

Motivation And Shorthand Performance Case Study of Bolgatanga Polytechnic

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Abstract

Shorthand has been 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. This study sought to examine the influence of motivation on shorthand performance. It solely sought to appraise the interest of shorthand students in the subject and how that affects student's performance and also determine the adequacy of tuition and timeframe for the practice of shorthand. Relevant literature was reviewed and a research methodology developed. The system sampling technique was used in the study and the main research instrument was the questionnaires which was developed and administered to respondents. The study discovered that, the content of shorthand, both theoretical and practical dimensions were comprehensively administered and the time frame for teaching and learning was adequate. The study also unearthed various limiting factors such as reduction of credit hours, inability to write shorthand outlines and inappropriate placement vowels and identification of outline for transcription that affect students' performance

1.0 Background

Most students who enrol in Secretarial Studies at either certificate or diploma levels do not get certificates at the end of their training because they fail in Shorthand, a key subject in the training of secretaries. Eddy (2002) stated that the performance in national examinations today continues to be poor because the intrinsic desire to excel is lacking in many learners. A student's attitude towards a subject greatly influences performance. It affects the individual's organised manner of thinking, feeling and reaction to a study subject. Also Hamchek (1971) observes that an individual's attitude towards a subject will influence their self-concept of academic ability. Therefore, while Shorthand remains the bed-rock upon which the secretary career is established by imparting on learners initiative, innovation and organisational skill, the failure rate is so high that there is the need to explore ways to reverse the trend.

A cross-sectional survey of the targeted population of this study shows that the scale of poor performance in Shorthand is about 90%. With most trainees looking forward to a secretarial career, this state poses a great concern to all stakeholders because of its manpower implications. Poor performance in Shorthand is an indicator that, the commitment to attaining the career goal might either be lacking or has been dimmed by either internal or external influences. Attitude, whether intrinsically or extrinsically motivated plays a major role in influencing performance at any stage. The students' self-concept of academic ability is not only influence by the learners' self-concept profiles but also by those of the significant others especially the subject teachers and fellow students. So long as the curriculum continues to emphasise the teaching of Shorthand for prospective Secretaries, it is imperative to ensure that the products of the process are well qualified to pursue their career path. This is the academic lacuna that this study hopes to fill. This study therefore attempts to examine the influence of motivation on shorthand performance. Specifically, the study sought to appraise the interest of shorthand students in the subject and find out how these affect its performance and to establish the adequacy of tuition and timeframe for the practice of shorthand.

2.0 Theoretical Analysis of Shorthand

Beryl Pratt in her book "What is Pitman's Shorthand?" writing on the performance of pitman shorthand in the United Kingdom states that dictation cannot teach any shorthand theory, outline or phrase. According to her, for one to do well in Shorthand, they must learn and concentrate on basic phrases. One must also increase reading practice from printed shorthand instruction books to consolidate knowledge of outlines. Berly advises those learning Shorthand to endeavour to write as fast as a person can speak as this will assist in improving the transcription speed. Henry in his book, "A Manual of Current Shorthand, Orthographic and Phonetic", says that, learners have to improve English and spelling while learning Shorthand. He advises learners to sharpen their powers of concentration and alertness which are both essential attributes for shorthand writing. He also advises learners to occasionally practice speed of 20wpm faster than the examination for excellent results. Over the years, Chief Examiners for Shorthand at Bolgatanga Polytechnic have raised various issues concerning the performance of students in shorthand examinations. In their reports, the Chief Examiners have indicated that a lot needs to be done in the Polytechnic to help candidates do well in their shorthand examinations.

According to the 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 Chief Examiner's reports, most candidates' scripts

displayed lack of mastery of the subject. This shows that the candidates were not well prepared for the examination. In the same report, the Chief Examiners also noted that some candidates had not achieved the speed for the examination they had registered for in their various semester courses. The Chief Examiners indicate that such candidates sat for the examinations when they were not ready and consequently failed, as compared to other subjects taken in these semesters. The Chief Examiners reports also identify incomplete transcription as contributing to poor performance in these examinations. Wrong transcriptions and wrong outlines are also a common feature in the candidates' work presented for marking. This according to the Chief Examiners indicates lack of enough reading and practise. It also shows that the candidates have not mastered the Shorthand theory well enough to sit for the examination.

Anyone willing to learn Shorthand must have some specific skills also known as the entry behaviour. Entry behaviours are necessary specific skills that students must have prior to beginning an instruction. It is not a list of things that students can do, but the specific skills that they must have in order to begin a certain course. Different levels have different entry requirements. The entry behaviour of learners affects the speed with which a teacher can introduce new material, the amount of reading of primary sources you can expect and the level of critical analysis you can demand. In practical courses, students need certain forms of literacy to enable them succeed. One of them is tool literacy, or the ability to understand and use the practical and conceptual tools relevant to education and the areas of work and professional life that the individual expects to inhabit. One of the entry behaviour expected of a shorthand student is mastery in the English Language which is also displayed in the candidates' scripts during marking. The Chief Examiners indicate that 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 students in the relevant areas and a sound theoretical background provides a modern industry oriented education. It aims at producing trained professionals who can successfully meet the demands of the various industries. A more practical and applied way of teaching can improve the relevance of work. Practical skills are an essential part of competence in some disciplines. As Well as developing these practical skills, good laboratory and practical work also help students develop expertise in critical enquiry, problem solving, experimental design, data analysis and presentation, and a long list of important academic and professional abilities. Emphasis in teaching practical subjects should be on students' active involvement in doing the practices. Practical process skills such as careful observation, interpreting, predicting events, designing experimenting, organizing information and reporting and generalization will be acquired. Good quality work promotes the engagement and interest of the learner as well as developing a range of skills and conceptual understanding.

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Emphasis in teaching practical subjects should be based on students' active involvement in doing the practical's. Practical process skills such as careful observation, interpreting, predicting events, designing experiment, organizing information and reporting and generalization will be acquired. Good quality work promotes the engagement and interest of the learner as well as developing a range of skills and conceptual understanding for shorthand students to perfect their speed and accuracy in transcription, they need enough exposure in practical lessons. The teachers also need to ensure that the candidates are well grounded in the theory aspects of the subject so that they can easily write shorthand outlines during dictation. Candidates are therefore required to increase reading practice from printed shorthand books and also practice in transcription to be able to pass their examinations.

3.0 Methodology

The survey method which falls under descriptive design is used in this study. This method provides statistics on various issues (Ngechu 2006). Survey research seeks to obtain information that describes existing phenomena by asking individuals about their perceptions, attitudes, behaviour or values (Mugenda and Muganda, 2003). This is the most appropriate way of collecting data on survey on factors influencing the poor performance of shorthand in Bolgatanga Polytechnic.

The population for this study consisted of Secretarial students in the department of Secretary ship and Management Studies The systematic random sampling was used and research instrument was questionnaire. The questionnaire sought information on the bio data and self-concept and shorthand performance. The data gathered were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Quantitative data which was mainly from close

ended items are coded and keyed into the computer using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 20 to calculate frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data mainly came from the open ended item. The items are coded, keyed into the computer and analyse using the SPSS.

4.0 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study sought to find out whether the time students are allowed to practice and tuition is adequate before examinations

4.1 Level of Shorthand Currently being studied by Students

The results show that, 67.8% of the respondents were in level one of shorthand while 22% said that they were in level three. Only 10.2% were in level two of Shorthand

4.2 Number of theory and practical lessons per week

The respondents were asked to indicate the number of theory and practical lessons they have per week. The responses are presented in Table 1. It indicates that, most students attending theory lessons also attend practical lessons. The theory aspect was taught more in the first year (44%) while there were more practical lessons in the second and third level (57.6% and 18.7% respectively).

Table 1: Theory and practical lesson

Lessons Per Week	Theory Lessons		Practical Lessons	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1	26	44	14	23.8
2	25	42.3	34	57.6
3	8	13.6	11	18.7
Total	59	100.0	59	100.0

Source: Field data, 2018

The reason behind this analysis is that, more lessons are taught to explain the principles behind the signs and symbols in shorthand. Once the students get acclimatized with the basic principles of the subject, more practical lessons are then taught to enhance their speed and accuracy in writing the shorthand outlines.

4.3 The time frame for practical lessons

The respondents were asked if they get enough time for practice as indicated in Table 2. It shows that, 76.3% of the respondents had enough time for practice during practical lessons while the minority, 23.7% did not have enough time for practice. This indicates that, time for practice is not a big challenge to most of the Shorthand students.

Table 2: Time frame for practical lessons

Enough	Frequency	Percent
Yes	45	76.3
No	14	23.7
Total	59	100.0

Source: Field data, 2018

4.4 Time provided for the teaching of shorthand.

The respondents were asked if their teacher had enough time to teach them shorthand. The responses are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Time for the teaching of shorthand

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	46	78.0
No	13	22.0
Total	59	100.0

Source: Field data, 2018

The table 3 shows that, 78.0% of the respondents reported that their teachers had enough time to teach shorthand while 22.0% reported that their teachers did not have enough time to teach. This suggests that enough time is provided to teach shorthand. This goes to confirm the analysis made in table 2.

4.5 Factors that affect performance in shorthand

The respondents were asked of the factors performance in shorthand. The responses are presented in Table 4. The results shows that 39% of the respondents said that, long passages their performance while 61 % thought long passages did not affect their performance.

Table 4: Factors that affect performance in shorthand

Factors	Yes		No		Total responses (%)
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	
Long passages	23	39	36	61	100
Inadequate practice time	21	35.6	38	64.4	100
Reduction of credit hours from 3 to 2	41	69.5	18	30.5	100
Ability to spell words correctly	22	38	36	62	100
Inability to write shorthand outlines	42	71.2	17	28.8	100
Placement and identification of shorthand outlines	39	66.1	20	33.9	100
Relevance of shorthand to the secretarial career	13	22	46	78	100

Source: Field data, 2018

On the question of inadequacy of practice time, 35.6% viewed the time to be inadequate while 64.4% saw the time to be adequate. The question of credit hour reduction saw 69.5% for yes while 30.5% for no. Ability to spell words correctly saw 38% for yes while 62% for no. Inability to write shorthand outlines saw 71.2% for yes while 28.8% for no. Further, when asked of placement and identification of outlines, 66.1% opined that, it affects their performance while 33.9% did not think so. Finally, 22% thought the relevance of shorthand to the secretarial career affects their performance while 78% did not see its relevance as affecting their performance. This analysis shows that, long passages, inadequate practice time, ability to spell words correctly and relevance of shorthand in secretarial career do not affect students' performance in shorthand (61%, 64.4%, 62%, 78% respectively). However, reduction of credit hours, inability to write shorthand outlines and inappropriate placement and identification of shorthand outlines greatly affects students' performance (69.5%, 71.2% and 66.1% respectively)

5.0 FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found out that, theory and practical lessons were fully utilized by students of shorthand except in the first year where theoretical lessons are given more attention to introduce basic principles. The students are also given enough time to practice the subject (76.3%). Generally, the time allocated for the teaching of the subject, both theoretical and practical, was adequate. Diversity of factors influence or affect the students' performance in shorthand. Prominent among them included reduction of credit hours, inability to write shorthand outlines and inappropriate placement and identification of shorthand outlines.

The study concluded that, a shorthand study is not inhibited by time limitation. Students are given enough exposure on the subject in terms of theory to place them on a pedestal to be able to perform well. Critical factors for the performance of shorthand are given more credits hours, ability to write shorthand outlines and ability to place and identify shorthand outlines.

The study recommends among others, that, the Bolgatanga Polytechnic should do well to make available teaching and learning materials for use by both teachers and students. The institution should equally make their materials available in the library. The school should solicit support from philanthropists, NGOs and other stakeholders for the provision of these teaching and learning materials. Shorthand teachers should endeavour to thoroughly teach the correct placement of vowels for proper positioning of outlines. Students should also be taught on the techniques for identification of outlines for transcription. The teaching of the subject in general should be made interesting which engenders higher motivation for students to learn the subject on their own.

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