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Communicative Language Teaching Method as Solution to Students Performance in Oral English in Secondary Education

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Abstract:

This study to investigate the effect of the communicative language method as a solution to students performance of secondary school students, in Oral English The study adopted a true experimental design – a post-test only equivalent group design.

The study was carried out in Ogoja Education Zone which is one of the three education zones in Cross River state. The population of the study comprised all 2,137 secondary school two (SS II) students in Ogoja Education The instrument for data collection was the researcher developed tag Communicative Language Teaching Method in Teaching Oral English, The test was face validated by specialists in English Language and education. Two specialists were from Department of Arts/Education, University of Calabar Calabar and two In analysing the data, the means and the standard deviations were used to answer the research questions

Two research questions guided the study. The results of the study revealed that communicative method significantly enhanced students 'pronunciation of speech sounds more than the conventional method. There is no significant difference in the use of stress by the students taught with the conventional method and those taught with the communicative method. Based on the discussion of the findings of the study, the researcher recommended that oral English should be taught using the communicative method as it is hoped that this method will help to minimize the present problems which the students encounter in learning to communicate orally

Keywords: *Communicative language, teaching method students' performance i oral English and secondary education*

1. Background of the Study

The creation of the world was a product of speaking, as all created things were commanded to be, mostly the creation of man that was through an invitation 'lets create man in our image and likeness' (Gen 1:8) this makes Speaking an important aspect of language learning. In fact, it is seen as the main objective of language teaching and learning the teaching and learning of English language in Nigeria has a long history. With the advent of the British in the country, English was designated a socio-political and an economic language. Thus, the Nigerian constitution (2014:55) states that 'the business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English . . .'

Also, The Federal Ministry of Education, in the National Policy on Education (2013:16), indicates that 'the medium of instruction in the primary school shall be the language of the immediate environment for the first three years' and 'from the fourth year, English shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction...' In the light of this, therefore, English became a medium of communication in the country and the language of instruction in educational institutions; thus, the interest in learning the language increased. The imperative to learn the language was strengthened by the introduction of the language as a vital subject of study in the formal system of education especially in the secondary schools where it is a core subject. Due to this, the secondary school students' performance in the subject is constantly monitored both by the school and the society at large.

For years now, the performance of the Nigerian secondary school students in English language has deteriorated. World Bank Report of February, 2017, on the quality of Nigerian university graduates, notes that poor mastery of English language is one of the areas of degeneration in the educational system (Sunday Guardian, March 2019). Most often, comments on the fallen standard are based on the judgment that students no longer speak correct English. Many students have been observed to converse in pidgin English and at times in their mother tongue because they cannot express themselves adequately in the standard English (Mgbodile and Afangideh, 2005). For this reason, students ought to study oral English, properly. Studying oral English involves not only the learning of how to communicate orally in English but also to acquire the ability to understand and evaluate what others say (Akeredolu-Ale, 2005)), According to Mgbodile (2014), having competence in oral English is having the ability to understand and produce:

- The English sound system,
- Stress, intonation and rhythm,

- Correct grammatical usage of words, phrases and idioms,
- Different styles to suit different topics and various levels of audience,
- Social conventions of speaking.

The production of sounds in English comprises two features; the segmental and supra-segmental features. The segmental features are the consonants and the vowels. These are individual sound segments such as /b/, /k/, /e/ and /i/ while the supra-segmental features are stress and intonation. Knowledge of these sounds is important for intelligibility in communication (Onuigbo, 2003).

Stress is defined by Gimson [1980] as the acoustic energy which a speaker uses to produce a syllable. There are three degrees of stress: primary, secondary and contrastive stress but in this study, two degrees of stress shall be recognized: stressed and unstressed syllables. In English pronunciation, stress is very meaningful. A change in the stress pattern of a word may change completely the meaning and class of the word. Stress is problematic to many Nigerian students of English because the students' mother tongue [MT] is syllable-stressed while English Language is stress-timed.

Intonation is the rise and fall in the pitch of voice. This rise and fall is important because as Onuigbo (2001) states, it makes the listener understand the attitude of the speaker. Failure to make correct use of English intonation may lead to a collapse in communication between native and non-native speakers of English. This importance of intonation may be the reason why Elugbe (2017) notes that students cannot speak good English if they cannot handle stress and intonation.

An important aspect of speaking which is usually neglected in the teaching of Oral English is discourse. Discourse entails that the students engage in conversations or discussions, using language expressions they know. Ameh (2016), citing Obanya and Dada (1983), indicates that one of the skills of oral English which the teacher should teach his/her students is the ability to speak correct sentences in the language for purpose of conversation, self-expression and interaction in day-to-day activities. To engage in discourse, the students should know the social conventions of speaking. Social conventions of speaking are unwritten existing rules and ways which tell speakers of a language that language is used in socially acceptable ways to begin, interrupt and end conversations without being impolite (Mgbodile, 2014).

Proper teaching and learning of these aspects of oral English will lead to oral English proficiency. Oral English proficiency is often an evidence of competence in English as a second language (ESL). This is because most times, students tend to write as they speak. Students who mispronounce certain sounds or words write likewise. Thus, Elugbe (2017) states that the development of appropriate basic language skills in the learners is the proper way of preparing them for meaningful learning because every teaching and learning involves oral communication. It is necessary, therefore, that the learner is made to acquire this important tool. Unfortunately, more attention tends to be paid to the acquisition of the writing skill while the oral skill receives little attention.

The observations of these writers are in line with the statistical reports (1998 and 2003) of English Language Chief Examiners of West African Examination Council (WAEC). The reports indicate that mother tongue (MT) interference was a major hindrance to good essay writing and that speaking and reading culture have not taken root in our secondary schools. Several other reasons have been proffered as the causes of this deterioration. They include the non-availability of oral English teaching aids, lack of motivation (both for the teachers and the students), the insufficient time allotted to English on the school time table and the approach or method used in the teaching of the subject (Otagburuagu, 2016).

There is a general belief that the method or approach adopted in the teaching of English is contributory to the deteriorating performance of students in spoken English. This has inspired a lot of research in English Language pedagogy. Many writers are of the view that teaching method is very necessary in the teaching of English as a second language (TESL). In his work, Brown (2016) states that the use of a sole method or approach is inappropriate for good language teaching and learning. He is of the view that teaching should be based on a combination of different approaches to get the required results.

In the view of Bolunde (2005), the method used can affect the learner's achievement (positively or negatively), and that the method is a great weapon that the teacher should employ in his or her professional duty of enhancing the language ability of his students. Likewise, Richards (2001) observes that if teaching is successfully carried out, learning will occur and that successful teaching axiomatically implies good method application.

Teaching methods abound. They include among others the Traditional cum conventional method and the Communicative Language Teaching Method (CLT). The conventional method has its focus on the acquisition of vocabulary, according to the prescribed rules of grammar which the learner should join to form sentences. The method emphasizes more on the knowledge of the language than the use. In this method, language learning is grammar-based; its emphasis is on developing the ability to write, therefore, it neglects the development of the speaking skills (Mgbodile, 2014). Azikiwe (1998) notes that in the conventional method, the students learn the speech sounds like parrots. There is the neglect of the communicative skills with virtually little or no stress attached to accurate pronunciation and intonation (Baldeh, 2015).

In using the conventional method to teach oral English in Nigerian secondary schools, the teacher devotes a full lesson to the teaching of the phonology. The teacher spends 30-35 minutes of the lesson period teaching phonetic symbols which the students memorize. Memorizing here is taken as a process of drilling. The selected symbols are written in one column with the words in which they occur in another column:

Teacher: /i/ as in sit

Student: /i/ as in sit

Teacher: /e/ as in pen

Student: /e/ as in pen

The students are expected to internalize the target symbols and words through repetition, mimicry and memorization. Throughout the lesson period, little or no attempt is made to provide relevant contexts or situations for oral communication.

On the other hand, Communicative Language Teaching Method (CLT) is an approach to the teaching of second and foreign language that emphasizes interaction as both the means and ultimate aim of learning a language. CLT method can be described as a set of core principles about language learning and teaching; and, assumptions which can be applied in varying ways and which address various aspects of the process of teaching and learning (Richards, 2006). According to Brumfit & Johnson (2003) cited in Tomori (2018), CLT method is a reaction against the view of language as a set of structures; it is a reaction towards a view of language as communication; a view in which meaningful uses to which language is put play a central part. It is a movement away from the teaching of language where emphasis is on mastery of different aspects of grammar and practice through controlled activities such as memorization of dialogues and drills towards the use of pair/group work activities, role plays, project work: kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning. It sees language learning as acquiring the linguistic means to carry out different functions (Offorma, 2017) in (Okoh, 2006). That is, its focus is on making the learner acquire the ability to select and use appropriate language suitable for specific situations such as when playing games or shopping. It emphasizes speaking the language and using it to communicate in daily activities. Communicative Language Teaching method sees language learning as a social event which does not occur in a vacuum. The study of language should be in relation to the situations in which it is used.

The method shifts emphasis from linguistic competence to communicative competence. According to Hymes (1966) in Otagburuagu (1997), competence is what a speaker needs to know to communicate effectively in a culturally significant setting. Communicative competence includes knowing how to use language for various purposes and functions and knowing how to vary the use of language according to setting and participant; that is, knowing when and how to use language appropriately for written and spoken communication.

In CLT method, attempts are made to give learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) the natural setting for them to grapple with communicative activities so as not only to try to understand the message produced by other speakers but also to produce their own ideas and meaning (Amusegham, 2018). Thus, the communicative language teaching method emphasizes that language learning should be based on situations. In other words, language teaching should be geared towards using the language in real life and not only for the classroom purposes.

Every language teacher makes use of one method or another. Scholars such as Chomsky (1959) and Bruner (1960) have propounded all the existing theories but teachers are still the ones that live day-by-day with what happens in the classroom and know about the real needs of the students; and therefore, they try to find solutions to the problems they perceive in the class.

Generally, teachers want to know if a method is right and if applying its principles could lead to the learner's successful acquisition of the language (Cristo, 2005). Like many other applied linguists, Whitehead (2005) concludes that no particular method is in itself better than the other. It is interesting to note that he also agrees that there is a broadly accepted method – a communicative method – which incorporates many best characteristics of a variety of approaches.

Other research works which have attested to ineffectiveness of the conventional method include Osakwe (2016), Akabuogu (2016), and Igbokwe (2018). It is, therefore, worthwhile to find an alternative method. The basic qualities of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method tend to suggest that it is a method which will improve the performance of students in oral English.

The efficacy of the communicative language teaching method in the teaching of reading and writing is quite remarkable as the studies of many researchers such as Igbenyi (1998), Wangweiping (2017), and Anizoba (2017) show. The impact of CLT on oral English performance of students in Nigeria especially in Cross River Education zone is not known and it is worth investigating. It will be worthwhile to find out whether the success recorded in the other language skills (reading and writing) would be the same in Oral skill.

It has been observed that many Nigerian teachers of English employ more of the conventional method than the communicative method in teaching. It is suspected that the predominant use of the conventional method could be the reason for the poor performance of the secondary school students in spoken English.

It has been suggested that the method used in teaching can affect (positively or negatively) the students' communicative competence, and so, it is suspected that the inability of the students to effectively engage in communicative act could be due to the predominant use of the conventional method by the teachers instead of the communicative method. It has been observed that English Language teachers use mostly the conventional Method irrespective of the theoretical postulations of linguists that the Communicative Language Teaching [CLT] method is better. It is, therefore, necessary to have empirical evidence on the performance of students taught oral English with the two methods (conventional and communicative language teaching methods) respectively to ascertain whether any of the methods is better than the other in enhancing the students' oral communicative competence.

The aim of this study, therefore, is to find out whether there would be any significant difference in the performance of students taught oral English with the conventional method and those taught the same subject with the Communicative Language Teaching Method.

1.1. Research Questions

- To what extent do the mean performance scores on the use of social conventions of speaking by the students taught with the communicative language teaching method relatively differ from those of the students taught with the conventional method?
- What is the relative difference in the mean performance scores of the students taught oral English with the conventional method and those of the students taught with the communicative method?

2. Methodology

The study adopted a true experimental design – a post-test only equivalent group design. The design calls for no pre-test. According to (Ali,2006), the post-test only equivalent group design is highly recommended for experimental research in education because it is a powerful and effective design for minimising internal and external validity threats to an experiment, especially, where pre-testing is undesirable and will introduce internal validity threats

The study was carried out in Ogoja Education Zone which is one of the three education zones in Cross River state. The zone consists of all the state secondary schools in Cross River North, Bakwara, Obanliku, Obudu, Ogoja and Yala local government areas in the state. There are ninety -seven secondary schools in the zone

The population of the study comprised all 2,137 secondary school two (SS II) students in Enugu Education Zone. SSII students were chosen for the study because the scheme of work for the class contained the aspects of oral English the study covered.

Out of the ninety -seven secondary schools, one school was chosen. In the school, a class of 40 SSII students was randomly selected. The students were grouped into two through simple random sampling. Assignment to treatment conditions was by balloting. Both the experimental and control groups had 20 subjects each.

The instrument for data collection was the researcher developed tag Communicative Language Teaching Method in Teaching Oral English,

The test was face validated by specialists in English Language and education. Two specialists were from Department of Arts/Education, University of Calabar Bakwara, and two

In analysing the data, the means and the standard deviations were used to answer the research questions

3. Findings and discussion

3.1. Question One

To what extent do the mean performance scores on the use of social conventions of speaking by the students taught with the communicative language teaching method relatively differ from those of the students taught with the conventional method?

Group	N	X	SD
Experimental	20	4.5	2.25
Control	20	2.9	2.14
Total	40	3.7	2.17

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations of the Students' Performance on The Use of Social Conventions of Speaking

The performance of students in relation to the use of social conventions of speaking is shown in table 1. For the experimental group, the mean score is 4.5 with the standard deviation of 2.25 whereas for the control group, the mean is 2.9 and a standard deviation of 2.14. The means show that there is a relative difference in the mean scores of the two groups with the experimental group having a higher mean score. Hypothesis 4 is used to further examine the extent to which the two groups differ.

3.2. Research Question two

What is the relative difference in the mean performance scores of the students taught oral English with the conventional method and those taught with the communicative method?

Group	N	X	SD
Experimental	20	55.65	17.12
Control	20	42.15	13.9
Total	40	49.9	15.5

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations of Students' Performance in Oral English

Table 2 shows that the experimental group obtained an overall mean score of 55.65 and standard deviation, 17.12, which are much higher than 42.15 and 13.9, the mean and standard deviation of the control group. This, therefore, indicates that there is a relative difference in the mean performance scores of the two groups.

3.3. The Students' Performance in the Use of Social Conventions of Speaking

The study's result shows that there is a significant difference in the performance of students in the experimental group and those in the control group. The experimental group performed better than the control group. This is in line with the earlier evidence in the literature which reveals that the CLT method has a great impact on the students' achievement in English as second language learning. Cristo (2005) indicates that the CLT method is very effective in the acquisition of social conventions of speaking. Cristo's study reveals a significant effect of the CLT method on the students' use of conversational expressions. As such, the result is in line with the findings of this study.

3.4. The Effect of Method on the Performance of Students in Oral English

The evidence from the results of this study shows that the CLT method produced higher mean scores than the conventional method.

The findings of this study agree with the findings in the earlier research works of Igbenyi (1998), Osakwe (2016) and Wangweiping (2017). These studies report that CLT method has significant effects on the students' learning outcomes. Igbenyi's work stresses the effectiveness of CLT in teaching reading; Osakwe's study shows that communicative task-based method (CTELT) increased the achievement of students in different ability levels in the Use of English Course and Wangweiping's study reveals a positive correlation between the oral testing form and student's performance in oral English. Wangweiping maintains that oral testing form not only improves the students' pronunciation but also makes teachers work hard to improve their students' communicative competence.

It could be inferred that the students in the experimental group of this study performed better because they fully and actively engaged in co-operative activities rather than individualistic approach to learning unlike the students in the control group. The co-operative (pair/group work) approach employed in this study support the view that the CLT method has a great effect on the students' performance in oral English. Thus, the students' active engagement and the teacher's facilitating role account for the significant difference in the performance reported in this research work.

4. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

- The CLT method should be used by teachers in the teaching of Oral English since it makes the students participate actively in the learning.
- Students should be regularly engaged in group discussions. This helps them to be fluent and use, orally, correct grammatical expressions and social conventions of speaking.

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