

**UNLOCKING THE POWER OF SHORTHAND WRITING: IMPROVING THE  
COMMUNICATION SKILLS OF THE SECRETARIAL OFFICE PROFESSIONAL**

**Fasae, Felicia Bosede Kehinde (Ph.D)**

Management Sciences, Office and Information Management,  
Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti

\*fasae.feliciabosede@bouesti.edu.ng

0000-0002-0407-0423

**Abstract**

*The proliferation of ICT in the digital age and in communication has reduced the positive influence of shorthand use by the secretarial office professionals due to the fact that the power and benefits of shorthand as a writing system and effective communication tool has been undermined. This paper assessed unlocking the power of shorthand writing in enhancing communication efficiency and effectiveness of the performance of the office professional. The paper considered relevant literature on the secretarial office professional and language skills, shorthand as a system of writing, shorthand writing for effective communication, and enhancing communication efficiency and effectiveness through shorthand writing. It was concluded that secretaries/office managers' position contributes to achievement of organizational goals through effective communication, hence, should not be undermined. It was recommended that that shorthand reading and writing should still be an important part of the skills to be acquired by the office professional. Although shorthand has its own peculiarity of being feared by students, it is still much needed in helping professional office workers in improving their communication skills.*

**Keywords:** Shorthand writing, Communication Skill, Secretarial Office Professional, Language Skills.

**1. Introduction**

From time immemorial, effective communication skills have been critically needed for success in every facet of life including business. Communication is the potent tool used in transferring information, knowledge and ideas from one person to another through various means which could be verbally, in writing or through electronic means. Without communication, human relationships will be chaotic. Ayeni (2021) in Fasae (2023) agreed that communication is key in every human relationship or encounter. Silviani (2020) in Agustini, Amanah and Harahap (2022) see communication as the delivery or exchange of information from sender to recipient, either verbally, in writing, or using communication tools, it is very important in achieving company goals.

Communication is not just transferring information or ideas from one person to another but must be effective before it can achieve its goals. Feedback ensures that the message sent is well understood, hence effective transfer of message. Ahmad, Ahmad, Zulfakar, Aliyashak, Isham and Iazhar (2022) affirmed that effective communication is more than just exchanging information, but understanding the emotion and intentions behind the information, as well as being able to clearly convey a message and it plays an important role in the development of any organization, builds strong relationships and attract more opportunities for organizations. Oriji and Allison (2021) talking on skills learning for self-development in the 21st century workplace in Nigeria see communication skills as effective oral or written ways by which one expresses oneself in the workplace which include: teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, creativity, work ethics, interpersonal skills and time management abilities.

The secretarial professional is indispensable in organizations due to the essential and vital duties that they render, hence, Nwaobiakara, James, and Amasike (2013) emphasized that over the years, she has become indispensable in organizations that strive for competence, efficiency and effectiveness; in other words, the functions of a secretary in modern organizational management cannot be quantified. Fasae (2023b) noted the different nomenclature of secretaries to include office professionals, office information managers, administrative assistants, office coordinators, executive assistants, office managers, among others, and asserted that they are becoming more and more relevant in today's offices due to their specialty in general office administration and keeping up to date with technological advancements. She reiterated the supportive roles of the office professional to be very fundamental and indispensable in the 21st century organisations.

The multifarious functions of the office professional are all dependent on effective communication and ability to do this places the secretarial office professional in a vantage position in the organization. Gartside (1983) in Adako (2007) confirmed that at every level of performance, whether routine or administrative, efficiency is liable to turn, from time to time, on communication, either in speech or writing. Adako noted that the ability to communicate with others is an essential attribute of human life and that we grapple with communication tasks most of the time we are awake and that it is only when we are alone and also not reading or writing (or listening to radio or watching television) do we, briefly, stop receiving/sending messages from/to

the world of people outside and around ourselves. Communication plays, then, a vital part in our personal daily lives.

The education and training of the secretarial office professional incorporates skill courses such as secretarial duties, office practice, office management, computer/word processing, shorthand and, most importantly, English language, among others. Fasae and Aina (2007) observed that shorthand is an aspect of phonetics (Pitman (1978), and affirmed that pitman shorthand is phonetic in nature, that is, words are generally written as they are sounded and not according to ordinary longhand spellings. Pitman's system uses signs/symbols to represent only those consonants and vowels which are actually sounded when pronouncing words. The shorthand alphabet consists of thin and thick strokes which represent the consonant sounds, and dots and dashes which represent the vowel sounds. Thin strokes (symbols) represent light sounds, thick strokes (symbols) represent heavier sounds. Thin strokes are very thin, thick strokes are slightly firmer.

Babatunde (1997) in Fasae and Aina (2007) remarked that phonetics is that branch of linguistics, concerned with the articulation, transmission and reception of speech sounds, and accounts for how speech sounds are generated (the physical properties of the sound) and how they are received by the hearer. Three major aspects of phonetics identified are articulatory (production of speech sounds); acoustic (physical properties of sounds); and, auditory (reception of the speech sounds). There is, therefore, no exaggeration that shorthand is deeply rooted in phonetics because the sound produced by a speaker determines the signs or symbols to be written by the shorthand writer. Correct pronunciation is also a necessity to avoid distorted information. Pitman's system uses signs/symbols to represent only those consonants and vowels which are actually sounded when pronouncing words. The shorthand alphabet consists of thin and thick strokes which represent the consonant sounds, and dots and dashes which represent the vowel sounds. Thin strokes (symbols) represent light sounds, thick strokes (symbols) represent heavier sounds. Thin strokes are very thin, thick strokes are slightly firmer.

Furthermore, anyone willing to learn Shorthand must have some specific skills also known as the entry behaviour, necessary specific skills prior to an instruction. They asserted that one entry behaviour expected of a shorthand writer is mastery in the English Language. Mastery of English Language is a must for one to do well in Shorthand since dictation passages are written and dictated

using the English Language. Practical exposure to the relevant areas and a sound theoretical background provides a modern industry oriented education, aimed at producing trained professionals who can successfully meet the demands of the various industries. (Adombilla, Aburiya & Roger, 2018).

Despite the fact that the entire world has been globalized through technological development, it has been observed that the place of shorthand usage in communication cannot be underestimated as a tool for record keeping and improvement in grammatical competencies.

Secretaries/administrative professionals are indispensable personnel in organizations as they fulfil a wide range of responsibilities that contribute to the advancement of their organizations. In view of the complexities in workplace and technologies, effective language skills are required of the administrative office professional to coordinate relationships, establish and maintain interactions among employees. On the office professional and language skills, Fasaie and Aina (2007) opined that a secretary who does not know the appropriate use of language cannot be an effective secretary and will have the performance of duties hindered.

## **2. Shorthand as a System of Writing**

Shorthand is the art of representing spoken sounds by written signs. Pitman Shorthand was devised by Sir Isaac Pitman (1813-1897) and was first published in 1837. Over the years it has been gradually improved and has been also adapted in 15 different languages. The system was widely used in the UK and USA by secretaries, reporters and writers, but lost popularity with the invention of pocket tape recorders (First Course, 1982). It deals with writing of words as they are pronounced and not according to longhand spelling.

There are several shorthand systems used in earlier times such as Chandler shorthand, Current Shorthand, Duployan shorthand, Eclectic shorthand, Gregg shorthand, Pitman shorthand, Speedwriting, Teeline Shorthand, Tironian notes, among others. 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 (<https://en.wikipedia.org> (2024)).

The writing of shorthand is regarded as a skill. A skill is a specialized training required to perform specific tasks. Anybody cannot be called upon to perform the secretarial duties without prior training. Shorthand writing has been based on the language skills of listening, speaking, reading

and writing skills. Oyinloye (1999) in Fasae (2000) asserted that listening is the most used of all the language skills because man's understanding of the society he lives in depends largely on his ability to listen and speak. It is very essential in shorthand writing because shorthand is the art of representing spoken sounds with signs. Ekhaton (2020) sees listening as an active process where we receive and respond back to messages which are spoken; it is an activity of paying attention to and trying to get meaning from something we hear and involves understanding of a speaker's accent and pronunciation, his grammar and vocabulary and grasping its meaning. In shorthand writing therefore, listening helps to distinguish between grammatical aspects of the passage being dictated to know the differences between nouns and verbs, between light and heavy strokes, among others. For instance, ability to distinguish between the use of advice and advise, fair and fare, practice and practise, among others, in a passage depends on the listening skill of the shorthand writer as an effective communicator.

Pronunciation is an important skill in language use and is basic to shorthand writing. Shorthand teaches pronunciation. Ability to differentiate between voiced and voiceless consonants and vowels is a skill the shorthand writer must possess. If these skills are lacking, the shorthand writer cannot write shorthand effectively.

Shorthand writing is also based on the principles of English language. Adombilla, et. al., (2018) confirmed that in ancient times, shorthand was described as any system of rapid writing using symbols or shortcuts that can be made quickly to represent letters of the alphabets, words or phrases. Ikoyo (2016) sees shorthand as the art of representing spoken sounds by written signs as heard in English words. Invariably, the writing of shorthand is based on the sounds of English words divided into twenty-four consonants, twelve vowels and four diphthongs. He highlighted the notable features of Pitman shorthand as follows:

- ✓ Pitman shorthand is phonetic, i.e. it records the sounds of speech rather than the spelling. For example, the sound [f] in form, elephant and rough is written in the same way for each word.
- ✓ Vowel sounds are optional and are written with small dots, dashes or other shapes next to the main strokes. This helps increase writing speed because most words can be identified from their consonants only.
- ✓ The thickness, length and position of the strokes are all significant.

- ✓ There are many special abbreviations and other tricks to increase writing speed.
- ✓ Silent letters are not represented in the pronunciation. e.g. tomb, palm, calm, etc.
- ✓ Fewer letters are used to represent the pronunciation of words than spelling. e.g. k-aw-t (caught).
- ✓ Written on ruled surface: Lined shorthand notebooks are used for writing.
- ✓ Perfect regularity of the outlines.
- ✓ Words of frequent occurrence have special outlines.
- ✓ Uses Symbols

### **3. Shorthand Writing and Effective Communication**

#### ***3.1 Mastery of Grammatical Rules***

The benefits of shorthand writing in terms of its ability to capture information quickly, improve note-taking proficiency, and facilitate accurate and concise communication cannot be over emphasized. Afolabi (2004) in Fasae and Aina (2007)) asserted that the secretary's language skills would normally be put to use in receiving visitors in taking and, atimes, giving dictation in making and receiving telephone calls, in seeking information, in the usual office and business correspondence, in writing memoranda, letters, minutes, reports and press releases in representative capacity of his boss, in stemming crisis in the organization, in judicial and legal transactions and several other functions. It has been observed that all these activities are communication oriented.

A shorthand writer possesses the speaking skills in that he is able to articulate the consonant and vowels sounds in a word so as to bring out its pronunciation and meaning. For instance, the word 'goggle' should be pronounced as 'gogl' not as 'gogu'; total as totl, among others. This skill helps to pronounce correctly. Reading should be mastered well so that the reader can respond at surface level, and, at deeper level of understanding, the explicit meaning of words, sentences, paragraph or passage. Ekhaton emphasized that reading instruction is most effective when intertwined with writing instruction and vice versa. He found that when children read extensively, they become better writers. The pitman shorthand passages have been written to contain matters in all fields and walks of life and in such a way that if a shorthand writer reads through its texts, journals and exercises, he will be versed in words. Fasae and Aina (2007) agreed that reading the printed shorthand passage is a major source for building a large vocabulary of outlines and for developing

speed as images of shorthand forms would be registered in the subconscious mind of the reader and spontaneous recall of such would be easy. As opined by Adombilla, et. al., (2018), shorthand writers therefore engage in reading materials to increase their reading practice from printed shorthand books and also practice in transcription.

Writing is a means of externalizing what has been internalized (Oyinloye (1999) in Fasae (2000)). It was asserted that the art of writing shorthand is a skill but the shorthand writer must possess the ability to write or communicate accurately because he possesses the shorthand writing skills. The sense of the passage will help the writer to differentiate, for instance, between minimal pairs, synonyms and antonyms. The shorthand writer must be skillful in the art of writing.

### **3.2 Accuracy and Penmanship of Shorthand Outlines**

Apart from the four language skills, accuracy and penmanship are important aspects much needed in communication that will help the shorthand writer in communicating effectively. For penmanship, pen/HB pencils and reporter's notebook, well lined and double spaced with about 21 lines to the page with one inch margin and not more than 80 leaves are required for writing shorthand because of the variation of light and heavy strokes which are based on the sounds produced. It also helps greatly in phrasing by joining two or more words together without lifting the pen and plays such a large part in the development of speed and skill. Denomme and Grey (2023) established that penmanship is the art or skill of having excellent handwriting, being able to write legibly and clearly.

Accuracy in shorthand demands the right outlines for separate words, right outlines for the arbitrariness (which have to be learned by heart), the right position of each outline in relation to the line, and, the correct use and application of the rules of the system, the degree of which is dependent upon the knowledge and understanding of principles, visual memory and the level of 'correct' automaticity that the student has attained. The mind must be switched on when the writing is taking place so that the right outlines can be impressed on the heart. Writing correctly is always at the forefront of the shorthand writer's mind. Adombilla, et. al., (2018) agreed that nothing less than absolute accuracy should satisfy the shorthand writer and that conflicting outlines should be carefully distinguished, inserting vowels where necessary, to avoid confusion.

In his contribution, Ikoyo (2016) noted that shorthand is one of the skill subjects that requires the acquisition of basic skill because acquired skills must be integrated into competency. He

highlighted that three skills are of great importance in the study of shorthand which are manual, aural and mental. Manual skill entails skill in the handling of shorthand outlines being correctly written right from the very beginning of the course and fluency, giving attention to accuracy of details. Mental skill is the ability to grasp the sense of the material dictated, to concentrate and recall, to read, to quickly apply the rules and to see outlines in advance or visualize outlines during the course of dictation (Nwosu, 2008). The reading of printed shorthand outline (passages or literature) is another way of developing mental skill as it enables the student to recall or visualize the outline such that he/she can read and apply them easily in taking dictation soon after. Some literature texts have been printed in shorthand outlines to enhance reading, speaking and writing skills of shorthand writers. (Umoru, 2011). Aural skill involves the ability to discriminate against important and irrelevant sounds. This can be achieved through the use of dictated records and by making use of other voices in giving dictations. Inviting others to dictate to one or recording certain dictation can also do this. The office style dictation may also be applied to develop this skill.

### ***3.3 Improving Communication Skills through Shorthand Writing Skills***

Shorthand writing is as valuable a communication skill in enhancing efficiency and effectiveness as it was in earlier times – a ready tool in the hand of the professional secretary (Fasae & Aina, 2007). They established that language is a principal means of communication used by human beings and, primarily, a vocal means of exchanging ideas which is unique to only human beings within a speech community. These sounds have their respective symbols and representation in shorthand writing, the essence of which is to equip its learner with fast writing skills. The authors emphasized that attainment of good speed in shorthand writing depends upon a thorough knowledge of shorthand principles, which are, of course, dependent on adequate mastery of the rules of grammar.

The relevance of shorthand as a communication skill lies in its ability to provide an efficient and effective method of capturing and conveying information. Oguntimehin and Oludele (2017) on the relevance of shorthand writing as a communication skill, highlighted that the role of shorthand writing in the context of a secretarial office professional encompasses producing error-free mailable documents and effective communication. However, in view of recent developments in technologies, its relevance as a communication skill has been undermined as some have ignorantly thought that shorthand is no longer relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century organisations and even campaigned



for its removal from the curriculum. Researchers such as Clark (1997), Oludele (2008), Sholagbade (2012), opined that technologies have changed the nature of office works and the office today is being largely automated with modern technologies, hence daily use of Shorthand and Typewriting skills has been greatly reduced in the public sector because more managers are getting involved in word processing, resulting from office automation. It was further emphasized that these innovations in Information and Communication Technology, which revolutionized the operations of the office, coupled with general opinion that Shorthand is problematic for students and so excessive labour on it is unnecessary in the information age, influenced change in curriculum for the training of secretaries.

However, Adebusi (2001) in Oguntimehin and Oludele (2017) studied the relevance of shorthand and typewriting in the curriculum for higher education and agreed that the use of shorthand skills cuts across a wide range of professionals and formal training on shorthand will enhance better productivity. Also, Agboola, Ademiluyi and Ademiluyi (2014), while assessing the continued relevance of the secretarial profession in the age of office technology, viewed effective secretarial practitioner as being still needed in the office for taking telephone messages, taking dictations, recording minutes of meetings and receiving information in different formats and concluded that shorthand would still be relevant in office management.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In view of the content of this paper, it can be concluded that secretarial office professionals do occupy an important position in the achievement of the organizational goals and objectives. Her vantage position as information custodian in the organization cannot be undermined since she is at the central position of relating with both superior and subordinates as well as those within and outside the organization. It is also concluded that good knowledge of shorthand will enhance secretarial office professionals' effective delivery of their job performance.

#### **5. Recommendations**

In view of the importance and relevance of the office professional and the need to get work done with dispatch in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace, it is recommended that shorthand reading and writing should still be an important part of the skills to be acquired by the office professional, not minding its own peculiarity of being feared by students.

## References

- Adako, L. B. (2007). Communication as the vehicle of thought in classroom teaching. *Journal of Research in Vocational and Technical Education*. 3(2), 1 – 7.
- Adebusi, A. M. (2001). The Relevance of Shorthand and Typewriting in Curriculum for Higher Education. *Business Education Journal III(4)*. 28-38.
- Adombilla, B. B.; Diana, A. A. & Roger, A. (2018). Motivation and shorthand performance: Case study of Bolgatanga Polytechnic, Ghana. *New Media and Mass Communication*. 76, 7 – 11.
- Agboola, J. O.; Ademiluyi, L. F. & Ademiluyi, A. B. (2014). An assessment of the continued relevance of the secretarial profession in the age of office technology. *Nigerian Journal of Business Education I(3)*. 159-168.
- Afolabi, L. (2004). The language question in secretarial administration. *Secretarial Forum*. Ede. 1(1).
- Ahmad, N., Ahmad, M. A., Zulfakar, M. H., Aliyashak, N. I., Isham, J. N., & Iazhar, N. A. (2022). How effective communication improves employees' attitude and organizational performance. *International Journal of Accounting, Finance and Business (IJAFB)*, 7(42), 127 – 134.
- Agustini, F.; Amanah, D. & Harahap, D. A. (2022). Employee attitude towards communication effectiveness at state-owned enterprises in Indonesia. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews*, 2022, 13(02), 389–400 .
- Ayeni, B. (2021). Language choices and its effect in a culturally diversified Nigeria business places: Adopting Gile's communication accommodation theory. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*. 1(1), 80 – 87.
- Babatunde, A. Y. (1997). *An overview of language and linguistics*. Studies in Language and Linguistics: An Introductory Text. Lagos. Montem Paperbacks.
- Clark, C. (1997). *What it means to be a Secretarial as Perceived by first-year Information Specialist Students*. *The Changing Workforce, the Changing Curriculum*. Unpublished Project Report submitted to the Faculty of Education, University of Lethbridge, Alberta.
- Denomme, D. & Gray, L. (2023). Penmanship: Definiion, Types and Strategies. Study.com
- Ekhatior, I. E. (2020). Literature as a vehicle for the teaching of English language. *Journal of International Association of Language Educators (JIALE)*. 1, 109 – 118.
- Fasae, F. B. K. (2000): The relevance of shorthand writing as an effective communication skill. *Journal of the Nigerian Vocational and Technical Education*. Ondo/Ekiti States Branch. 4 (1 & 2). 37 – 44.

- Fasae, F. B. K. & Aina, M. A. (2007). The secretary and language skills. *Industrial Technical Review*. 6, 25 – 32.
- Fasae, F. B. K. (2023b). Ethical Standards and Effective Communication for Fostering Sustainable Organizational Development. *Humanities, Arts, Education & the Social Sciences Journal*. 11(4), 75 – 86. [www.usteams.net/humanitiesjournal](http://www.usteams.net/humanitiesjournal). [dx.doi.org/10.22624/AIMS/HUMANITIES/V11NP6](https://doi.org/10.22624/AIMS/HUMANITIES/V11NP6)
- Gartside, L. (1983) *Modern Business Correspondence*. Macdonald and Evans Limited.
- Harahap, D. A.; & Amanah, D. (2018). *Pengantar Manajemen*. September. Bandung: Alfabeta. DOI:[10.31227/osf.io/3ub4t](https://doi.org/10.31227/osf.io/3ub4t)
- <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>, (2024).
- Ikoyo, I. (2016). Good Teaching Methods: An antidote for effective learning and mastering of shorthand skills by Office Education students in Nigeria. *International Journal of Innovative Social & Science Education Research*. 4(3):33-37
- Silviani, I.; Organisasi, K.; Surabaya, P. T. (2020). Scopindo Media Pustaka.
- Nwaobiakara, J. & Amasike, F. (2014). Ability to operate modern information technology (M.I.T) equipment as a function of the exposure level of office technology and management students to such office technology equipment (the case of selected polytechnics in Nigeria). *National Journal of Humanities, Business And Information Technology*. 3(2),
- Nwosu, B.O (2008). The Changing Secretarial roles for Sustainable development in Nigeria. Implication for Office Education, *Journal of Business and Office Education*, 1(1), 19 – 24
- Oguntimehin, Y. A. & Oludele, L. Y. (2017). Personnel’s perception of continued relevance of shorthand and typewriting skills to office management in osun state owned tertiary institutions, Nigeria. *British Journal of Education*. 5(3), 60-68.
- Oludele, L.Y. (2008). “Integrating Information and Communication Technology in the Training of Professional Secretaries: Issues and Prospects” *Educational Periscope*. *British Journal of Education* 5(3), 60-68.
- Oriji, C. M., & Allison, D. S. (2021). Educational management and skills learning for self-Development in the 21st century workplace in Nigeria. *The Colloquium*, 109 – 114.
- Pitman, I. (1978). 700 common-word reading and dictation exercises. London. Pitman Publishing Limited.
- Sholagbade, F.A. (2012). Analysis of Academic and Professional Competencies of Professional Secretaries in Ogun State-owned Tertiary Institutions. M.Ed Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Education Foundations and Management, Faculty of Education, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State.
- Umoru, B.C (2011). *Career Development and Professional Ethics*. Agunbay Publishers