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BETTER ENHANCEMENT OF ORACY SKILLS AMONG STUDENTS THROUGH COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH: A POSSIBLE BREAK FROM THE PRESENT

By

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Abstract: Several research reports indicate low communicative competence level among senior secondary schools students in Nigeria. This study investigates methods of oracy skills teaching in senior secondary schools of Dutse metropolitan area of Jigawa State of Nigeria. The introduction examines the importance of competence in oracy skills in natural language and problems of English language teaching and learning process in Nigeria. Probability method of sampling has been used to select the sample schools for the study and participant observation has been used to collect data for the study. The data has been analysed by the use of percentages and it has been found out that all the schools in the study area employ audio-lingual method underpinned in structural theory in the teaching of oracy skills. The study concludes that the sole use of audio-lingual method in the teaching of oracy skills in the study area does not enhance and encourage natural communicative potentials of the learners. The study therefore recommends adoption of communicative-based methods and approach in the teaching of oracy skills in the senior secondary schools of Jigawa State of Nigeria.

Key words: oracy skills, communicative competence, audio-lingual method, structural theory, natural language

Introduction

According to Richards and Rodgers (2001:1), "Language teaching came into its own as a profession in the twentieth century". Historically, language teaching process in Nigeria and the world over had seen the rise and fall of several language teaching methods; among these include the Grammar-Translation Method, the Situational Language Method, and the Cognitive-Code Method. These language teaching methods borrow heavily from the underpinning that language is a system of communication anchored on language system or rules, instead of viewing language as a social phenomenon in which meaning is socially negotiated depending on practical usage in everyday situations. English language teaching methods based on the view of language as a system has contributed immensely to the weak communicative abilities and potentials among learners of English as a second language in Nigeria on which linguists, educationists, governments and parents have been complaining about (Shuaib, 2015).

Oracy skills (Listening and speaking) are the most fundamental language skills among the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Speakers of languages that have not yet been reduced to writing do not have to exhibit any knowledge of literacy skills (reading and writing) in those languages; on the contrary, all natural languages are spoken. Generally, language learning depends on effective oracy skills because listening provides the aural input that serves as the basis of language learning and enables learners to interact in spoken communication. It has been estimated that adults spend almost half of their communication time listening, and students may receive as much as 90% of their in-school information and to each other through oracy skills (NCLRC.org).

Background to the Study

This research work has been designed to investigate the teaching methods employed by teachers in the teaching of oracy skills (listening and speaking) in Dutse metropolitan senior secondary schools in Jigawa State of Nigeria. This is done with a view to

determining the extent to which the methods are appropriate towards equipping the learners with the intended competence in English oracy skills.

Interest for the study has been developed out of the following:

1. The critical role oracy skills play in all natural languages
2. The appropriateness or otherwise of the methods in the study area in fulfilling the communicative role of English language teaching in the Nigerian environment

Statement of the problem

The fundamental and critical nature of oracy skills in English as a second language in Nigeria notwithstanding, their teaching and learning process is generally below the expected level. According to Olaofe (2001), "Of all the woes befalling the Nigeria's education system, the language of education is perhaps the hardest hit".

Historically, there have been reports on the decline of the teaching of English language in Nigerian schools. Such reports include Shaplins Report (1969), Sofenwa (1975), Omojuwa (1991), Northern Education Research Project (2000) and Babatunde and Adeyanju (2002).

Furthermore, the various WAEC and NECO Annual Chief Examiners' Reports have reported deep concerns over the declining rate of students' performance in the respective examinations, especially with regard to spoken English.

The teaching and learning process of English language in Nigeria has been problematic. According to Omojuwa (1991), 46% of final year NCE students could not pass the FGC Common Entrance Examination meant for primary six pupils. According to Northern Education Research Project (2000), out of 207,081 teachers in primary schools in Northern Nigeria, only 5,630 or 24.9% are qualified. Furthermore, Falayajo et al (1997) finds that 60% of children in primary schools across Nigeria cannot perform the simple task of look and copy a single word or sentence. The Nation newspaper of July the 10th 2015 reports that 61.32% of candidates who wrote the 2015 WAEC examination have failed to score a credit level in English and Mathematics.

The foregoing research reports and statistics are compelling enough to make Nigeria transform its education system with particular emphasis on the teaching and learning of oracy skills.

Research Questions

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, the following research questions have been formulated to guide the study:

1. Which language teaching methods and approaches are employed by teachers in the teaching of oracy skills in Dutse metropolitan senior secondary schools?
2. How appropriate are the methods and approaches in developing the intended oracy skills among the students in Dutse metropolitan senior secondary schools?

Basic Assumption

This study has been based on the assumption that senior secondary schools teachers in Dutse metropolitan area employ communicative methods in the teaching of English oracy skills.

Delimitation and Scope of the Study

This study has been situated within the confines of applied English linguistics and it is limited to senior secondary schools in Dutse metropolitan area of Jigawa State of Nigeria.

Significance of the Study

Findings of this study are expected to be very useful to the following:

1. Departments of English in the various colleges of education in Nigeria in their role as those who train English language teachers
2. English language textbook writers because they play critical role in the learning of English language as a communicative tool
3. Literature on applied English linguistics useful to researchers
4. Students and teachers especially those in the area of learning and teaching of English as a second language

Conceptualization

The concept of 'oracy skills' needs to be fully explained in the context of this study.

Oracy Skills

Oracy skills (Wilkinson, 1970:70) refer to the skills of listening and speaking, the other skills being literacy skills (reading and writing).

Oracy skills teaching had suffered a lot in that they were not given their deserved status in language teaching. The traditional grammarians considered spoken language as inferior to written language; hence the teaching of oracy skills wasn't given any serious consideration. To these grammarians, written language is 'more correct' than its spoken form.

The Reform Movement made up of an amalgam of reform-minded teachers and linguists by the end of the 19th Century marked the beginning of new approaches to language teaching (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). It was only then that spoken language came to be recognized as more primary than the hitherto written words as the primary form of language. In Europe, increased opportunity for communication among Europeans created huge demand for oral proficiency in foreign languages. The formation of EU gave rise to adult "guest workers" in different European countries who need to communicate with their "hosts". Functional-Notional approach of second language teaching represents the earliest form of "Communicative Approach" of second language teaching.

In the United States, Audio-lingual Method or the "Aural-Oral" Method represented the earliest attempt to give oracy skills teaching a priority. Audio-lingual Method was underpinned on the important tenet of structuralism that the primary medium of language is oral, or that speech is language. According to Brook (1964) cited in Richards and Rodgers (2001:55), "Language is primarily what is spoken and secondarily what was written". This marks the point where "oracy skills" assumed priority in language teaching in the United States.

The advent of communicative approach in the early 1970s marked even more recognition of oracy skills in language teaching in both the United States and Britain. Communicative language teaching is an approach that aims to make “communicative competence” the goal of language teaching. According to Littlewood (1981:1), “One of the most characteristic features of communicative language teaching is that it pays attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language”. Oracy skills are given top priorities in fulfilling the goals of communicative language teaching. According to Paulston (1992:55ff), communicative interactive activities such as social formulas in the forms of greetings, introduction, apology, compliments, etc and dialogue in the form of role play, depend heavily on oracy skills.

Theoretical Framework: Communicative Language Theory

According to Brumfit (1986: vii)

The shift away from the view of language as a static observable system to be learnt to the view that it is fluid, negotiable system to be performed is fundamental to recent developments from a wide variety of sources.

The term “communicative competence” was coined by the American sociolinguist Dell Hymes (Shuaib 2011:62). Communicative competence refers to the ability of the speaker or writer to express himself as a social person, rather than just a cognitive person. Communicative competence is therefore much beyond the speaker’s mastery of linguistic forms, popularly referred to as linguistic competence. According to communicative competence theory, communicative abilities go beyond the speaker’s mastery of the linguistic forms, as human language is used in various socio-cultural and sociolinguistic contexts; it is used in communication to adequately fulfill these underpinnings.

Components of Communicative Competence

Canale and Swain, Canadian linguists, are perhaps two of the most famous with regard to lending support to Hymes’s views on language. Canale and Swain (1980) could be claimed to be the most influential analysis of communicative competence in which four dimensions of communicative competence are identified.

1. Grammatical competence: This kind of competence corresponds to Chomsky’s linguistic competence and Hymes’s concept of “formally possible”. It includes knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology and syntax, (Canale and Swain, 1980:29).
2. Socio linguistic competence: This involves knowledge of the socio-cultural rules of language and of discourse i.e. understanding of the social context in which communication takes place.
3. Discourse competence: This is the ability to connect sentences in stretches of discourse and form meaningful whole out of series of utterances.
4. Strategic competence: This aspect of communicative competence is mainly coping strategies that communicators employ to initiate, terminate, maintain, repair and redirect communication.

Several other linguists of communicative competence circle modified Canale and Swain’s (1980) model to come up with their own.

METHODOLOGY

This study has been designed to investigate methods employed by teachers in the teaching of oracy skills in senior secondary schools of Dutse metropolitan area of Jigawa State of Nigeria. This is with a view to seeing how the methods fulfill the learners' communicative needs in using English as a second language.

Sampling Technique

Probability method of sampling has been used to select the sample schools for the study.

Source of Data for the Study

Primary data collected from participant observation form the data for the study.

Data Collection Procedure

(a) Preamble: Written permission for the researcher to be allowed into the classrooms for him to conduct participant observation in the sample schools was sought.

(b) After having been permitted to conduct participant observation during oracy skills teaching in the sample schools, the researcher introduced himself to the English teachers to inform them about his mission and sought for their cooperation.

(c) Teaching time-table of each sample school was collected by the researcher with a view to finding when 'oral English' is taught.

(d) Each of the sample schools was visited and the researcher employed participant observation during 'oral English' teaching to collect the primary data for the study.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents the data for the study.

Table 1 Resource Materials used in the Teaching of Oracy Skills in Dutse Metropolitan Senior Secondary Schools

GDSS Gadadin	textbook
GDSS Galamawa	flashcards
DCSS Dutse	textbook
DMIS Dutse	Recorded audio material
GSSC Dutse	textbook
GGASS Dutse	textbook
SAIS Dutse	Recorded audio material
GGDSS Dutse	flashcards

Table 1 presents the resource materials found to be used in the teaching of oracy skills in Dutse metropolitan senior secondary schools. Four out of the eight sample schools or 50% of the sample schools use textbooks as resource material in the teaching of oracy skills. Two schools or 25% of the sample schools have been found to be using flashcards as resource material in the

teaching of oracy skills. For the use of recorded audio materials in the teaching of oracy skills, two schools representing 25% of the sample schools have been found.

Table 2 Teacher Talking Time (TTT) and Students' Talking Time (STT) During Oracy Skills Teaching in Dutse Metropolitan Senior Secondary Schools

School	TTT	STT
GDSS Gadadin Dutse	70%	30%
GDSS Galamawa Dutse	65%	35%
DCSS Dutse	65%	35%
DMIS Dutse	45%	55%
GSSCD Dutse	60%	40%
GGASS Dutse	45%	55%
SAIS Dutse	50%	50%
GGDSS Dutse	60%	40%

Table 2 presents the Teacher Talking Time or TTT and Students' Talking Time or STT during oracy skills teaching in Dutse metropolitan senior secondary schools. In GDSS Gadadin, the TTT is 70% or 56 minutes and the STT is 30% or 24 minutes. In GDSS Galamawa, the teacher takes 65% of the time, which represents 52 minutes and the students used the remaining 35 minutes which represents 28 minutes. The same ratio is what obtains in DCSS Dutse. In DMIS, the teacher uses 45% of the time or 36 minutes and the students use 55% of the time or 44 minutes. In GSSC Dutse, the teacher uses 60% of the time or 48 minutes and the students use 40% of the time or 32 minutes. The teacher of GGASS Dutse uses 45% of the time or 36 minutes while the students use 55% of the time or 44 minutes. The TTT and the STT in SAIS Dutse is equally shared, i.e. 50-50%; both the teacher and the students have 50% of the time or 40 minutes each. In the case of GGDSS Dutse, the teacher uses 60% of the time or 48 minutes and the students use the remaining 40% of the time or 32 minutes.

Table 3 Students Activities-Types Employed During Oracy Skills Teaching in Dutse Metropolitan Senior Secondary Schools

GDSS Gadadin	Oral drills
GDSS Galamawa	Visual phoneme recognition
DCSS Dutse	Oral reading
DMIS Dutse	Writing answers
GSSCD Dutse	Oral drills
GGASS Dutse	Oral reading
SAIS Dutse	Writing answers
GGDSS Dutse	Oral drills

Table 3 presents the types of students' activities employed during oracy skills teaching in Dutse metropolitan senior secondary schools of Jigawa State of Nigeria. Three schools, GDSS Gadadin, GSSC Dutse and GGDSS Dutse the total of represents 37.5% of the sample schools, employ oral drills as the activity in the learning of oracy skills. Phoneme recognition activity has been employed by only one school GDSS Galamawa, which represents 12.5%. Reading aloud as an activity in the learning of oracy skills has been found to be employed two schools, DCSS Dutse and GGASS Dutse representing 25% of the sample schools. The

activity of writing answers to teacher's questions has been found to be employed by two schools, SAIS Dutse and DMIS Dutse which represents 25% of the sample schools.

Table 4 Methods employed in the Teaching of Oracy Skills in Dutse Metropolitan Senior Secondary Schools

GDSS Gadadin	Audio-lingual Method
GDSS Galamawa	Audio-lingual method
DCSS Dutse	Audio-lingual method
DMIS Dutse	Audio-lingual method
GSSC Dutse	Audio-lingual method
GGASS Dutse	Audio-lingual method
SAIS Dutse	Audio-lingual method
GGDSS Dutse	Audio-lingual method

The table presents the methods found to be employed in the teaching of oracy skills in Dutse metropolitan senior secondary schools. The table indicates that all the eight sample schools, representing 100% of the schools, have been found to be employing audio-lingual method in the teaching and learning of oracy skills.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

After having collected, presented and analysed the data for the study, it has been found that the method of teaching oracy skills in the senior secondary schools of metropolitan area of Dutse in Jigawa State of Nigeria is solely audio-lingual method. The resource materials used, the dominant teacher control especially in terms of teacher talking time during lesson and the students' activities are all geared towards 'error-free' or 'accuracy-centred' spoken English and not 'fluency-centred' spoken English.

Enhancing Effective Oracy Skills through Communicative Approach

Oracy skills teaching as found in Dutse metropolitan schools is characterized by heavy teachers' control with regard to what should be done in terms of listening and speaking in the classroom. The teacher and the teaching materials are the "models" which the students aim to imitate in classroom situation. Repetitive drills aimed at "error eradication" are a very common language exercise. Such communicatively unfriendly methods draw heavily from structural approach of audio-lingualism.

The above approach in the teaching of oracy skills in Dutse metropolitan secondary schools is far from effective towards enhancing in the learners the required communicative proficiency level. In the first place the learners are required to exhibit their competence in a psychologically insecure linguistic environment in which fear of mistakes and inaccuracies posed great threat. At such times the affective filter is said to be "up". The heavy leaning on the need for accuracy from the learners could significantly inhibit effective learning. Students are just required to engage in an exercise of the "teacher's language". In other words the materials which the teacher has brought to the class for practice and exercises may not concern them. This has violated an important language learning requirement: the learners of a language have to need the language before they will effectively learn it; such language could be useful now or in the future.

The communicative approach on the other hand lays emphasis on "authentic language", or language used in real communication. This can be any language which the learners use in their day-to-day communication, e.g. language used in teasing their mates, etc. Furthermore, varieties of the same linguistic forms are presented and practiced according to contexts. An example of this is asking for information from a close friend and asking for information from an unknown adult person. Additionally, in

communicative approach the teacher's role is not that of a "model" whose mode of speech must be imitated. On the contrary, the teacher's role is just an "adviser". All these mean that students are free to express themselves to negotiate meaning in communicative classroom.

Using the Input Hypothesis as the First Communicative Step

According to this hypothesis, understanding spoken and written language is seen as the only mechanism that results in the increase of understanding linguistic competence. Krashen hypothesis has been quite influential in language education, particularly in the United States.

The Listening Input

Before any meaningful oral or spoken communication could be hoped to be enhanced among second language learners, the listening abilities will have to be developed first. Authentic language should be used to develop the listening abilities in line with the general goals of teaching listening skills as specified by (nclrc.org) to include:

1. Production of students who can use listening strategies to maximize their comprehension of aural input
2. Production of students who are able to understand relevant and irrelevant information
3. Production of students who are able to tolerate less than word-by-word comprehension.

Appropriate listening strategies should be employed towards achieving the above objectives. It is hereby suggested that the "top-down" listening strategies be employed, because such strategies are listener-based. Listening for the main idea, predicting, drawing inferences and summarizing are listening strategies under the "top-down" listening approach.

Having identified the appropriate listening strategy to be employed, "authentic topics" in which "authentic language" is used should be considered for use. Each of the following could serve as authentic topic vis-à-vis the students' backgrounds:

1. asking for information from a friend
2. a football match between school A and school B
3. price negotiation in Dutse Central Market
4. apologizing for something done wrong to somebody
5. borrowing books from school library
6. process of millet cultivation in Dutse
7. an occasion of wedding in Jigawa State

In each of the above, the following communicative activities could be done:

- A. teacher talk: the teacher can talk freely to the class on the topic while the students listen attentively
- B. recorded talks on the topic (audio and video)

Now that the learners have had enough listening input on any of the communicative event they are learning to practice, it is time for them to be focused on the second important aspect of oracy skills: the spoken ability.

The spoken ability skills are the second aspect of the general oracy skills (the first aspect having been the listening skills).

Two interwoven factors are however a great stumbling block with regard to effective spoken skills among learners of a second language; they are problems of lack of confidence and "speaking apprehension" (Weigle 2002 cited in shuaib 2011:25).

Therefore to ensure the intended good spoken communicative English among the learners, these stumbling blocks will have to be removed.

The Speaking Input

Speaking input is a strategy aimed at ensuring a more successful spoken language among learners of a second language. Three main strategies for effective development of speaking skills given by (nclrc.org) could be employed towards producing communicatively competent learners of English as a second language.

Using Minimal Response

Sometimes, language learners that lack confidence in their ability to participate successfully in oral interaction become passive while others do the talking. In such a case, they can be helped to build a stock of minimal responses that they can use in different types of spoken exchanges. Minimal responses are predictable and often idiomatic phrases that conversation participants use to indicate understanding, agreement, doubt, etc.; example in negotiating of a price in the market, “how much do you” “Do you sell....?” “That’s ok”, “could you reduce...?” etc, are good examples of minimal responses.

Having a stock of such responses enable the learners to focus on what the other participant is saying, without having to simultaneously plan a response.

Recognising Scripts

Scripts are predictable set of spoken exchanges. They can be employed as speech input to help learners develop speaking abilities by making them aware of the scripts for different situations so that they can predict what they would hear and what they will need to say in response. Example in a communicative situation involving apology, expressions such as “you are welcome”, “that’s alright”, etc could serve as good scripts.

Using Language to Talk about Language

One inhibitive factor against spoken ability of learners of a second language is the fact that they are often too embarrassed or shy to say anything when they do not understand another speaker or when they realized a conversation partner has not understood them. Teachers can help learners overcome this problem in two ways. The first way is by assuring learners that misunderstanding and the need for clarification can occur in any type of interaction, no matter the participant’s linguistic skills level. Secondly, learners could be given strategies in the form of sentences and phrases to use for clarification and comprehension checks. Examples of such sentences and phrases could be “is that ok?” “Are you with me?” “Right?” “Got it?” “Can I continue?” “Do you understand?” etc.

Having received the required communicative inputs (in terms of listening and speaking) learners are now engaged in communicative activities in the form of simulations and role plays in pairs, groups and addressing the entire class, choosing topics from those generated by them during the listening input stage.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has investigated the teaching and learning of oracy skills (listening and speaking skills) in the senior secondary schools in Dutse metropolitan area of Jigawa State of Nigeria. Eight senior secondary schools have been sampled for the study. Participant observation has been employed as the method of data collection of the study. After having collected, presented and analysed the data of the study, it has been found that all the sample schools employ audio-lingual method in the teaching of oracy skills.

The study concludes that the strict teacher control predicated on 'accuracy' and 'error-free' learning of oracy skills in the study area does not enhance and encourage natural communicative potentials and capacity of the learners, because there are a lot of what should form the basis of oracy skills use among the learners that has not been captured by the teachers' strict control and emphasis on accuracy.

This study recommends a break or shift from the current practice in oracy skills teaching and learning in the study area. There should be a change from the current audio-lingual method and structural approach in the teaching of oracy skills to a more fluency-based and communicative approach in which the learners would have the opportunities to employ oracy skills in more communicative situations in the classrooms and beyond. Communicative interactive activities such as social formulas and dialogues, community-oriented tasks, problem-solving activities and role-play which characterize communicative methods and approach should be employed in the teaching of oracy skills in the study area. These activities have the advantages of ensuring learners' dominant role in fluency-based learning of oracy skills.

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