills. It therefore becomes pertinent to instruct/train the students on the skills and attitude required to operate the word processor and computer efficiently, if they are to remain competitive in the labour market upon graduation. Adamu (2010) noted, that shorthand skills develop secretarial student's consciousness for speed and accuracy. As the student continues to strive to write and transcribe shorthand



with speed and with minimum errors, it creates in him/her the consciousness for speed and accuracy. Any secretary that possesses these skills handles his/her functions efficiently and effectively. Ambrose (2011) supported the idea that shorthand skills is still relevant in the composition of correspondence and effective in communication skills despite the introduction of sophisticated machines in offices which was also affirmed by Sunday (2005) who opined that, shorthand skills are indispensable to the secretarial profession, as it helps secretaries in developing their written and oral English communication. Ogunyinka (2007) also affirmed that shorthand has come to stay, though seen as a vocational and not educational course yet it has been discovered that it has educational values. This contradicts Barnes (2004) who was of the opinion that, with recent advances in the area of office technology, the use of shorthand skill will be de-emphasized.

Adebayo (2006) opined that good communication skills makes secretaries more productive and the ability to communicate well allows secretaries to better compose correspondence to capture what is expected of them by their management. Prince (2004) said listening skills acquired through teaching and learning of shorthand helps the secretary to cultivate the habit of good report writing and composing of correspondence including minutes of meetings in automated offices. This, to a large extent helps the manager to concentrate on other issues. Agbionu (2014) affirmed that, shorthand skills enhance secretaries' ability to write detailed reports, by describing how the information in reports are obtained, difficulties encountered and acknowledgement of help and assistance. He further emphasized that only secretaries with shorthand skills can follow the steps involved in report writing one at a time. Roe (2014) opined that shorthand

skills tend to reduce the burden of workload in the office and promote confidentiality in service delivery. In line with this, Teeline (2010) affirmed that, shorthand is a vital tool for secretaries in keeping secret and confidential matters of the organization. He stressed that despite the digital age, shorthand skills are still regarded as an absolutely essential skill that make secretaries more productive in automated offices. Adebayo (2011) affirmed that, shorthand skill is still very relevant in maintaining documents than automated machines that can be operated by anyone who is literate in manipulating the office machines. Barnes (2004) however, observed that improvement in the automated equipment may render shorthand less useful in automated offices especially in the area of confidential record keeping. Fasami (2014) said that, secretaries need shorthand skill to carry out the day to day responsibilities and routine in offices, in areas of receiving instructions and getting update information and good listening skills by pointing out the ways, through which both secretaries and executive can realize a higher level of success in achieving the organizational goals.

Chip (2014) affirmed that nobody can qualify as a professional secretary without adequate skills in shorthand.

Prince (2004) further stated that shorthand skills will continue to be needed. He also stressed that, it is noteworthy that the purpose of training and development is to enable an individual acquire the skills that will be relevant for his/her job performance and that every curriculum is expected to make beneficiaries apply the skills acquired in solving problems in the work place. Stressing that shorthand skill has been a saving grace for many graduates roaming the streets without jobs. In view of this, 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.

### **Position of Shorthand in the Work of Secretaries in Automated Offices**

Sesan (2000) in Awak (2015) notes that, nobody can qualify as a professional secretary without adequate skills of shorthand.

Earlier Dele (2002) reasoned that, if Shorthand skills were not found useful in the secretarial studies curriculum the developed countries would not have continued to invent systems of shorthand from time to time.

Davis and Eddy (2002) concluded after a survey that a marketable skill in shorthand was worth a large sum of money a month as salary for secretary, the reason being that shorthand writers were perceived as possessing an abundance of skills that involve high language skill and found no any other than secretary. Sesan (2000) noted that, nobody can qualify as a professional secretary without adequate skills of shorthand.

In complete agreement with this view Adebusi (2001) in Awak (2015) stated that shorthand skills in higher education curriculum were beneficial to students and society. She further said that shorthand had education values, which works through the medium of language and spoken abilities, was useful for note taking in other subjects, and was used to record speeches as a means of keeping scores. Shorthand skill according to her was a saving grace to many graduates of other discipline who otherwise would have been roaming about the streets in search of jobs but who had to undergo evening shorthand and typing studies to be employed as secretaries.

**Conclusion**

This paper will conclude that shorthand is still relevant and there is no other course or application which could be used to replace the writing of shorthand.

**Recommendations**

1. Shorthand should still remain in the school curriculum of secretarial education both at secondary schools and post secondary institutions of learning because of its relevance to secretaries in taking accurate minutes of meetings.
2. The institutions that offer shorthand should constantly organize seminars and workshops for students regularly as well as invite seasoned business educators who are office-based and professional counselors to educate business education students on the relevance of shorthand skills in an era of automated equipment. If business education students are well informed on the relevance of shorthand, they will be interested in offering the course and perform well in it.
3. Organizations and employers of labour should educate people on the relevance of shorthand through appropriate seminars and workshops because shorthand skills still serve as a means of confidential writing in close door meetings.
4. Ministries of education should collaborate with the Education Trust Fund (ETF) to enable them supply equipment and teaching materials in shorthand laboratories.

This will enhance the teaching of shorthand to be more practical and that will help in bringing out the needed secretarial skills for boosting students' speed and accuracy in composing of reports and taking of minutes even when out of school.

5. The equipment and materials already in use in shorthand laboratories should be effectively handled by teachers and students under the supervision of the administrators for update and good maintenance which can yield good results in

carrying the practical aspects while in school.

6. Secretaries in offices should always take dictations in shorthand so that administrators can appreciate the use of these rare skills especially the aspect of good communication, speed, accuracy and confidentiality of handling office correspondence and matters.

7. Constant training and retraining of secretaries should be based mainly on shorthand skills rather than other criteria.

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