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An Investigation Into The Oral English Communicative Skills Competence Of Some Lecturers In Shehu Shagari College Of Education, Sokoto

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ABSTRACT

The primary medium, undoubtedly, of enhancing learning of any educational programme is language. The clear and accurate understanding of a language of communication by the lecturer is very imperative for any meaningful learning to take place. Since in Nigeria, the main medium of instruction is English Language, proper and clear understanding of English language and its rules on the part of the lecturers is very imperative. When this is lacking, there is every tendency that the message intended for the learners listeners will not be passed accurately. It is based on this belief that this research investigated the communication skills competencies of some lecturers in English language while delivering their lectures and how this can affect learning positively or negatively in Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto. The research adopted physical presentation approach where by lecture presentations of sampled lecturers were recorded in the lecture Halls while in progress and the lecturers were not aware. 22 lecturers were randomly sampled and their lecture presentations were recorded which were later analysed and data generated. Out of the 22 recorded lecture presentations, 10 were used for the analysis and the remaining 12 were discarded due to poor recording and lack of audacity. The research found out that there were many errors patterning to use of English Language in the presentations of the sampled lecturers which can adversely affect learning. Some of these errors include Inappropriate use of pre-positions, Concord/Agreement or problems of subject and verb, errors in sounds pattern, errors in words pattern and Code Switching /Direct Method among others. The research recommended that Teachers or lecturers with appropriate communication skills and competences should be employed, there should be mentorship in the College so that the newly employed lecturers can be groomed by the older and well experienced ones, Lecturers should be trained from time to time on communication skills and improvement of language, Quality Assurance Unit of the College should try to identify the areas of problems of lecturers whether relating to communication or delivery of content or knowledge of the subject matter as a whole, or lack of adequate teaching pedagogy and other shot-comings that will affect proper teaching and learning in the College.

Keywords: Lecturers, Teaching, presentation, grammar, English Language

INTRODUCTION

Language is primarily a means of communication by speech, a means which is extended by reading and writing. A pre-requisite for any academic success is a good mastery of basic communicative skills in the language of education- English in the case of Tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Communicative skills are

techniques for expressing ideas effectively devoid of general, abstract or vague words. While on the other hand, communicative competence is concerned with the knowledge and ability which speakers need to possess in order to use language appropriately in communicative structures. Since students are the centre of all educational aims the teacher must have the knowledge and ability to teach, as well as the ability to explain concepts in a simple and imaginative manner using the correct language skills. When some teachers cannot effectively make use of an intricate structure of specific rules and guiding principles to explain their subject matter the way it ought to be taught, incalculable harm can be done to the students. It is against this background that this research seeks to investigate into the communicative skills competence of some lecturers in Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto and see how they affect students learning and performance.

Statement of the Problem

Evidence abounds from research or otherwise that about three decades ago there has been a dwindling down trend of the performance of students leading to mass failures mainly due to their inability to put down on paper concepts, ideas, definitions of what they have learnt or grasped in appropriate English on paper. Why do we most often blame the students? Can they give what they don't have? Is it not then a situation of garbage in garbage out? With the introduction of its compulsory Basic Education in the country, there was a massive increase in the enrolment of pupils and definitely a corresponding increase in the employment of teachers qualified or otherwise. This phenomenon continued to affect the schools, institutions of learning until it becomes evident to us that the communication English of a good number of staff is a serious cause for concern that can be heard, discuss openly in formal and informal gatherings. In SSCOE, Sokoto, it becomes even more worrisome when some of the good students) come out openly to criticise some teachers. It becomes more worrisome when use hear some students saying they attend some lectures not because they want to but because they want to copy some of the numerous communication errors some lecturers commit while delivering their lectures so that they will have a good laugh at the end.

Many factors also aggravated the situation. Some of which include nepotism, tribalism, politics, indigineship issues, lack of exposure to environments that provide the correct model/situations/materials of correct use of grammar, vocabulary, intonation etc at the early years of learning when a child's brain is a *Tabula Rasa* and can easily assimilate.

Lack of communicative skills in English is not restricted to the academia, but offices, banks, and many formal set-ups to the extent that many speak pidgin/broken English or switch completely to the mother tongue if they find a partner. Lack of language competence performance has made people to look incompetent, unsuccessful and generally incapacitated.

Objectives of the Study

The broad aim and objectives of this research is to investigate the communicative skills competence of some lecturers in Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto (SSCOE) in English while delivering their lessons. Therefore, the study intends to Identify:

1. Why some lecturers cannot teach the little they know in their disciplines in English Language
2. Why some lecturers cannot express themselves adequately and clearly in English for the understanding of their students?
3. Some use of unusual expressions, constructions, ungrammatical expressions, misuse of words, wrong pronunciations etc.
4. Ways that will help lecturers in the College to improve their communication skills in their lessons in English

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The success of any educational organization depends to a large extent upon the success of its members particularly the teaching staff, in making themselves understood by the category of students they teach. The ability of every teacher or lecturer to speak clearly, correctly and convincingly, in the process of teaching, will play a vital role in helping to revive the fallen standard of education in our educational systems. The fact that, there is a strong link between communicative behaviour and educational success is

supported by several scholars. Ritchie and Bhatia (1996) cited works of scholars like Hymes, Lyons and Chomsky who have all demonstrated the importance of language in cognitive or intellectual development. A pre-requisite for academic success is a good mastery of the basic communicative skills in the language of education. The language is the medium of teaching and evaluating knowledge in schools, colleges and universities. If a mere knowledge of English is regarded as an index of “educatedness” then certainly a fair degree of proficiency in speaking the language is considered as a mark of good education. Barth (2011) asserts that the teachers’ skills in building a coherent learning culture in the classroom and his learners provide an essential foundation. Therefore, this development of communicative skills in the teachers become imperative. It becomes even more imperative in a second language situation where the learners and even the teachers are prone to mother tongue interference at phonological, grammatical and semantic levels. Mother tongue interference can reduce communicative proficiency in the second language in speech or writing. In fact, one important indication of one’s mastery of a language is the ability to communicate effectively in the language in both oral and written terms.

Notion of skill

According to the Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary, (2006) 6th edition, a skill is seen as an ability to do something well especially because you have learned and practiced it. Ritchie (1996:69) asserts that a skill is not the same thing as knowledge, but rather the acquisition of a complex cognitive skill. He further went on to say that somewhat similar to skill are the “operating principles” (ops) i.e, how to deal with input, how to store information, and how to produce linguistic output..

The notion of communicative competence according to Chomsky (1988) is the cognitive state that encompasses all those aspects of form and meaning and their relation, including underlying structures that enter into that relation, which are properly assigned to the specific sub-system of the human mind that relates representation of form and meaning.....

Communicative skill is concerned with the knowledge and ability which speakers need to possess in order to use language appropriately in communicative situations. Thus, according to Ritchie (1996), to say that someone had the imaginative competence for English means that, that person has represented internally the ‘exceptionalness’ principles of universal grammar (UG) as well as those principles associated with parameters set in a particular value in accordance with his or her experience of English, namely, the structure of English. He further noted that in contrast, to linguistic competence “pragmatic competence (solving problem in a practical and sensible way rather than by having fixed ideas and theories underlies the ability to use such knowledge along with the conceptual system to achieve certain end purposes”

Bell (1976) asserts that the idea of communicative competence defines how language user is able to pass judgement of grammatically as well as recognize acceptable speech act in a social situation. According to Chomsky (1965) competence in a language – the model of what speakers know when they know a language- a grammar of that language- Thus, communicative competence is perceived and seen as being broader than ordinary linguistic competence. Therefore, in order to achieve communicative competence, a language user should be familiar with the linguistic rules governing his language as well as the non-linguistic factors that bear on the process of communication.

Oral Discourse

Oral discourse in everyday life is extended in all sorts of unpredictable ways. In aiming at communicative competence, teachers have to do better than produce what Rivers (1981) has labeled—foreign language cripples with the necessary muscles and sinews, but unable to work. Oral language is the ability to speak and write, which are the primary ways people communicate with each other. As a spoken language it is a complex system that involves connection sounds and meanings. Oral language is the system through which we use spoken words to express knowledge, ideas and feelings <https://blog.heinemann.com>>what.. Oral English like all forms of speech is made up of successions or sequences of sounds produced by the organs of speech <https://aduklushs.com>>lessons>less... Williams (1990) refers to mode of transmission and expression which is conveyed through spoken words via the mouth. Oral communication therefore means verbal expression by words of mouth as a means to convey ideas, emotion and feelings.

Speaking is conveying ideas, feelings, emotions etc through usage of words via the mouth. Speaking (oral communication) is the most demanding skill for the teacher. Oral language is more connected with ears and tongues since it involves listening and speaking. Ramar (2016) noted that speaking spoken English entails operating systems of stress, rhythm, intonation and juncture; it involves the use of greetings, formulae, slangs, idioms and clichés; it requires familiarity with images, allusions, even current linguistic fashion, and it means using all these much more readily than is permitted in writing; it requires the automatic use of the scale of formality—informality (Perren, (1968). Ediger (2023) asserts that the English of speech tends to be different from the English of writing in some fairly obvious ways. For example; in writing we usually have time to plan our message, to think about it carefully while writing, and to revise it afterwards if necessary. (In speech, unless it is, say a lecture prepared in advance), we have no time to do these in speech but must shape our message as we go. And as we go the teacher who teaches has to use the communicative language which is English to impact knowledge. And as a teacher he or she is expected to plan the lesson he or she is going to teach ahead of time. But do some of our lecturers do so? We shall come to this issue later.

Bayo (2019) wrote that speaking is a means through which communication takes place. By speaking we form the message to be communicated in a linguistically valid way that can be comprehended by people. Pandey (2010) asserts that the most frequent form of communication occurs when one person speaks in a particular language and the person spoken to understand. These modes are based on sounds which are the most natural medium of the study of language. This is in connection with Ramar (2016)'s views. Who pointed out that oral language is more connected with ears and tongue. This becomes necessary that for a teacher to teach effectively he or she has to provide the listener or student more clues that he or she needs for easy comprehension. The spoken English of the teacher should be a standard one --- fluent and as competent in speech as well as in writing. Those who use the English language as a medium must also be aware of their responsibility for the growth of English; if only the code conditions the message and the available language controls the learning of the subject which they teach (Perren, 1968). Again, when English is the medium of the teaching subject like Physics, Chemistry, Education courses, Economics, Social Studies, Computer Science, to mention but a few, then it becomes necessary that the teacher provides more clues for the easy comprehension of the spoken English language to the learner.

Communication and Oral English

Oracy is the ability to communicate logically and fluently in speech using the word of mouth. The power of expression in lucid language. Man is a communicating human being. Speaking and listening to other human beings is necessary in natural communicative activities. There are many intelligences that are closely related to the speaking skills. Probably, the most pervasive characteristics of human social interaction, so pervasive that we hardly find it remarkable, is that we talk. Communication, according Yule (2010) is the primary function of human language which is not a distinguishing feature. Rivers (1991) asserts that in communication process, we speak in order to convey the message that we have, and in this way, we encode a message. At the same time, we expect the listener to interpret or decode this message,. In this way we frame our message and the linguistic elements to express it so as to arouse in the receiver the meaning we are trying to convey.

METHODOLOGY

Research of this nature needs different approaches. Therefore, multifarious methods were adopted in carrying out this research as follows:

Research Design

The researchers intends to use different language roles like grammar, use of verbs and tenses etc to assess the lecturers

Population of the Study

The total number of the lecturers in the College is about 650 but only 22 lecturers were randomly sampled due to many factors instead of the 50 earlier planned to be sampled.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

Random sampling and recording of lecturers took place across the 7 Schools in the College

Instrument for Data Collection/Materials

This study used various modern devices to record the lessons of 22 lecturers across the schools of the College. This was done at different times and venues while randomly sampled lecturers were making their lecture presentations. At a point, the spy recorder was discontinued because of its problems to use. The researchers therefore resorted to recording with phones

Method of Data Collection

- a) The researchers secured consent permit from the College Management prior to commencement of data collection
- b) Recording of lectures presented by the randomly selected lecturers was done through Class Representatives who were used as research assistants. The lecture presentations of 22 lecturers were recorded while their lectures were progressing and without them knowing.
- c) After the recording period, the researchers collated the various recorded lessons of the lecturers and played them severally trying to identify the communication skills errors or otherwise. during this process it was discovered that 12 out of the 22 recorded presentation were faulty. The recordings were poor and cannot be understood clearly. Therefore, the researchers were compelled to restrict themselves to only 10.
- d) Analyzing these lessons based on the rules of English language to ascertain the degree of Communicative skills of the lecturers and show the extent at which the contents of these lessons were accurately presented to the learners was very tedious. The analysis was based on the rules of English Language. Many aspects of English Language were used to analyze the presentations. Among these rules used were the use of subject-verb agreement, inappropriate use of preposition, nouns, sentence structures, patterns among others.

DATA PRESENTATION

Procedure of Transcribing and Deciphering of the Recorded Lectures

The process of transcribing and deciphering of the lectures recorded was very tedious. It involves listening to the presentation word by word, and writing each word and stopping the recording frequently, listening to the reordering phrase by phrase, for each word written the playing of the recorded lecture has to be paused to ensure that the correct word is recorded. More over, for each phrase, the recording has to be listened to, paused written and continued. Finally, each sentence has to be listen to severally, then written, re-checked for confirmation and accuracy before proceeding to the next. It was really time consuming and we have to ensure meticulously that we have the original words of the lecturers.

Findings

The following were the findings of the research

1. Errors in sentence patterns/ structure words
2. None use of structural signals (articles etc) or inappropriate use of them
3. Errors in words pattern
4. Incomplete statements
5. Abuse of hesitation fillers
6. Errors in sounds pattern
7. Abuse of the use of the Direct Method/Code-switching
8. Concord/Agreement
9. Redundancy/ verbosity/ use of unnecessary words
10. Inappropriate use of pre-positions

DISCUSSION ON THE FINDINGS

Sentence Pattern

Sentence pattern refers to the appropriate ways in which sentences are put together to make sense.. in English our sentences usually operate using patterns which include subject, verb and object. Sentence

pattern is the order and type of phrases and clauses in sentences. There are four types of sentence patterns which include simple sentence, compound sentence, complex sentence and compound complex sentence. Ironically, in the research, we discovered that this aspect of English Language was not applied knowingly or unknowingly by the sampled lecturers

Code Switching /Direct Method

Direct method is the use of the mother tongue instead of the official language in teaching in the classroom. Code switching on the hand is the phenomenon common among bilingual speech communities, in which speakers switch from one language to another within the same conversation (McGregor, 2009). By making choices among the available languages within the process of the lectures some lecturers were observed to code switch from the national language (English) to vernacular (Hausa) which is the predominant spoken language in Sokoto State. Therefore, failing to vary their teaching within a single discuss (English Language) with either the motive of serving their goals of making their lessons understood by the students they code switch in a bit to achieve the communicative purpose or they code switch because they lack the communicative skills in the official language to impact the required knowledge.

The implications of this are that learners will not be encouraged to learn the communication skills in English; they will not be able to communicate the ideas taught to them adequately during examinations because the questions required them to respond in English language and finally, the method will affect learners that do not understand the vernacular, here Hausa.

None use of structural signals (articles etc) or inappropriate use of them

Structural signals refer to words that help to bring out the intended meaning in a sentence from a speaker. This includes words like a, an, the, they, it, we, he, she, etc. these words help to bring out the meanings in a sentence and show where the speaker is making reference. Let alone, the words do not have much meaning in themselves but serve as cement which binds sentences together.

Errors in words pattern

This is another communication errors detected from the presentations of the sampled lecturers. Words pattern refers to the sequence of consonants and vowels in a word which can range from basic to more complex. The arrangement of letters within words or the way words are placed in a sentence is another meaning of word pattern. Again in the area of word structure we found that there is a regular pattern. Normally an 's' on the end of a noun means that the noun is in the plural. If the that 'S' in on the end of the verb, it means that it is in the present tense, and subject is in the third person. Similarly, the suffix--- 'ed' shows that the verb is in the past tense. Though there are exceptions to this rule, but this is in most cases the normal pattern.

Incomplete statements

Incomplete statement refers to sentences that are stopped half way without being complete thereby making the meaning of what the lecturer wants to convey to the learners ambiguous or leaving them in state of confusion or uncertainty..

Abuse of hesitation fillers

By hesitation fillers we refer to exclamations like 'Mmm' 'eem', 'Iim', 'ahm', 'am', 'ehm', 'ehem' etc. Hesitation is the act of pausing while communicating. It happens mostly when the vocabulary to express ideas is lacking.

Errors in sounds pattern

English has 44 sounds that fall into the following categories: Consonants, Diagraphs, Diphthongs, Vowels and r-controlled vowels. A diagraph is a sound that generates from a combination of two letters. Example ph, gh and ey. In the area of English sounds, we find various examples of this. For instance, a/p/ and an /n/ will come together at the end of a word, eg' happen', but never at the beginning (in words like pneumonia, the 'P' is silent). On the other hand, the combination /sp/ comes at the end of a word (wasp) and also at the beginning (spell). Similarly, we have 'hurdle', and 'glue', but, though we have 'hurdle', there is no word beginning with /dl/ in English. But in the course of this research we found out that in

pronunciation anything /th/ majority of the lecturers have glaring native tongue influence in their sound patterns and this have some bearings on the delivery of the lectures or ideas to the learners.

Redundancy/ verbosity/ use of unnecessary words

Redundancy/use of unnecessary words or verbosity means the use of words that are not required or are not necessary in a sentence or statement. This occurs due to lack of language or vocabulary to express intended ideas to learners or listeners. Verbosity on the other hand means use of too many words in explaining a concept instead of being direct or straight forward in providing the required explanation. This aspect of language error is observed in this research.

Concord/Agreement

Concord is the grammatical agreement between the subject and the verb in a sentence (<https://unacademic.com>kerala-psc>). It is also known as subject-verb agreement. For example, the verb must be plural if the subject is plural and vice versa. In our investigation we found elements of non-compliance with this aspect of English language among the sampled lecturers.

Inappropriate use of pre-positions

A pre-position is a word or group of words that connects nouns, pronouns or phrases to other words in a sentence. Pre-positions can show direction, place, location, special relationship or introduce an object in a sentence (Oxford online Dictionary).

CONCLUSION

It is clear from what was discussed above that there are good lecturers as well as bad ones as far as communication in English language is concerned. This problem exists and can be arrested when it is given the attention needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings above, we would like to proffer the following recommendations

1. Teachers or lecturers with appropriate communication skills and competences should be employed because teaching is a profession and is being taken for granted especially in higher institutions.
2. During recruitments for lecturer ship there should be thorough screening based not only on paper qualifications but on also on the ability to communicate the subject matter clearly to the learners
3. There should be mentorship in the College so that the newly employed lecturers can be groomed by the older and well experienced lecturers.
4. Lecturers should be trained from time to time on communication skills and improvement of language.
5. Quality Assurance Unit of the College should try to identify the areas of problems of lecturers whether it is relating to communication or delivery of content or knowledge of the subject matter as a whole, or lack of adequate teaching pedagogy and other shot-comings that will affect proper teaching and learning in the College.

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