

The Influence of Practical Teaching of Oral Communication

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Abstract: *Oral communication fulfills a number of general and discipline-specific pedagogical functions. Learning to speak is an important goal in itself, for it equips students with a set of skills they can use for the rest of their lives. Speaking is the mode of communication most often used to express opinions, make argument, offer explanations, transmit information, and make impressions upon others. Students need to speak well in their personal lives, future workplaces, social interactions, and political endeavors. They will have meetings to attend, presentations to make, discussions and arguments to participate in, and groups to work with. If basic instruction and opportunities to practice speaking are available, students would be able to position themselves to accomplish a wide range of goals and be useful members of their communities. Therefore, this pilot study attempted to describe the applications of the practical based approach to teaching oral communication skills in an academic setting. It also investigated the teachers' attitude to adoption of practical task as a complement to the teaching of oral communication skills. The findings revealed the stakeholders positive attitude to its adoption in order to complement the theoretical aspect, of teaching.*

Keywords: *Influence, Practical, Teaching, Oral Communication*

1. INTRODUCTION

With the globalization, it has become imperative for graduates to be proficient in oral communication skills so that they can function effectively in the academic and professional setting. Oral communication covers a wide area, ranging from formal presentations to participation in town meetings. Consequently, oral communication skills course is included in Primary, Secondary and Tertiary levels. Despite the need, and the varied ways of including oral communication skills in curriculum, there appears to be little research available that provides a more precise understanding of the methods and approaches of teaching oral communication at each of these levels. This is why this paper tries to examine the possibilities of applying practical in teaching oral communication skills. This study reports on an investigation into the attitude of the teachers' of oral communication in four selected polytechnics in Osun, Ondo and Kwara States. These are Osun State Polytechnic Iree, Rufus Giwa Polytechnic Owo, Federal Polytechnic, Offa and federal polytechnic Ede. The paper first describes the dimensions of oral communication skills and practical based approach. It then introduces the dimensional contexts in which the oral communications skills course is offered and the goals of this particular course.

2. ORAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

For successful communication, students require more than the formal ability to present well and a range of formulaic expressions. Successful communication is context dependent and therefore embedded in its particular discourse community (Bizzell, 1989). Oral communication reflects the persistent and powerful role of language and communication in human society. As Halliday (1976) explains, communication is more than merely and exchange of words between parties; it is a "... sociological encounter". And through exchange of meanings in the communication process, social reality is "created, maintained and modified" (Halliday, 1976). Such a capacity of language is also evident in Clyne (1994) assertion that communication is an "... instrument of action". Speech Act Theory is concerned with the communicative effect, that is, the function and effect of utterances. He dissects an utterance into three components: the actual utterance (the locution); the act performed by the utterance (the illocution); and the effect the act has on the hearer (the

perlocution) (Austin 1962). Speech acts has also been described as directives, imperatives, requests, among others.

Communication is a dynamic interactive process that involves the effective transmission of facts, ideas, thoughts, feelings and values (Oluga, Adewusi and Babalola 1998). It is not passive and does not just happen; we actively and consciously engage in communication in order to develop information and understanding required for effective group functioning. It is dynamic because it involves a variety of forces and activities interacting over time. The relationship of people engaged in communication continuously grows and develop.

Communication is an exchange and negotiation of meaning and understanding. (Canale and Merrill, 1980) meaning is central to communication. Communication is symbolic because it involves not only words but also symbols and gestures that accompany the spoken words because symbolic action is not limited to verbal communication. Communication is an interactive process. The two communication agents involves in the communication process are sender(S) and receiver(R). Both the communication agents exert a reciprocal influence on each other through inter stimulation and response.

At its most basic level, oral communication is the spoken interaction between two or more people. The interaction is far more complex than it seems. Oral communication is composed of multiple elements which, when taken as a whole, result in the success or failure of the interaction. Not everyone is an effective communicator (Sannie, 2000).

In order to function successfully academically and professionally, one needs to learn effective oral communication skills. For many, conversational speech comes naturally. However, in more formal speech, effective communication skills are essential. A poorly conducted interview, sales presentation, or legal argument could have implications that affect many more people than speaker. By becoming an effective communicator one will be able to conduct himself in a variety of personal, professional, and academic environments with confidence. (Gamble and Gamble, 2002).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Oral communication is a unique and learned rhetorical skill that requires understanding what to say and how to say it. Speech in more formal environments does not come naturally. What should be learnt is how to critically think about how to present oneself as a speaker in all occasions and also how to function in a variety of speaking environments (Kaitholil, 2007).

Oral communication can take many forms, ranging from informal conversation that occurs spontaneously and, in most cases, for which the content cannot be planned, to participation in meetings, which occurs in a structural environment, usually with a set agenda.

As a speaker there are several elements of oral communication of which one need to be aware in order to learn how to use them to his advantage in order to be able to communicate effectively. These elements are; sender, message channel receiver and feedback. It is usually erroneously assumed that the learners know these basics of oral communication. This is not the case. Therefore, there is the need to vividly understand the oral communication skills in detail. To be able to do this effectively, the better way is when the learner perform tasks (Practical' works) in the class. In other words practical-based approach seems to be the most suitable way for teaching and learning these skills.

4. WHAT IS A PRACTICAL APPROACH?

Practical work means any teaching and learning activity which involves at some point the students in observing procedure or process of doing something. The term "practical work" is used in preference to "laboratory work" because location is not salient feature in characterizing this kind of activity (Cerini, Murray & Reis, 2003). The observation of any process could take place anywhere, even in and out-of-school setting. Therefore, anything that is concerned with action is practical in term of subject matter (Lunetta, Hofstein and Clough, 2007).

A practical task is a 'work plan. It takes the form of materials for • researching or teaching. A work plan typically involves the following:

1. Some input (i.e. information that learners are required to process and use)
2. Some instruction relating to what outcome the learners are supposed to achieved.

Four defining criteria are also identified by Breen (1987). These are:

1. Meaning primary
2. There is a goal which needs to be worked toward
3. The activity is outcome-evaluated.
4. There is a real-world relationship.

Canate and Merrill (1980) are critical of such a definition of 'task', they opine that the criteria do not themselves distinguished the linguistic exercise and the communication task. They argue that "Exercise" and "Task" differ with regard to the kind of meaning, goals and outcome they are directed towards. An exercise is promised directed toward. An exercise is premised on the need to develop linguistic skills as a prerequisite for learning of communicative ability, while a task is based on the assumption that linguistic abilities are developed through communicative activity, it is suggested that what constitutes the primary focus of attention, the goals, the way in which the outcome is evaluated and the relationship to the real world are all interpreted, differently in accordance with this basic different in orientation.

5. IMPORTANCE OF PRACTICAL TASK TO ORAL COMMUNICATION

- (i) It assists learners to gain an understanding of the communicative knowledge. That is, learners will gain experience of spontaneous interaction.
- (ii) It promotes knowledge-in-action technique.
- (iii) It develops student as a self learner in order to have sufficient understanding of oral communication to be able to participate confidently and effectively in the modern world.
- (iv) It helps students in working in team as well as individuals in order to use language purposefully and cooperatively.
- (v) It helps in observing by using all senses. In other words, the learner has opportunity of benefiting from noticing how others express similar meanings.
- (vi) It promotes a logical and reasoning method of thought
- (vii) It helps student to be creative and be good in problem solving.
- (viii) Practical task works promote engage are interest of students as well as developing a range of skills that helps in communicative activities. These language skills are listening, speaking, reading and writing.
- (ix) Good practical knowledge will empower oral communicator to be more effective in planning, manipulating, observing, analyzing and evaluating oral communication to achieve a desired goal.

6. METHODOLOGY

The population of the pilot study consists of the English language lecturers of Osun State Polytechnic Iree, Rufus Giwa Polytechnic Owo, Federal Polytechnic of Offa, and Federal Polytechnic Ede. The sample size of 25 respondents was drawn from the five institutions. Those that were purposely selected were lecturers who were then (during the time of the study) teaching GNS 102 and GNS 402. They were selected base on the fact that those two courses are directly oral communication oriented.

The purposive .sampling technique was adopted and it was used to selected twenty-five (25 Lecturers in all). They were selected as follow:

S/N	NAME OF SCHOOL	STATE	NO OF SELECTED RESPONDENTS
1	Osun State Polytechnic, ire	Osun state	6
2.	Rufus Giwa Polytechnic,Owo	Ondo state	6
3.	Federal Polytechnic, Offa.	Kwara state	6
4.	Federal Polytechnic, Ede.	Osun state	7
	TOTAL		25

To determine their attitude to the use of practical tasks for oral communication courses, a. W-item copies of questionnaires was administered to each of the elected respondents. The data collected were analysed using the frequency method and simple percentage for deduction and influences.

7. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The Item one result reveals that 23 of the respondents believe that the adoption of practical task in the teaching of oral communication would have a positive impact on the students while only 2 disagreed. In item two, all the respondents maintain that practical task would improve student performance and attainment. The item three shows that 24 agree that if is well planned and effectively implemented, would assist learners to be mentally and physically engaged in ways that are not possible in ordinary classroom situation while only 1 (%) disagree item four shows that 22 believe that practice task would help students to be able to manipulate ideas when necessary in day to day human endeavours while 3 do not agree. Item five also reveals that 19(%) agree that practical task can increase students’ sense of participation and can therefore increase their motivation while 6(%) disagreed. In item six, 13(%) believe that it is time-consuming exercise while 11(%) disagreed. In item seven, 13(%) see adoption practical in the teaching of oral communication an enjoyable while (8%) disagreed.

Item eight also reveals that 22(7%) prefer involving student in discussion, debates e.t.c. in the school to watching of Videos, while 3(%) disagreed. Item nine shows that 25(100%) believe that practical task is very relevant to communication. Finally, 24(%) maintained that there has not been significant inclusion of the practical task in the teaching of oral communication skills, while 1 (%) disagreed.

From the findings above, it can be deduced that;

- The adoption of practical task in the teaching of oral communication would have positive impact in the students.
- Practical in oral communication would improve student performance and attainment.
- If well panned and effectively implemented, practical task would assist learners to be mentally and physically engaged than in ordinary classroom situation.
- Practical task would help learners to manipulate ideas when necessary.
- Involvement in practical would increase learners motivation.
- Though it is very useful, it is time consuming.
- Practical task is enjoyable.
- Involvement of students in discussion debates etc is preferable to watching of Videos.
- Practical task is very relevant to the teaching of oral communication skills.
- There has not been any significant inclusion of practical in the teaching and learning of oral communication skills.

8. CONCLUSION

It has been clearly shown from the pilot study that the teachers have a highly positive attitude to practical in oral communication and English language as a whole because the adoption practical task in the teaching of oral communication has been identified as a virile tool of enhancing good performance of students in their day today activities. It is also seeing as good complement to classroom teaching as well as a better way of for motivation, students’ to excel in any communication activities.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i). Stakeholders like government, curriculum designers as well as teachers should ensure that practical task become essential component of language teaching and learning in order to develop student communicative knowledge.
- (ii) The learning objective should be clear in order to stimulate and motivate the students to learn oral communication skill.
- (iii) When necessary, necessary equipment that may be needed for effective understanding and performance of students should be made available.
- (iv) Separate time should be allocated for practical task in the teaching of oral communication in school timetable.
- (v) Lecturers of language and communication should also be specially trained for this task to be able to impact positively on the student so that the quality not the quantity of practical tasks that would be promoted and encouraged.

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