

Need Analysis of Oral English in Primary Schools: An Overview of a Project Proposition

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the concept of Oral English, need analysis of Oral English, the place of English language in the Nigerian Educational System, the Place of Oral in the teaching of English language, Universal Basic Education Policies and Objectives with regard to Oral English Teaching, and the current state of Oral English teaching in Primary Schools. The paper also discussed challenges militating against effective teaching of oral English in primary schools and highlighted ways in which it can be enhanced through proper provision of resources like good English textbooks, qualified teachers, radio, television charts and well equipped Language Laboratory. Oral English is an important aspect of the English Language. The Teaching of Oral English has been very problematic over the years. Oral English is supposed to be practice oriented, however, more often than not, it is taught theoretically and without any practical or instructional materials like the radio cassette recorders, pre-recorded tapes, speech organs charts, model passages etc. to enhance and facilitate the teaching of Oral English. The paper concludes that Government should adhere strictly to English Language policy and make provision for special English teachers to be sent to all primary schools.

Keywords: *English Language, Need Analysis, oral English, primary schools, project proposition*

INTRODUCTION

It is a truism that education is the greatest weapon with which man can achieve great heights. It is fundamental in the development of any nation or people. Government the world over including the Federal Government of Nigeria recognize this and decided to review education policy to capture the united nations standard (Ziongina,

2000, Urujzian, 2016). This is a welcome development. The educational policy which captures the United Nations Standard is the Universal Basic Education.

The UBE program, which was formally launched by former President Olusegun Obasanjo on 30th September 1999, aims at achieving among other objectives the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills... needed for laying solid foundation for lifelong learning (UBE implementation Guidelines, 2000). In this regard, language which is God's greatest gift to man, and according to Haluta and Carcino (1977), provides one of the most readily accessible windows into the nature of the human mind, has a very important role to play in a multi lingual world such as the one we live in. this is because a working knowledge of language other than ones mother tongue is an added advantage that could always give one an edge over others.

Urujzian (2012) cited in Enang (2017) opined that

“English Language is not only one of the subjects on the primary school curriculum; it is also the medium of instruction through which all other subjects are taught. It is one of the legacies bequeathed to us by the colonial masters. It is the National official Language of Nigeria with well over four hundred and fifty (450) ethnic groups”.

English Language comprises different aspects, syntax, morphology, graphology phonology, and semantics at specialized levels. In the teaching of English language, areas such as oral English, lexis and structures, composition, registers, vocabulary development are usually emphasized. Teaching Oral English in a second Language situation like ours requires greater attention. The greatest challenge confronting any teacher of English Language in this type of situation is inter-ferece or inter-fluence. To effectively teach Oral English, it is necessary that the teacher should employ a variety of speech drills. These drills should feature consonants and vowels; especially those ones lacking in the mother tongue. Examples of such consonants include the dental fricatives, the palato-alveolar fricatives, the palato-alveolar affricates etc. Students should be drilled through the use of minimal pairs. Examples are word initial, word medial, and word terminal. Students should also be given the privilege and opportunity of listening to model recorded speech on articulation, phonation and stress (Enang, 2017).

They should also be allowed to engage in dialogue or discussion, affording them to put what they have learnt into practice. The teacher should involve them in loud reading during Oral English lessons. Okoh (2006) opined that. this gives the teacher opportunity of ensuring that the students articulation of words are standard.

The Concept of Oral English

A number of dimensions of speech are included within oral English. For most language teachers oral English is largely identified with the pronunciation of individual sounds (consonant and vowels) and to a lesser extent, with the stress and intonation. It is difficult to divorce oral English from communication and from other aspects of language use. Sounds are a fundamental part of the process by which we communicate and comprehend lexical, grammatical and socio-linguistic meaning (Enang, 2017). Oral English class is a where the segmental features are taught, voice setting features are taught and prosodic features, are taught. Segmental features being minimal units of sound defined in phonetic terms. Here the phonological inventories of English Language are taught (vowels and consonants and environments they occur). Voice setting relates with the general articulator characteristics of stretches of speech. Here, manners of articulation and place of articulations could come in. learners could be taught how to lower or raise their voices to lay emphasis or create a literary effect or for fore grounding purpose the third dimension is prosodic features which involve stress and intonation, pitch. While other co-articulation features are elisions, contractions, assimilations of neighboring sound among others (Enang, 2017).

The Concept of Need Analysis of Oral English

Need is defined as the discrepancy between an ideal situation and a status quo. Need is a, gap or difference between what is and what is expected. It is the difference between what is observed and what is anticipated? (Dike 1998, Urujzian 2018) According to Gupta (2007) and Urujzian (2016), need assessment is a process for determining and addressing needs or gap' between current conditions and desired condition.

Similarly, Stout (1995) and Urujzian (2016) had defined need assessment as a systematic exploration of the way things are and the way they should be. Four steps of conducting a need assessment have been laid down by Brinkershoff (1987). The First step according to this source is to check actual performance against existing standards that is current situation and desired situation. It is this gap between the current situation and the desired situation that will identify our needs, purpose and objectives. The second step is to arrange one's needs according to how important or pressing they are and the third step is to find out the cause of the problem while the fourth and last step is to proffer possible solutions to the problems.

The Place of English Language in the Nigerian Educational System

Past and present educational policy had shown considerable interest in the teaching of English language in the school system. The national policy (1981) and (2004) and even the 9-year Basic Education curriculum accord the English Language the pride of place as a core subject at all levels of education. The policy according to the 9-year Basic Education (2008) must be implemented as follows:

- > The lower basic education (which covers primary 1-3)
- > Middle basic education (which covers primary 4-6)
- > The upper basic education (which covers junior secondary one to three) as English studies

These have been recognized by the National Policy in Education (1981) and even the revised (2004) which is the root of the 6-3-3-4 system of education. The question is since this was recognized and enshrined in the past Education policy, what is the state of our education system as regard English Language today? The answer is that the Nigerian education according to Ekpo (2009) is a system that is in a state of confusion and disarray. Ekpo (2009) further observes that primary graduate of yester years could speak better English than most of the university graduates of today. Today, there is a loud cry that the standard of education generally is low compared to the time of the missionaries and the colonial government (Enang, 2017).

In their opinion, Udoka, Enang and. Utin (2018) declare that the general yearning for the new educational policy and the general dissatisfaction with the existing one vis-à-vis the poor communication ability .of majority of the product of the 6-3-3-4 shows that our educational processes with respect to the teaching of English language has made the system to be irrelevant to the goal, aspirations and visions of the Nigerian nation. Whatever is the cause of this marked difference in the performance of the products of the 6-3-3-4 system with respect to the spoken English constitutes the challenges of this paper (Urujzian, 2016).

The Place of Oral in the Teaching of English

Out of the five areas of the English Language, namely, composition, comprehensive, grammar and summary, an aspect that records the highest degree of poor performance is oral English. Urujzian (2016) declares that

"The aim of English language teaching is to expose the language to the student as it is spoken. Poor foundation in oral speech has contributed to the poor usage of English phonics among

primary/secondary school students. One of the factors responsible for the mass failure includes poor handling of the oral aspects of the course. Too little attention is paid to oral English by teachers. It is not accorded a prominent position in the school curriculum.

According to Urujzian (2018), the teachers often skimmed over pronunciation drill. Oral English is most hated and most carefully avoided by teachers and their students. Some teachers lack the competence and willingness to teach oral skills. Ikonta (2002), on his article Compulsory Oral English at primary and secondary school level, carried out a research on the state of the teaching of spoken English in nine schools in Lagos State, fifty-two English Language teachers made-up the subject for the study. The design of the study was survey questionnaires interview and observation were used for data collection. The result shows that many of the teachers are incompetent to teach spoken English. The teaching procedure left much to be desired while instructional materials/aids were completely absent in the observed schools.

The teachers were not knowledgeable and confident enough while teaching the course. The common characteristics of the teachers observed was the preponderance of Li interference problem exhibited. It was not difficult to discern the teachers' linguistics background as they taught. As one of the teachers interviewed put, "we the teachers are not exempted from the influence of the mother tongue, we are not too good, and in pronunciation, we give what we have to the students. Government should employ specialists to handle oral English".

Otagburuag and Enuesike (1998) cited in Urujzian (2018) carried out a random selection of fourteen tertiary institutions made up of (11) Universities, (eight Federal and three States) and three Polytechnics to study the skills used in English classes in Nigeria tertiary institutions. They used questionnaire in collecting the data from 1500 students and 350 lecturers across the institution chosen. The instrument was randomly distributed to the population. The return was hundred percentages as they personally delivered and directly collected after completion. From the data collected, it is clear that speaking and listening are completely neglected in the use of English classes in Nigeria tertiary institutions. The skills emphasized are reading and writing.

Universal Basic Education Policies/Objectives and Oral English Teaching

The Universal Basic Education which came out of the 1990 world conference on Education for all framework for action held in Jontlen is in line with the requirement of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) which spells out the

guidelines of its implementation to include:-Government shall as an when practicable provide:

- Free and compulsory and universal primary education.
- Free secondary education among others.

The universal declaration of education by the united nations is due to the recognition of education as a veritable tool to individual as well as societal development. The objectives of the primary school have been theoretically formulated in the National Policy on Education as follows (a) The inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy, and the ability to communicate effectively among others but our concern in this paper is that every primary school student should read and speak fluently. But the big questions here are how fluently can a child speak? How effectively can the student communicate? How well! Where the pupils are not exposed to the speech symbols (phonemes), stress patterns of words and the identification of consonants, clusters and silent letters in words from early to late Primary Education? How well! When some teachers in primary schools did not come across the current (IPA) phonetic symbols in the days of their training as teachers? Instead they went through the old time consuming examination that included tests of listening comprehension, oral production and oral composition which has been phased out for a more elaborate one. What then should be done at the primary level of education? (Enang, Urujzian and Maduewesi, 2015)

Current State of Oral English Teaching in Primary School

This paper is a re-examination of the status of oral English language teaching in the primary schools. Oral English as stated above refers to pronunciation in the discourse-based view comprising vowels and consonants, segmental and voice-setting, and prosodic features. From this perspective the effect of voice setting, stress and intonation as well as co-articulatory phenomena, will be given a greater importance in language teaching in the primary school. Udoka, Enang and Utin (2018) viewed that since the goals of language teaching have changed under the impact of communicative views of language and interactive theories of language learning. Pronunciation traditionally viewed as a component of linguistic rather than communicative competence of an aspect of accuracy rather than of conversational fluency has come to be regarded as being of limited importance in a communicatively oriented curriculum. This current comprehension-based approach to teaching English language de-emphasizes the need for correct production in the early stages of second language learning. Also recent changes in oral examination patterns have brought uncertainty on the role of pronunciation in English language

learning (Enang *et al.* 2015). Thus it is not an overstatement to say that the primary education has received the greatest brunt of neglect from the feel and touch of oral English teaching. Many writers have observed that the Nigerian school system is failing in its responsibility to give learners proficiency in English. Ojetunde and Umolu (1991) and Enang, Urujzian and Udoka (2013) argue that the vast majority of children who finish government primary schools are literate neither in English nor in a Nigerian language. Enang *et al.* (2013) maintained that

“Common sense has it that foundation matters in every new beginning. Since the whole idea of education revolves around language education”. It is therefore pertinent that the child must only learn other subjects effectively when he has mastered the language of the school (English language) one cannot master English well without being able to articulate (pronounce) English words correctly, laying emphasis where emphasis is needed and stressing where it is needed knowing fully well that ambiguity, a hydra headed barrier to smooth and effective communication is often caused by poor pronunciation of lexical items.

Currently in our primary schools, teachers who never studied English as their core subject at the teacher training level are compelled to teach oral English. Enang & Urujzian (2013) stated that

while hungry authors that are not conversant with the international phonetics symbols write phonetic books and lobby for their poorly written texts to be imposed on primary schools.

They write /0/ and /J/ as phonemes. No one is actually interested on how the native speaker articulates the English words and much emphasis is on the nativisation of the so-called Nigerian English. A careful observation or examination of the national goals for English language education reveals that, the following kinds of inputs are implied if Universal Basic Education objectives for English studies are not to remain at the theoretical level:-

- There must be well trained and qualified English teachers to teach English in primary schools.
- Resources which embody the relevant learning experiences that the objectives imply must be available. Such resources include: good English textbooks, qualified teachers, radio, television, charts and a well-equipped language laboratory. Considering the above expectations, the resources of existing primary schools shows the gap between what are expected as inputs to enable the primary level of education function effectively in and what

currently exists with regards to oral English teaching. All these together make government language dream unrealizable (Enang & Urujzian, 2013).

Challenges of Teaching Oral English in Primary School

Student-Teacher Ratio: The National policy on education recommends teacher-student ratio of 1:20. There is an alarming situation currently in Akwa Ibom State with its free and compulsory primary and secondary education. In this situation, it is difficult to estimate the teacher - student ratio especially where a given class has A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I divisions with one or two teachers handling them. The near remedy to the problem is to employ more qualified English teachers, so that, there is one qualified teacher for a typical class size of 20 prescribed in the National policy on education (Enang, Urujzian and Maduewesi 2015).

The Cost of Learning Facilities: The cost of building and maintaining classrooms, providing oral English learning facilities like good English text books, radio, televisions, recorded tapes, charts and well-equipped laboratory are staggering as the environment figures themselves. In the face of this huge cost, many schools remain starved of the learning resources that make education qualitative. The teacher's methods of effective teaching remain unused because of a lack of teaching materials. The replacement of obsolete materials becomes very difficult especially in the face of the failing value of naira (Enang, Urujzian and Maduewesi, 2015)

The Problem of Teachers: Qualified teachers of English language are still in short supply. Even where they are sufficient in terms of numbers and qualification, their condition of service do not provide enough motivation for them to invest themselves in teaching English. Thus, in the absence of job - satisfaction, many teachers fly at half-mask, causing an artificial shortage of English teachers since each of operating at less than full capacity. Constant teacher unrest contributes to poor quality learning. Denger (1991) and Enang & Urujzian (2013) opined that

since so many teachers are needed to cope with the soaring enrollment figures in primary and secondary schools, particularly when shifts are being advocated (separate English teachers will be needed for each shift. The naira cost of training English teachers in order to save cost is to lower the quality of education. Adequate funds should be expended to produce well trained English teachers who, all being well, are most likely to raise and maintain the standard of education.

Apart from paying teachers a reasonable good salary for their significant contribution to manpower development and all, they should also enjoy a good housing policy and other forms of social welfare services. The teacher's spiritual reward is in "Heaven", but since "Heaven" does not talk of materialism, let them enjoy a bit of material reward on earth like everybody else.

Lack of Adequately Equipped Language Laboratories for Effective Oral English Practical Learning: Oral English is supposed to be practice oriented, however, more often than not, it is taught theoretically and without any practice or instructional materials like radio cassette recorders, pre-recorded tapes, speech organs charts, model passage to enhance and facilitate the teaching of oral English.

1. No ready jobs for programme products
2. Greater government emphasis on other programmes than on English language education. This is detrimental to its existence.

Finally, the need to reposition, refocus, update and modify the existing programmes offered in our English language education and more cannot be over-stressed. Oral English should be separated from general English in the primary school time table. Also, expert in phonetics and phonology should be paid to do a routine inspection of teachers of English in primary school.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is alleged that planning strategies adopted by the government for primary schools do not always allow the government to provide all the necessary facilities, equipment, staff and relevant environment for effective language policy implantation. It is clear from this re-examination of the status of oral English teaching in primary school that there is a significant gap between intended aims and goals of the national language policy and the realization of the goals. Here the objectives of primary Education will regard to oral English and their implication to the nature of educational resources have been critically discussed, scarcity of qualified English teachers together with the collapse of the Nigerian economy, the waves of political instability, corruption, poorly written oral English language text books has created serious gap between what is and what ought to be in terms of oral English language proficiency.

It is recommended in the light of the above discussion that:-

- Government should be sincere to the language policy, and make provision for special English teachers to be sent to primary schools. This is because in

the entire world, there is no educational system that can rise above the standard of its teachers.

- Since teacher's competence in English language is of prime importance, seminars, workshops and symposia should be organized to update teachers knowledge of current international phonetic symbols and current issues in Oral English.
- English text book writers who are not well vested in oral English should be asked to review their books or have them banned from teaching/writing in areas they do not have sufficient knowledge on.
- Oral English should not be incorporated into general English in the primary school timetable. It should be singled out as a separate subject so that if a teacher runs away from teaching it, it will be quickly noticed.
- Expert in phonetics and phonology should be paid to do routine inspection of the teachers of English in primary schools, and
- Serving teachers should be retrained on phonetics and phonology.

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