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DEVELOPING THE SPEAKING SKILLS OF UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS USING LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH (LEA) FOR GLOBALIZATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The inability of primary school pupils to express themselves fluently, accurately, coherently and confIdently remains a thing of concern. It is with this passion that this paper attempts to evaluate issues related to the use of Language Experience Approach (LEA) and how it can be employed to develop speaking skills in upper primary school pupils in consonance with the demands of NPE which requires pupils to exhibit a reasonable level of commrmicative competence in English. The paper also discusses the signifIcance of speaking skills to the learners and reviewed how defIcient its teaching and learning have been over the past decades . Having established that effective instruction in speaking skills is not given the attention it deserves, the exposition further revealed how teachers can explore and adapt effective method in the teaching of speaking skill, one of these methods is the LEA. The LEA method is considered effective due to its basic ingredients which are the learners' experiences and expressions, communicated in a relaxed and unthreatening atmosphere. The paper concluded by highlighting some recommendations on the use of the procedures and activities of the LEA which, if adhered to would help to develop upper primary school pupils speaking skills for globalization and sustainable development.

KEYWORDS: Upper primary pupils, Language Experience Approach (LEA), Speaking skills

INTRODUCTION

The National Policy on Education (NPE) stipulates as one of its objectives, the inculcation of permanent literacy and the ability to communicate effectively in a target language which is English language (NPE, 2004). Of all the language skills, (listening, speaking, reading and writing), speaking seems the most important (Brown, 2003). Hence the need for it to be accorded the attention it deserves in its pedagogy.

The dynamism and complexity of the society makes it mandatory for an individual to possess mastery of the language skills, most importantly, the speaking skills. This is so due to the fact that whether an individual will read or write in English or not, he or she will inevitably require considerable understanding and control of speaking skills to cope with the realities of life. In like manner, an individual will need speaking skills to compete favorably with his or her counterparts across the globe (Mohanni, 2015)

As vital as this language skill is, researches and experiences have shown that speaking skill is neglected in its instruction which subsequently, results to inefficiency in the speaking skills of primary school pupils (Khurram,2015; Alhosni 2014 & Zahoor, 2011). Furthermore, it has been noted that not so much concerted effort is put into what is termed a speaking class. More often, speaking is considered as a byproduct of reading or writing (Adejide, 2000). In such situations, learners are expected to read aloud or read what they have written. In addition, what obtains in a speaking class in upper primary classes, is engaging the learners in a debate which is carried out either twice or thrice in a term.

From the foregoing, it is pertinent that effective strategy is lacking in the instruction of speaking skills in the primary school level. Thus, this paper attempts to explore a more effective strategy that is learner centered to engage the pupils so as to develop their speaking skills. More so English is learnt as a second language in Nigeria, a situation of second language learning.

Concept of Speaking Skill

Speaking, oral, speech skills are used interchangeably to mean the same thing. Speaking skills are defined by different scholars from different perspectives. According to Adejide (2000), speaking is the ability to express oneself clearly in flexible and conversational English. He further states that the features of the conversational English should be such that are nationally and internationally accepted. This definition emphasizes clear communication using grammatical or linguistic accuracy that is globally accepted.

To Anyadiegwu (2007), speaking skill refers to the ability to produce sounds correctly by way of pronunciation, stress and intonation in English. The focus of this definition lies in the realization of the distinct sounds that make up words which are the building blocks of speaking. Other notable features in this definition are the mention of stress and intonation which also contribute to efficiency in speaking.

Again Zhang (2009) asserts that speaking is the ability to communicate in a language in a most effective way. From the aforementioned definitions, speaking or speaking skill is the ability to use linguistic sources to communicate in a most effective and interesting manner. Speaking skill is also considered as the ability to manipulate language to talk naturally in a way that listeners are carried along. Hence the need for an effective strategy in the teaching of speaking skills in upper primary school classes

Significance of Speaking Skills

The power of speaking cannot be overemphasized considering the fact that world safety largely rests on the verbal competence of statesmen, diplomats, national leaders and delegates to national and international conferences (Gomwalk, 2005). Speaking skills transcend the borders of life itself as one will need the skills to carry out quite a cluster of functions beneficiary to oneself and the society at large,

Furthermore, speaking skills enable learners to communicate in day to day expressions like exchanging pleasantries, introducing one's self and expressing apology. It also helps learners to express themselves in varied contexts, for example, at interviews and occasions like speech and prize-giving events, and other related occasions. In addition, speaking skills help learners to express themselves using simple and correct structures in meaningfbl contexts within the classroom and beyond.

Besides enhancing expression in meaningfbl contexts, speaking skills enable pupils to develop confidence. Once learners are exposed to rich linguistic background, their confidence is secured, as they would not lack the linguistic elements with which to express ideas, opinions or feelings both in school and out of school. Speaking skills are therefore, significant in both academics and careers of pupils. Consequently, the need to develop this vital skill in the upper primary level using a more appropriate and effective strategy like the Language Experience Approach (LEA) cannot be over-emphasied

Teaching Speaking Skills in Primary Schools

The inability ofprimary school pupils to express themselves fluently, coherently and

accurately with confidence has raised concerns by teachers, parents, academics stakeholders and the general public. Researches and experiences have revealed that primary school pupils exhibit a dearth of ability to express themselves in a fluent and acceptable manner. This is due to a number of reasons one of which is inability to speak fluently in an acceptable manner. As a second language learning situation, learners have to struggle to attain the level of mastering the rubrics of the language. This comes with a lot of difficulties in learning first, the alphabets or sounds that constitute words and expressions and at the same time striving to associate words and expression with their meanings. Since much time and effort is vested on learning the nrbrics of the language, learning to communicate in the language fluently and in an acceptable way, becomes a problem to the child (IMalgwi, 1997).

A second reason is that of the policy statement. The NPE (2004) stipulates that, unless a child gets to upper primary school level, the medium of instruction remains his mother tongue or language of the immediate environment. Consequently, the child finds it difficult to immediately switch from communication in the mother tongue to communication in English. A child in this situation will no doubt, exhibit some level of inefficiency in communicating fluently and in an acceptable way when compared to his counterparts who embrace the 'straight for English' approach.

While some researchers attribute pupils' inability to speak fluently to learners' poor linguistic background, others correlate it to teachers' ineffective pedagogical strategieg or approaches. When teachers use strategies or approaches that do not engage learners, learning is not internalized.

An appraisal of the teaching methods by Ubahakwe in Marshal (2015), reveals that teachers still hold on to the traditional methods of teaching language skills that places the teacher as the sole repository of knowledge, thereby reducing learners to mere passive listeners which in turn makes learning ineffective. But when learners are engaged, learning becomes more permanent,

In addition, a survey conducted by Ubahakwe as reported in Oyetunde (1999) states that a test and lesson on oral English only places premium on the recognition of receptive skills to the neglect of productive skills. Notably, speaking is one of the productive skills that is neglected in its instruction. He further notes that this situation will turnout students who may understand when spoken to but may not be able to respond in an intelligent manner.

Agreeing with Ubahakwe, Adejide (2000) asserts that spoken English is not receiving any systematic teaching and learning. He was quick to add that speaking is

not allotted time on the timetable and at the same not accorded the attention it deserves. The assumption is that as learners are taught reading and writing they would spontaneously acquire speaking skills. Thus, speaking skill is assumed as a by-product of reading and writing.

Malgwi (2003) further affirms that speaking skills are taught haphazardly, leaving the learners devastated, lacking words or expressions to respond with when confronted with different speech situations. For this reason, some pupils choose to keep quite in the class not that they lack what to say, but they lack the linguistic elements to express their ideas, thoughts and feelings.

It is as a result of these trends in researches and observations that Akere (1989), emphatically posited that spoken English or speaking skills should be consciously taught with the aim of developing in children the ability to communicate effectively in English and in different speech contexts. This leaves the teacher of English with the responsibility of exploring and exploiting avenues or approaches that will develop and enh4nce this vital language skill. One of such is the Language ExperienceAppr'oach (LEA).

Concept of Language Experience Approach

There are a number of methods and approaches used in the teaching of speaking skills; one of such methods or approaches that merits attention is the Language Experience Approach (LEA). LEA is an off-shoot of the communicatiVe approach advocated in recent years for the effective teaching of language skills. LEA as the name implies, is an approach as well as a method that can be used to teach more than one language skill. Language Experience Approach (LEA), according to Oyetunde (2009), is a reading method that uses the language and personal experiences of pupils to create materials for reading instruction. Andzayi (2004) does not view it differently. In her opinion, LEA is the method of teaching children to read using materials or sign language of the children,

Though LEA is a useful method in the teaching of reading, it also lends itself to the effective teaching of speaking skills, thus making it a flexible instructional language strategy as it predisposes the learners to the acquisition of language skills using the learners' experiences (Surgigao, 2017). The approach exposes the child to language skills in a more relaxed, natural and interesting atmosphere. This atmosphere gives the learner the opportunity to relate his experiences, stories, events without stress. Other methods that are used in the teaching o speaking skills as identified by Yulia (2006) include reading aloud, group presentation, storytelling, role play and debate. These methods are considered as activities in the LEA.

Principle of LEA

Language Experience Approach (LEA) is one of the methods or appr4oches that has been found to be effective in the teaching of reading to primary pupils (Umolu, 1997). It has however been discovered that it can be adapted to develop other language skills like the speaking skills (Umolu & Oyetunde, 1991). Yulia (2002), Surgigao (2017), and Aslam (20 17) assert that to develop children's speaking skills, they should be encouraged to talk about themselves and their relations and discuss freely about their own experiences and opinions. The authors argue that since most of the problems of speaking often evolve from lack of linguistic sources when learners are asked to talk about their experiences, expression becomes less difficult to them. The authors further argue that since LEA uses learners' experiences as its veritable tool, it can be. adapted to teach speaking skills to children effectively. Thus, the principle of LEA is that the child's own experiences and oral language are the basic ingredients that help the child to learn speaking skills more effectively. The method further demands that the child be allowed to speak uninterruptedly to build his fluency by immersing in language usage. The teacher afterwards, steps in to correct learners' grammar and intonation, especially through modeling and drills.

Procedures of LEA

Having established that LEA is basically a reading approach, it can however be adapted to develop speaking skills in upper primary school pupils, considering thefact that its basic ingredients are the learners' experiences and self expression. A resourceful teacher will therefore put to advantage its procedures and activities, exploring and using those that lend themselves to the development of speaking skills.

One procedure as identified by Andzayi (2004) is exposing pupils to rich linguistic environments capable of presenting substantial linguistic elements or resources. Learners in this procedure can be carried out for class excursion to amusement parks, production companies or on the alternative, the teacher can display pictures from old calendars featuring traditional dances, art works like pot making to evoke learners to talk about them. In the same manner, learners can be encouraged to talk about items like an aeroplane, beam balance to make the learning environment rich in linguistic resources. Stories like folklores can also be used to provide a variety of linguistic environment. Children can as well talk about celebrations they have attended Celebrations like Christmas, Sallah and Children's Day.

Another procedure is that the teacher should be a good model. Anyadiegwu (2009), opines that for a teacher to become a good model, he or she must be fluent in speech. A good model should speak accurately, coherently, simultaneously exhibiting high level ofconfidence in tone and pitch, and should speak naturally.

Also. teacher generates discussion on topics that are appealing to learners. Yulia 1 :002) suggests that the teacher should generate discussion on topics that are appealing to the learners. She adds that this will set the tone, spur the learners and give them the opportunity to express their ideas and experience so rally thereby enhancing their speaking skills,

Another procedure that is worthy of mention is that the teacher should not interrupt learners unduly. This procedure demands that as the learner advances in his speech, the teacher should not correct the learner indiscriminately as this will break the channel of the learner's speech. The teacher should note that as learners set out to speak on an experience, they should not correct pupils' utterances as doing so will pave way for break in expression. Learners should be allowed to be immersed in the language as this will enhance their confidence and the skill ofpressing-on.

Activities of LEA

To enhance speaking skills, the following LEA activities are rewarding.

- News sharing: This activity requires the teacher to guide the children to talk about their experiences, events and objects within and outside the classroom.
  Telling and re-telling stories in a friendly and non-threatening atmosphere is another activity that is worth practicing.
  Reading aloud and inviting responses from the learners is engaging and also helps to develop learners' speaking skills.
- Talking about pictures that are captivating is another activity that is capable of developing learners' speaking skills.
  Asking learners to describe something or somebody of their interest.
  Grouping children to tell their favorite stories
  Discussing interesting topics or events and asking the children to comment, add or ask questions
  Designing tasks or responsibilities and asking pupils to account for same.

Developing Speaking Skills of Upper Primary School Pupils Using LEA Activities

The art of teaching or learning of speaking skills is tasking most especially to second language learners of English language because the learners have to grapple with EngIIsh language in school and other languages outside the school environment. This defines why learners lack fluency, accuracy and confidence in the language (Nuna, 2003),

For this reason, teachers of English as a foreign language should employ functional and effective strategies to teach speaking skills, without which, learners are plac."i „„

a disadvantage both in their academic and career pursuits. To make learning effective, communicative approach has been advocated. The LEA isa communicative approach with several activities the teacher can use to immerse learners in real-life situation (Kayi, 2016). Some of the activities the teacher can use in the LEA approach to develop and promote speaking skills in upper primary pupils include: discussion, brainstorming, simulation, role play, interview, reporting, storytelling and picture narration.

Discussion is one of the activities common with LEA. This activity gives learners the opportunity and time to share their feelings and ideas collaboratively. In using this activity, the teacher can set the tone by giving interesting topics that the students can relate to or which the students have experienced. For example, tell us how you spent your last Christmas holiday. This will help the students to speak in a natural way without fear as they speak from their experiences (Chandler, 201 8).

Brainstorming is helpful in that it gives learners the opportunity to develop their critical thinking capacity. Again, the teacher can ask learners about interesting themes to brainstorm on. This activity is effective, not only in giving learners the opportunity for verbal expression, but also developing their critical thinking skills. Topics like> 'lf I were to be a super hero', 'What if the sun rises from the south and sets in the north', etc. are capable of evoking both critical thinking and verbal expressions (Teaching Speaking, 2017) .

Simulation requires the learners to act as in a real life situation. For example learners can come to class in attires and instruments that connote professions they wotdd like in future. They are given the opportunity to talk about it. For example, coming to class in a white robe or coat with a stethoscope and talking or speaking like a doctor. This activity is interesting and makes learning permanent as learners are immersed in the learning process without just being passive listeners.

Role-play is another LEA activity that allows learners to play the role of somebody they have seen before. The teacher can elicit verbal expressions by using this method in class. Learners are motivated to pick roles of their interest and act and speak like the model. This model can be a father, moth% a doctor or a journalist (Teaching ELL, 2017)

Interview: As learners advance, they will come face to face with the realities of life. One of such is attending interviews. To build knowledge and confidence leanrers will :equireJ they need to be exposed these life situations in class. The teacher should explain to the leanrers the rubrics of interviews and give the learners the oppoltunity

to practice answering questions with the right composure, tone and accuracy which are components of speaking skills (Global Citizen, 2017).

Reporting is one other activity of LEA that advocates the learners' experience. Learners can be asked to report their experience after a visit to amusement parks or a company. These activities do not only develop the speaking skills of learners but also enhance their writing skills and consolidates what the students have learned during such visits .

Story telling: The basic ingredient of this activity is narration. The teacher can use storytelling to develop speaking skills of the learners. The teacher can also encourage or motivate the students to tell or retell a known story to the class. If effectively put to use, storytelling can enhance the organization and presentation of information which includes the beginning, middle and end. It can also help to develop confidence in the learners as it allows them to express ideas or information in a free, natural and logical order. Students can also tell or retell stories they have learned in the class and at home to enhance their speaking skills.

Picture narration is also an interesting activity the teacher can use to motivate speaking in the learners. The teacher can bring pictures on wall calendars or play videos that are captivating in class, after which learners are asked to narrate how and why the pictures appeal to them. This activity is one of the most effective in LEA. It allows the learners to narrate verbally, and in a chronological manner, thereby developing the skills of coherence and logicality in speaking. The learners are also free to talk naturally and confidently thereby encouraging the passive and shy learners to speak up. The skill of continuation or 'pressing-on' is also encouraged (Kayi, 2006).

Despite the fact that the teaching of speaking skills to second language learners is difficult and tasking, the language teacher can make it simple by using LEA activities which involve the leamers expressions of their experiences in their own words. English language teachers should effectively use these activities in class to provide a natural phenomenon so that learners are immersed in activities that seem familiar to them to talk about. Teachers should use the LEA activities to develop and enhance the following speaking skills:

- Ability to pronounce words clearly
- Ability to listen attentively
- Ability to take turns in conversations
- Ability to speak audibly and clearly
- Ability to express personal experiences

- Ability to narrate stories, pictures ,and events chronologically Ability
- to ask and answer questions appropriately
- Ability to respond orally in different speech contexts

Recommendations

Having considered the positive impression that the basic ingredient of LEA remains the spoken expression of the pupils own experiences, stories and events of their interests, this paper therefore recommends that:

- Teachers of English should enrich leamers' linguistic environment to help them acquire substantial words and expressions that would serve as linguistic sources that they would use to express their experiences and stories with. Teachers of English should endeavor to use the rich linguistic environment to encourage and engage learners in active discussion. This will help learners develop fluency in a natural way.
- In addition, teachers should not correct pupils when they are engaged in their expressions, so as not to break the flow of their utterances; learners can be corrected afterwards.
- Teachers should ensure that learners are exposed to the use ofrich vocabulary to spice their expressions and sustain their listeners' attention
- Teachers should engage learners with drills on words and expressions Learners should also be drilled on stress and intonation as this will enable them get immersed in learning speaking skills
- Furthermore, teachers should reinforce learners' effort as every effort that is reinforced is likely to repeat itself.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has discussed what obtains in a lesson of speaking skills. One of such is that speaking skill is assumed as a by-product of reading and writing lessons. Again, this paper also noted that as a result of unconcerted effort and ineffective strategies, primary school pupils are not proficient in expressing themselves in English and as a result, find it difficult to communicate their thoughts, ideas and feelings in an acceptable way despite the fact that speaking is a rewarding and life-long skill. It is with this passion that this paper strove to bring to limelight one of the effective methods that teachers can explore and use to develop and enhance speaking skills in upper primary school pupils. This effective method is the Language Experience Approach (LEA). This method uses the learners' experiences, expressions and the provision ofrich linguistic resources to help learners acquire and use substantial words and expressions to their advantage.

Also discussed in the paper is the procedure and activities of LEA and how the teacher can employ these activities in the class to engage the learners to talk about their experiences and stories in a relaxed and natural atmosphere to foster the skills of speaking. These activities will help to develop and reinenforce the speaking skills of upper primary school pupils for globalization and sustainable development.

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