EX'ELANCING *JSS* II STUDENTS' ORACY SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AKWANGA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

ConfIdence in listening and speaking is vitally important in the development of life skills as it will affect societal development and particularly guarantee sustainable development. This paper examined ways of enhancing yss Il students' oracy skills for effective communication and sustainable development in Akwanga Local Government Area of Nasar(Iwa State. The paper adopted both theoretical and practical methods to collect and gather data. While the theoretical methods include literature sources , the practical methods employed include a conduct of effciency test on the students' listening, speaking and reading skills. The paper discovered that ora(..y can be enhanced through turn-by-turn dialogues during conversational interactions among students, proper guidance by teachers and watching plms. The paper concludes that ora(=y in practice increases access ;b learning and teachers need to carefully plan its teaching.

KEYWORDS: Oracy skills, Effective communicationJ Sustainabledevelopment

INTRODUCTION

In the last century, oracy in schools has grown out of the shadows towards the light (Grainger, 2012). Classrooms in which silent students listened to their teacher and only spoke to answer questions and demonstrate their knowledge, have given way to more interactive contexts. At its most basic level, oracy is about communication with other people; it involves the process of utilizing thinking, knowledge and skills to listen and speak effectively.

English is desirable in modern life and it is necessary tomorrow (Nazarbayer, 2006) and hence listening and speaking skills play a vital role in the teaching and learning process in modern times. In every human society, language is an important tool for social interaction. In the process of communicating, language is a means of expressing and transmitting cultural and social values of the immediate envrronrnent.

For 21 st century students, listening and speaking skills are of vital importance since they help learners to solve problems, speculate, share ideas, make decisions and reflect on what is important. Grainger (2012) opines that speaking and listening today are perceived as vital communication skills and talk is acknowledged as a medium for learning and personal development. Education or the transmission, acquisition, creation and adaptation of information, knowledge, skills and values are a keys to sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015). This is based on the vision of inclusive societies in which all citizens have equitable opportunities to access effective and relevant learning throughout life. As such, education is essential to individuals' development as it is to the development of their families of local and national communities and the world at large.

In modern classrooms, the values of effective teamwork have become widely recognized in recent years. At their best, teams are excellent creative problem solving units, demonstrating that two good heads are better than one (Mercer, 2014). Psychological research now encourages the view that human intelligence is distinctively collective and that language has evolved to enable collaborative thinking. Teachers therefore need to ensure that students become effective communicators and active listeners because learning to read and write is the foundation of their development. This paper focuses on the need to enhance JSS II students' oracy skill for effective communication and sustainable development in Akwanga Local Government Area ofNasarawa State, Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There has been a growing recognition in recent years that schools have a special role to play in helping students develop their skills in spoken forms of communication, and in pushing the boundaries of learning itself through talk. Oracy, which encompasses both of these processes, offers a compelling means of extending pupils' linguistic, social, emotional and cognitive development. If done well, oracy can permeate students' lives, both within and beyond the school gates. This has enormous potential for addressing social disadvantage.

In most multilingual nations, English language occupies the position of language of socialization and oftentimes, it is used as the official language and the language of instnrction in virtually all institutions of learning beginning from pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary. The weak foundation of a learner affects his or her fluency as the mother tongue often interferes with free flow ofutterances.

Akwanga Local Government Area is a multi-lingua local government area, dominated by languages like Mada, Eggon, Rinze, and other non-indigenous languages like Igbo, Idoma, Yoruba, Tiv, etc. In some villages, mother tongue (native language) is mostly used as the language of instruction, as such, when students find themselves in secondary schools out of their immediate environment where English is used only as a language of instruction, they find it difficult copping with the learning process. Some of these students cannot speak in English nor can they even understand it before coming to learn and therefore cannot read or write when required to do so. Ultimately, they have difficulties in listening and speaking **in** English and as such, enhancing these students' oral skills will go a long way to facilitate their learning since English is the lingua franca in schools. Students therefore, need to develop and enhance their oral skills to enhance their learning ability

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary aim of this study is to identify ways or how JSS II students' oral skills can be developed for effective communication and sustainable development. **The** objectives of the paper include:

i. To identify efficient learning activities that can be used in developi% listening and speaking skills
ii. To show how these activities can be used to enhance JSS II students' listening and speaking skills for sustainable development.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

i. What are the activities that can help in developing JSS Il students' listening and speaking skills?
ii. How can these activities be used in developing listening and speaking skills among students?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

TIle term oracy was coined by Andrew Wilkinson, a British researcher and educator, since 1965, in an attempt to escape the woolliness of'speaking and listening' and give parity with the more respected terms 'literacy' and 'numeracy'. The word oracy is formed by analogy from literacy and numeracy. The purpose is to draw attention to the neglect of oral skills in education. According to Oxford dictionary (2016), 'Oracy' is defined as the ability to express oneself fluently and grammatically in speech and the ability to use spoken language effectively across a wide range of situations. It is also the ability to express oneself fluently and grammatically in speech, and the capacity to express oneself in and understand speech (Collins English Dictionary, 2012). Oral skills stress speech production which is tightly controlled in order to correct formation habit of linguistic rules.

Oracy is therefore, speaking and listening. Different scholars have different concepts of listening and speaking but they all agree that listening and speaking is a two way process between the speaker and listener. According to Howatt and Dakin (1974), listening is the ability to identify and understand what others are saying. This process involves understanding of a speaker's accent or pronunciation, the speaker's grammar and vocabulary, and comprehension of meaning. An able listener is capable of doing these four things simultaneously.

Tam (1997) says that it is necessary to give students a variety of situations and frequent speaking tasks which play a significant role in the improvement ofstudents' fluency while speaking. When such tasks are given to the students in form of roleplays, creating real life situations, each student will try to speak freely and feel confident in communicating in English. According to Larsen-Freeman (1986:26), “It is through interaction between speaker and listener that meaning becomes clear”. This clarity suggests an understanding of what has been heard. Xiaohong (1994) opines that speaking is “one of the most necessary language proficiency” skills. Speaking, thus, seems to be the most important skill that teachers should pay attention to in the process of teaching and learning. Likewise, today's world requires that the tdaching of oracy should improve students' communicative skills because only in that way can students express themselves and learn how to follow social and cultural rules

Scott (1978) reveals that "speaking can be typified as an activity involving two or more people in whom the participants are both hearers and speakers having to react to what they hear and make their contribution." Each has an intention or a set of intentions that he wants to achieve in the interaction and an ability to interpret what is said is referred to as meaning.

Rost (1994) proposes three reasons to improve oracy skills. First, speaking provides a means of interaction for students because they must interact to ' achieve understanding and gain access to speakers ofthe language. Second, authentic spoken language presents a challenge for the students to attempt to understand the language as native speakers actually use it. Third, listening exercises provide teachers with the means for drawing students' attention to new forms (vocabulary, grammar, new interaction patterns) in the language.

The Concept of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is an amalgam of two component words namely "sustainable" and "development". A clear understanding of each of these words is necessary to make this discourse more meaningful.

Sustainable

The literary meaning of'sustainable' is that which 'can continue or be continued for a long time; capable of being maintained at a set level, keep up assumed role competently (The American Heritage Dictionary, 2000; The 21st Chambers
Dictionary, 2001 ; Abraham, 2012).

Development

Development as a concept has been defined by authors from different perspectives and their various areas of specialization. Indabawa and Mpofu (2006) defined development as transformation both socially and materially. Akinpelu(2002) in defining development focused on human beings whom he referred to as the target of development processes rather than material accumulations surrounding him or the economic progress and growth of a nation state. He conceived development as:

> a process of changing the personality, equipping it with the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to conceive, design and carry out his/her own self development. It involves liberating him/her from all inhibitions (social, economic, political and cultural) that prevent him/her from realizing the best confidence, self-reliance, self pride, and poise to face the world, and of his/her creative potentials and sense of freedom and readiness to participate in any matter involving self/or the environment.(p. 80)

; tam in Onyeozu (2007) defines development from the point of view of its effect on :eoples' life. He conceived development as a continuous process of positive change i IIe quality and span of life of a person or group of persons. Development is often :asured in terms of improvements or refinement in certain parameters (housing :=aditions, road and railway networks, telecommunication, water, health and !!giene conditions, election and voting patterns, nutritional levels, etc) by which _dgment is conferred on the state of affairs of an individual or a country (Abraham, **1012)**

$-:stainable development therefore is one of the latest concepts that emerged in the _::erature and thinking of development policy. The concept was brought into :ommon usage by the World Commission on Environment and Development in its : 987 report (Kempe, 1996: 193). The report conceptualized sustainable development s human progress that meet the needs of the present generation without =ompromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Ugwu &
::ah, 2011). This means conservation, reservation, usage and management of =sources so that what we do to improve life and living standard today does not :ompromise future use of such resources and improvement in the quality of life for dI the people (Oyebamiji&Adekola, 2008).

Sustainable development is one concept that has become so popular and has attracted :nention across disciplines and scholars of various dispositions. In 1987, the United Nations (UN) released Brunt Land Commission report which offered the most Ridely recognized definition of sustainable development as development that 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development in UNICEF, 2013). Despite some perceptions that associate sustainable development mainly with the natural environment, it focuses on ways of meeting peoples' social and economic needs within natural resource limits so that human development can be both sustainable and sustained. This means the continued advance of poverty eradication, human rights and equity while also :ealizing more sustainable patterns of consumption and production, stabilizing climatic forces, and sustainably managing common natural resource base (UNICEF, 3013). It contains within it two key concepts namely:

i. The concept of needs, in particular the essential needs of the world poor, to which overriding priority should be given, and
ii. The idea of limitation imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.

Also, the Intemational Institute for Sustainable Development (USD) conceives sustainable development to mean environmental, economic and social well-being for today and tomorrow. Abraham (2012) submits that sustainable development mantra enjoins current generations to take a systematic approach to growth and development and to manage natural, produced and social capital for the welfare of their own and future generations, a system that connects space and a system that connects time. Sustainable development involves progress both within and across four integrally connected dimensions: inclusive social development, inclusive economic development, environmental sustainability and underpinning all of these, the rule of law. Each of these dimensions has specific influences and major impacts on children. At the same time, children are central to the progress and contributions of each ofthese four dimensions.

METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the aim of improving listening and speaking skills for sustainable development, the study focused on the collection and search of theoretical and practical materials. Theoretical materials include literature sources and review. Practical materials involve to conduct an efficiency test on students' speaking and listening skills, to identify learning efficient activities in developing listening and speaking skills, and to find solutions to and means of improving listening and speaking skills of students in Akwanga L.G. A.

Programme Structure

The three weeks of this study were subdivided into three components lessons of 50 minutes each. 80 students were selected, 40 each from JSS IIA & IIB.
The activities conducted in the three components were as follows (Table 1):

Table 1 : Activities

Component	Activity
Component One Week 1	Reading comprehension, teacher-fronted discussions
Component Two Week 2	Identify difficult words, correct pronunciation, and simulations
Component Three Week 3	Teacher -fronted discussions, speech-giving

Source: Field, 2018

From table I, lessons were planned and divided into components under three weeks. Each week had two lesson periods. In week one, the researchers led the students through a reading comprehension text as a pre-test. In week two, students were picked randomly to read from a passage while the researchers took note of

difficult words and taught correct pronunciation afterwards to arouse students' desire to read more.

Week three, the researchers fronted the discussion and challenged the students on the need to constantly read as such act will develop their vocabularies and give them edge over their peers and contribute effectively to their personal development.

Oracy and Sustainable Development

Today, listening and speaking are perceived as vital communication skills and talk is acknowledged as a medium for learning and personal development. Oracy was officially recognized in the late twentieth century as an important medium of the teaching learning process. Wilkinson in Mercer, Warwick and Ahmed (2014) argued that oracy is a condition of learning in all subjects; it is not a frill but a state ofbeing in which the whole school must operate. While many agreed with him, Barnes(1976) observed that the development of the oracy movement has been neither rapid nor without problems. Strategies to consolidate and enhance oracy are needed because, despite its recent rise in stature, its position remains insecure and continues to require nurturing. Opportunities for developing oracy abound in all curriculum contexts, but the potential of drama, storytelling, ICT, and the literacy level need to be tapped further

Challenges ofOracy and Sustainable Development

Even though oracy is held with high esteem within the education sector as a powerful tool for learning to guarantee sustainable development, several issues continue to undermine its stature and reduce its pedagogic potentials. These, according to Grainer (2012), include the nature of national curriculum requirement, influence of national literacy level (NLS), assessment, students and parental perspective.

National Curriculum limitation: to develop effective listening and speaking skills students need to be taught to :

i. Use the vocabulary and grammar ofstandardEnglish
ii. Formulate, clarify and express their ideas
iii. Adapt their speech, to a widening range ofcircumstances and demand
iv. Listen, understand and respond appropriately to others

This provides a summary of the curriculum requirement across all key states of an education without putting to mind the use of language as a tool for enquiry, reflection and knowledge construction. Also, the vocational stress on developing adequate communication skills diverts the teacher's attention from these more significant aim but work towards merely educating children to speak well and listen carefully.

Tbe influence of the National Literacy Strategy: this provides us with further challenge to the stature oforacy because it focuses upon teaching, not learning and profiles literacy instruction. Here, teachers talk take centre stage and much will depend upon the quality of talk. The framework of teaching does not acknowledge that teachers should aim at active engagement of students but emphasises quantity of objectives and explicit teaching which could serve only to reaffirm the dominant pattern of teacher-centered instruction. As such, separate planning for oracy is not required and so the door remains wide open for busy teachers to let oracy take a back seat as they come to grips with the national syllabus.

Teaching styles: the issue of different teachers' philosophies and their teaching and students learning styles lies at the heart of the constraints upon oracy in education. While a rationale for the importance of talk is widely accepted, it is quite another matter to operate in line with this rationale on a daily basis. Examination of classroom discourse suggests that many teachers implicitly avoid interaction in order to maintain control of both the outcome and content of discussion. Edward and Mercer (1987) observe that teachers retain control of knowledge gained through the use of a variety of spoken strategies which include

i. Eliciting students' contribution
ii. Marking some contributions as particularly significant, through joint knowledge markers
iii. Reconstructing and recapping past activities

Teacher and students' expectationg: factors here include teachers' expectations and influence (whether talk actually serves educational purpose). These may vary according to race, gender and class of students and teachers and in response to students' perceptions ofthe nature oftalk.

Enhancing Oracy for Sustainable Development

Many students equate being able to speak a language with knowing the language and therefore view learning the language as learning how to speak the language, or as Nunan (1991) observes that success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the (target) language. Therefore, if students do not learn how to speak or do not get any opportunity to speak in the language classroom, they may soon get de-motivated and lose interest in learning (Celce-Muricia, 2001). On the other hand, if the right activities are taught in the right way, speaking in class can be a lot of nm, raising general learner motivation and making the English language classroom a fun and dynamic place to be (British Council, 2018). This will make learning effective and contribute to development, constant growth and maintenance of results in sustained development.

<uanierek (2015) states that speaking is not easy to master as this language skill =volves constant exposure and lots ofpractices in communication. Learners have to :ruin a certain level of fluency and ease of communication with native speakers to :onsider themselves as having achieved acceptable linguistic level in the target _arlguage.

In enhancing oracy skills, one of teachers' main aims should be to ensure that the message is understood by the learners during the turn-by-turn dialogues or conversational interactions. Communicative interaction between teacher and children and input and output data can be achieved by means of a variety of techniques: asking questions, recasting, expansion, explicit corrections, elicitation, prompting, and repetition and wait time (Mackey, 2012).

On the basis of the foregoing review, a selection of best practices that foster oral English language and promote speaking skills are suggested. Musical activities are fundamental to oracy since the lyrics help to train the brain to grammatical patterns and the melodies train the ears to the sounds and intonation. Children can learn to discriminate the speech sounds, intonation patterns and rhythm of English through songs, chants, finger plays and rhymes (Bruce & Spratt inGuil16n, 2014).

Stories are powerfbl tools to develop oracy in EFL. Listening to and telling stories are among the best practices that meet the expectations of oracy in pre-primary classrooms. Stories can be used with different age and ability groups for developing the four skills as they contain all the ingredients necessary for language and for content learning (Wright, 2000).

Harmer (2012) credits information gap as the most important feature in communication activities. Students have to adopt ways to fill in the information gap and to counter such a gap they have no option but to communicate with one another. He further added that the teacher shonld not be quick to intervene during students' discussions. He should give only delayed feedback when students accomplish the activity. It includes also diction and language structures (Harmer, 2001).

Watanabe-Crockett (2017) observes that teachers can use the following strategies to enhance students' speaking, listening and writing abilities, no matter their age.

Watch films that model conversation skills: Conversation is one of the most basic and essential communication skills. It enables people to share thoughts, opinions, and ideas, and receive them in turn. Although it may appear simple on the surface, effective conversations include a give-and-take exchange that consists of elements such as:

1. body language
11. eye contact
111. summarlzlrlg
IV. paraphrasing
V. responding

Students can learn the foundational elements of conversation by watching films or videos of these interactions taking place. Pause the video and ask questions such as, "What message is the listener sending by crossing his arms? What else can you tell by observing the expressions and body language of both people in the conversation?"

Use technology: From audio books to apps, there is a multitude of technological resources teachers can use for improving student communication skills. Students can listen to or read along with audio books to hear how the speaker pronounces and enunciates different words or phrases.

Reinforce active listening: communication isn't just about speaking; it's also about listening. Teachers can help their students develop listening skills by reading a selection of text aloud, and then having the class discuss and reflect on the content. Active listening also means listening to understand rather than reply. Reinforce building good listening skills by encouraging students to practice asking clarifying questions to fully understand the speaker's intended message.

Offer group presentations and assignments: team-building exercises can also help students sharpen both oral and written communication skills. Not only does it offer students the chance to work in small groups, thereby reducing some of the pressure, but it also gives them the opportunity to debate their opinions, take turns, and work together towards a common goal.
Ask open-ended questions: because they require more than a one- or two-word response, open-ended questions are vital for inspiring discussion and demonstrating that there are multiple ways to perceive and answer a question. Teachers might set a timer for short informal conversations and challenge students to use open-ended questions. For example, you might show children the difference in how much more information they can obtain by asking "what did you like best about the song?" rather than simply "did you like the song?"

Use tasks and activities that foster critical thinking: another task-based method for improving student communication skills is through critical thinking exercises. These can be done verbally or through written assignments that give students the chance to answer questions creatively using their own words and expressions.

Offer reflective learning opportunities: recording students reading selected text or \'ideotaping group presentations is an excellent method for assessing communication strengths and weaknesses. Students can reflect on their oral performance in small groups. Then, ask each student to critique the others so that they can get used to receiving constructive criticism.

Find teachable moments: whatever the age group you are working with, maximize on the everyday happenings in the classroom environment. For example, if a student answers a question in a complicated way, you might ask that he or she rephrases what he said, or challenge the class to ask clarifying questions. If an unfamiliar word pops up in a text or on a film, pause in order for the class to search for the word in the dictionary.

CONCLUSION

Oracy in practice increases access to learning so, teachers need to plan carefully, to model and intervene to extend their students use of English language which will in turn increase the complexity of their thinking as well as bring about sustainable development. If teachers are to help their students develop their talk skills, then they need to be able to monitor that development and provide formative feedback that will help their progress. Oracy will be more important to the students once they are out of school, since in school they will be able to interact during instruction and become effective but out of school they will contribute to the society in general what they had learnt. It will help them speak up against the ills in the society and bad governance, suggest ways of improvement and thereby bring about sustainable development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper recommends that teachers should:

(a) Always update their knowledge by attending conferences and engage themselves in research to develop themselves so as to meet up with the demand of teaching 2 1 st century students.

(b) Understand the context and background of students before assigning t^{a}sk^{s} and if assigned must be monitored.

(c) Teachers should always carry out oracy assessment on their students to evaluate their fluency for feedback from the leanrer.

(d) Teachers should have exposure to differe^{n}t ^{a}pp^{roac}h^{es}9 ^{me}th^{o}dF ^{an}d teaching of listening and speaking and sho^{u}ld ^{a}l^{wa}Y^{S} p^{re}p$^{are\ new}$ l^{esson} " ' plans regularly. . ,

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