Listening and Reading Skills Training as Catalyst for Secondary School Students' Proficiency in Oral English

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Abstract
The study specifically investigated the impact of listening and reading training on secondary school students' proficiency in oral English. The population for the study comprised public senior secondary school students in Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State. A recorded audio package and a reading comprehension passage were administered on the students to measure their listening and reading ability after some lessons on listening and reading. Four hypotheses were formulated for the study and tested using ANCOVA variation at 0.05 level of significance. The result revealed that there were significant influence of listening skill ($F=14.014$, $P < 0.05$) and reading skills ($F=10.987$, $P < 0.05$) on students proficiency in oral English, Also, students gender ($F = 12.102$, $P < 0.05$) and home background ($F=21.634$, $P>0.05$) significantly influenced proficiency in oral English. It is concluded that listening and reading skills training must be intensified in second language learners of English if they should be proficient in spoken English.

Keywords: Listening, Reading, Skill Training, Oral Proficiency

Introduction

English language serves as a second language and a lingua franca in Nigeria. It is the language of instruction in almost all levels of our educational system. The general objective of any systematic instruction in any language, especially English is to enable learners to acquire a working knowledge of the rule of grammar and structural patterns of the language as an aid towards developing their skills in speaking and writing. Therefore, there is considerable emphasis on the development of the four basic language and communication skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing as a manifestation of language in action, or as creative writing meant for use in developing reading interests. This suggests that the skill are related both in oral and written modes. The oracy skills being listening and speaking and literacy being reading and writing. Out of the skills highlighted, Onadeko (2007) views listening, speaking and reading as the three strong tripods upon which the language teaching-learning process must rest.

Listening is the process of receiving, processing and assigning meaning to aural stimuli. It is an integral skill in communication which involves paying attention to the speaker's utterance. Listening forms part of the interrelated set of skills required by the learner for effective communication. It is a process by which sounds emitted by some sources are received by listeners. Listening according to (Oladunjoye 2003) is basic to language learning. To him without good listening the student will have great difficulty in speaking and writing well. Listening is more than hearing, listening usually has a purpose compared to hearing. Most times, we hear by accident without necessarily listening, this is partial listening, while the latter is critical listening. Maduekwe (2000) views listening as a primary source of language and personal activity that involves perception of sounds as well as ability to understand and evaluate what is heard. It is the communication skill that is used most often in the assimilation of information and the most neglected in foreign language teaching (Norris, 1993).

Listening is physical when message or information is comprehended from the tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures and other nonverbal cues of the speaker. While it is said to be analytical when meaning is derived from reasoning and level if understanding. Listening is the basic skill required for learning opportunities hence, it becomes an imperative skill to teach in schools. However, during listening, learners may not take account of the phonological clues available. They may also have problems identifying familiar lexis which may be due to lack of systematic ear training in recognizing individual sounds or clusters, stress patterns and tone of voice, and constant practice of the learners. Listening is difficult to measure; its effectiveness is dependent upon the listener's decoding skills, i.e. the listener's ability to make sense of the message or ability to reproduce what has been listened to in written or oral form.

In second/foreign language learning like English in Nigeria, learners' accurate and intelligent listening is a necessity for the enhancement of accurate and intelligent speaking. No wonder, Oladunjoye (2003) views listening as interactive and non-interactive. The teaching of word pronunciation to students, therefore, establishes the importance of listening in language skills learning. Listening can be viewed from two dimensions; active and passive listening. Active listening also known as critical listening is a type of listening that involves the rapt concentration of the listener for the benefit he/she stands to derive from the information received such as listening to academic lectures, and symposiums. While passive or partial listening is the type of listening where the listener exhibits little or no seriousness or attention because he/she may not need the information being passed across; among these are gossips and sound waves.

Reading, on the other hand, is learners' ability to view and interpret signs and symbols. Okebukola (1994), views reading as the process of looking at and comprehending the meaning of written and printed words from the visual representations of symbols which involves recognition. While Owoyele (1999) sees reading as a skill which involves basic sight, vocabulary, learning phonetic, structural analysis and developing skills of comprehension. The learner's ability to interpret and understand these signs and printed symbols is known as reading comprehension. Oladunjoye (2005) defines reading as an interacting process in which readers comprehend, interpret and respond to texts according to what they already know, that is an application of one's idea.

Welch (1993) in Osoba (2006) also asserts that "there is no escaping the oral, but many people believe that it is detectable and not central". He further explained that those people that believe oral can be detached from language are those that tacitly view speaking as a convenient that can be applied as necessary. An experienced reader with limited time, for instance, will get the main points of a newspaper article reporting a crime, by reading the first and last paragraph. As a result, learners cannot 'navigate' successfully through the text when reading (e.g. they only read from the beginning towards the end). Similarly, they may not break the text down into smaller, more manageable chunks to facilitate understanding, but depend on a rather vague global impression only, and may be unable to locate the place where clues to meaning are given. Reading could either be intensive or extensive. Intensive reading is a form of reading that is limited to the prescribed text while extensive reading is the reading outside the prescribed text for the development of vocabulary and widening of horizon.

Listening and reading skills are skills in language learning that deal with acquisition of information; here learners do not need to produce any language or utterance instead they receive and understand information passed across. However, in Nigeria the standard of good pronunciation is gradually declining among secondary school students (Odumosu, 2003). To corroborate this, Abimbade and Ogar (2005), Onyinloye (2007) and Udofot (2000) also state that there is still ample evidence of poor performance of Nigerian students. In fact, there have been a national debate among linguistic scholars like Bamisaye (2001), Fasanmi (2006), William (1990) and Ufomata (2005) about the poor quality of speech of the average Nigerian school leaver. These scholars ascribe these problems to the difficulty learners encounter in the use of segmental and supra-segmental features of English. Thus, learners substitute the sounds of English they are not familiar with for the nearest ones in their mother tongue. This is why some speakers in their oral communication pronounce words like 'very' as 'ferry', 'love' is pronounced loof etc. It seems more effective then to examine the abilities of each learner individually.

Statement of the Problem

Since the success or otherwise of the goals of English curriculum centres on the mastery of and communication with the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) as well as other language levels (phonetics and phonology, morphology, lexis and semantics). This study sets out to examine the influence of listening and reading skill training on students' proficiency in oral English. Students' gender and parental background are the moderating variables.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to train learners' ability to listen and read, identify and read, identify and associate words with the one read using their existing listening and reading skills training. It is believed that this could be used as strategies for improving students' proficiency in oral English. The study also examines the influence of gender and parental background of students on their proficiency in Oral English.

Significance of the Study

This study will be of paramount significance in several ways to various individuals including researchers both within and outside the field of language education. No doubt the poor performance of our students in English language has been attributed to a lot of factors including language teachers paying little attention to the teaching of basic skills in language classes, neglecting the teaching of the listening skill. It is believed that this study will serve as basis to facilitate the teaching and learning of basic skills to avert some of the problems encountered in teaching English as a second Language (ESL). This gospel could also be transferred to language students in training as it created awareness in them and gives them the opportunity to know the importance of listening and reading in their academic pursuit. It may thus serve as a useful guide to policy makers and curriculum planners when it comes to formulating and planning curriculum for instruction in English language. The result of this study will allow them to review the school syllabus, and revisit the teaching of orals English in our schools. It will also inform the time to be allocated for the subject and engineer the provision of necessary human and material resources.

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant influence of listening skill on students' proficiency in oral English.
2. There is no significant influence of reading skill on students' proficiency in oral English.
3. There is no significant relationship between students' gender and proficiency in oral English.
4. There is no significant relationship between students' home background and proficiency in oral English.

Population of Study: One hundred and two (120) participants were randomly selected for the study. The stratified random sampling technique was used. The population was drawn from SS1 students attending public Junior Secondary Schools in Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State.

Instruments: The instrument for the study were practical recorded instrument and paper representation of words and sentences administered on students to measure their listening and reading ability as it enhances their proficiency in oral English.

Data Analysis: The Analysis of Co-variance (ANCOVA) on the SPSS software package was the main statistical procedure utilized for the analysis of available data in testing the hypotheses.

Result

Table 1: Influence of Listening Skills on Students' Proficiency in Oral English

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean squares	F	P
Listening	3215.954	1	3215.954	45.383	.000
Pretest	2531.841	1	2531.841	1.004	.003
Treatment	385.018	1	385.018	14.014	.000
Error	786.934	17	21.859		.000
Total	2535.000	20			

Result on table 1 reveals that listening skills training affects students' proficiency in oral English. Therefore the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant influence of listening skill on students' proficiency in oral English is rejected at (F=14.014, P<0.05).

Table 2: Influence of Reading Skill on Students' Proficiency in Oral English

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean squares	F	P
Reading	3876.777	1	3876.777	21.106	.000
Pretest	2088.000	1	2088.000	1.004	.000
Treatment	333.765	1	333.765	10.987	.000
Error	4183.421	17	23.402		.000
Total	3009.356	20			

Result on table 2 reveals that there is significant influence of reading skill on students' proficiency in Oral English. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant influence of reading skill on students' proficiency in Oral English is rejected at (F= 10.987, P<0.05).

Table 3: Effect of Students' Gender on proficiency in Oral English

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean squares	F	P
Reading	6245.654	2	12491.308	45.383	.000
Pretest	2853.686	1	2853.686	1.012	.124
Treatment	1575.212	1	1575.212	12.102	.000
Error	1258.647	16	349.624		.000
Total	3735.000	20			

Result on table 3 reveals that gender affects students' proficiency in Oral English. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between students' gender and proficiency in oral English is rejected at (F= 12.102, P<0.05)

Table 4: Effect of Students' Home Background on Proficiency in Oral English

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean squares	F	P
Reading	3215.954	2	6431.908	45.383	.000
Pretest	2853.686	1	2853.686	1.012	.124
Treatment	1.575.212	1	1.575.212	21.634	.010
Error	1258.647	16	349.624		.000
Total	3735.000	20			

Result on table 4 reveals that home background of students will affect their proficiency in oral English. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that There is no significant relationship between students' home background and proficiency in oral English is rejected at (F=21.634, P>0.05).

Conclusion

In second language learning of English in Nigeria, learners' accurate and intelligent listening is a necessity for the enhancement of accurate and intelligent speaking. No wonder Oladunjoye (2003) views listening as interactive and non-interactive. The teaching of pronunciation of words to students therefore establish the importance of listening in the language learning situation. Listening is the process of receiving, processing and assigning meaning to aural stimuli. It is an integral skill in communication which involves paying attention to speakers' utterances. Listening forms part of the inter-related set of skills required by learners for effective communication. According to (Oladunjoye 2003), listening is basic to language learning. To him, without good listening, students will have great difficulty in speaking or writing. It is worth to know that listening is more than hearing, listening usually has a purpose compared to hearing. We may hear by accident without necessarily listening, this is partial listening while the latter is critical listening. Maduekwe (2000) views listening as a primary source of what language is and personal activity that involves perception of sounds as

well as ability to understand and evaluate what is heard. It is the communication skill that is used most often in the assimilation of information and the most neglected in second/foreign language teaching (Norris, 1993).

Listening and reading training must be taken seriously with second language learners. If properly trained, it will bring additional benefits, most especially, when learners are not intimidated by other tasks of unfamiliar content where discovery techniques may be needed. For instance, a good listening and reading skills complement learners' performance in speaking and writing. When the teacher provides learners with language 'data' and guides them to discover the 'rule', this will enhanced their learning (Devine, 1988). It would be helpful to bear it in mind that 'training does produce improvement in performance which can be considerable, long-lasting and pervasive' (Meadows, 1988 in Gross, 1996). What can compound the problem is the use of reading aloud as a means of developing reading skills which will only help beginners understand the relation between spelling and sound. Nevertheless, its misuse or overuse can communicate the wrong idea about the nature of reading (Gabrielatos 1996).

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