

Adopting Mother Tongue in Teaching TVET Students Speaking Skills

Olufunke Damilola DEGBORO¹ & Festus Moses ONIPEDE²

Department of General Studies, Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro, Ogun State, Nigeria

¹olufunke.degboro@federalpolyilaro.edu.ng; 08032255385

²onipedemoses@gmail.com; 08166065300

Abstract

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) aims to enhance the job opportunities for skilled employees. Here, English language speaking skill is one of the requirements TVET graduates need to enhance their employment prospects. This paper highlights on the concepts of TVET, employability, and adoption of mother tongue (MT) in teaching TVET students speaking skill. The paper discusses how MT can be adopted in teaching speaking skills, with insights from Bachman & Palmer's (1996) framework. The paper gave a sample of how the criterion for consonants description (place of articulation) can be taught using Yorùbá language. The paper suggests that students can be taught how to pronounce consonant sounds by specifying the place of articulation, and by giving them the interpretation of the concepts in Yorùbá language. For example: bilabial (afètèpè), labiodental (afeyínfètèpè), alveolar (aferìgìpè), among others. In terms of rhythm, the students must know that while English language is a stressed timed, Yoruba is a syllable timed. The paper concludes that speaking skill challenges can be overcome by students' willingness to learning, adequate provision of teaching equipment, teachers training, and seriousness on the part of the students.

Keywords: Employability; Mother Tongue; Speaking Skill; TVET

Introduction

Speech proficiency is one of the English language skills that Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) students need to learn for effective verbal or oral communication. Speaking skill is a verbal mode of expressing one's idea through correct pronunciation of speech sounds for effective delivery. Structurally, speaking is the art of using the organs of speech to produce meaningful sounds for communication purpose. From the social perspective, it is the use of language to communicate, negotiate and achieve certain desired intents and goals (Ofulue, 2004). For effective speaking, sounds and words must be pronounced correctly for the speaker's audience to hear and understand. The speaking skill also needs to use stress and intonation correctly to enhance intelligibility. By intelligibility, we mean that pronunciation of sounds in words, stress and intonation must be universally accepted for effective communication. There should not be a situation whereby a user of English language speaks, and s/he cannot be understood by another people from another country. As TVET students are trained in their respective course of studies to become future professionals in their field, they need speaking skill in order to disseminate information through speech delivery, project defense, head a meeting, among others. Speaking skills must be meaningful for a speaker to be understood. According to CEFR (2001, p. 90), to communicate orally, an individual must be able to articulate and perceive the utterance (Phonetic and auditory skills).

In this paper, attempts would be made to adopt mother tongue (hereafter MT) in teaching TVET students speaking skill, and review some of the challenges students and teachers faced.

Concept of TVET

TVET is a form of education and training that provides knowledge and skills for employment. There are various definitions of TVET by different scholars but all the definitions have the same concepts.

Oni (2007) defines TVET as the type of education which fits the individual for gainful employment in recognised career as semi-skilled workers or technicians or sub-professional. Maclean & Wilson (2009) see TVET as the acquisition of skills and knowledge for employment and sustainable livelihoods. Similarly, Akerele (2007) defines TVET as that aspect of education that exposes the learner to the acquisition of demonstrable skills that could be transformed into economic benefits. From the above definitions of TVET, it is

obvious that employment, livelihood sustainability, economic benefits, and skills acquisition, are the main focus of TVE training.

The objectives of TVET are to prepare youths for work related skills and mastery of underlying knowledge and scientific principles; to support self-employment and entrepreneurship training. These objectives support Wang's (2010, p. 47) submission that "the primary goals of skills training is to provide youths with practical techniques and skills based on professional knowledge rather than manufacture well-trained basic operators." Wang's submission shows that TVET in general education reform is focusing on training the students to be skilled workers with a professional knowledge that can be used in real situation.

TVET students need pronunciation skills in English to enhance their delivery. They should know the phonetics of speech sounds, that is, the study of human sound production, and provide a description of how sounds are produced. It is the duty of a teacher to introduce his students to the English sound systems, how to correct communication problems, and thus improve their pronunciation skills. As technology advances, the teaching of speaking skills should be taught via multimodality (Abioye & Onipede (2020). Employability skills are those essential skills necessary for acquiring and keeping and performing well on a job (Robinson-Shafield & Nayan, 2010).

Employability Skills

This is concerned with the needed skills that a graduate of technical institutions needs to acquire before s/he can qualify for a job. Simply put, they are skills required to secure and retain a job. Again, Munro (2010) sees employability skills as the ability to contribute to work's efficiency in an organisation combined with good oral and written communication skills and critical thinking, which form the foundation of both academic and workplace success. Munro specifies the place of oral communication (speaking skill) which is expected of any TVET graduate to acquire. In the same vein, Bennett (2006) argues that employability skill is not only the included attributes that are desired from prospective employees but also the basic requirements an individual needs to be considered before employment. For inclusion of technology as a criterion for a job, the basic skills, thinking skills, resource skills, information skills, interpersonal skills and personal qualities need to support technology requirement (Clarke, 2007). Teachers should therefore teach their TVET students speaking skills by adopting MT as one of their teaching methodologies.

Theoretical Review

In 1996, Bachman & Palmer designed a model to teach people how to design, develop and use language tests. According to them, one's language competence can be assessed to show how one's test performance describes language use in situation other than the test itself. The term competence was borrowed from Chomsky (1965) concepts of *competence and performance*. Competence means a person's knowledge of his or her first language to create, and performance means the actual use of the language. Bachman & Palmer's framework includes characteristics of language use and language test tasks and those of language users /test takers. Language testing (language ability) shows an individual's most important characteristics (p.61). The three characteristics of language testing include *topical knowledge, personal characteristics and affective schemata*. Topical knowledge is concerned with a person's knowledge of the real world. Personal characteristics include individual attributes, such as age, sex and native language. Affective schemata are a little more complex matter. It is concerned with emotional aspects of the world. For example, what kinds of issues have a lot of emotional value, e.g. violence, religion? Affective schemata determine how a person responses to a task. Bachman & Palmer posit that three features of language affect language use and test performance.

Moreover, language ability has two components - *language knowledge and strategic competence*. It has to do with how utterances or sentences and texts are arranged. It controls the formal structure of language to perform the following functions:

- (a) to produce or identify grammatically acceptable sentences;
- (b) to comprehend their content; and
- (c) to arrange them to texts.

The organisational knowledge has two components - *grammatical and textual knowledge*. Grammatical knowledge is concerned with producing and understanding formally correct sentences (vocabulary, syntax, phonology and graphology). Textual knowledge is concerned with producing and understanding texts, spoken and written. There are two parts to textual knowledge. They are *cohesion and rhetorical conventions*.

Knowledge of cohesion deals with the relationship between sentences in text. Rhetorical conventions on the other hand, deal with the arrangement of text from the narrative point of view.

To assess appropriateness of language use, Bach & Palmer introduce *pragmatic knowledge*, which allows people to create and interpret discourse by connecting utterances or sentences and texts with their meaning. Here, the intention of the speaker and the characteristics of the setting where the language use is considered, to know whether the language use is appropriate in the setting. The two subcategories of pragmatic knowledge are *functional and sociolinguistic knowledge*. Functional knowledge is concerned with the interpretation of the relationship between utterances or sentences and the intention of language users. Sociolinguistic knowledge considers the appropriateness of the language use.

In addition, language knowledge strategic competence is a set of meta-cognitive components, or strategies that enable people to cognitively manage their language use, and also cognitive activity. This framework will help us to adopt MT for the teaching of speaking skills. The summary of Bachman & Palmer's framework is presented on figure 1.

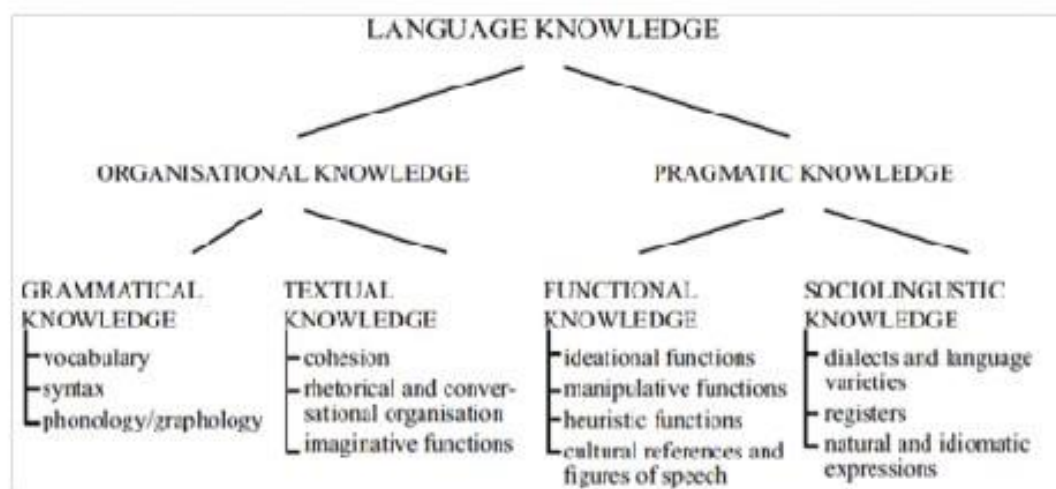


Figure1: Language knowledge (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p.68)

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The first language a normal child acquires is called mother tongue (MT). A child may be born of Yorùbá parents who reside in United Kingdom, and if the child picks English as his/her first language (L1), then, this will be the child's MT. One's knowledge of one's MT will allow one to effectively learn a second language (L2) or target language. Chomsky (1965) submits that ideal-listener would help a speaker who is a part of a completely homogeneous speech-community, knows everything about his language and grammatically non-significant conditions, such as age, sex and education.

In teaching speaking skills, TVET teachers need to adopt any of the three major Nigerian languages. For instance, if a teacher needs to teach consonant sounds, s/he first of all needs to discuss the criteria for consonant sounds. S/he can do this by telling the students the part of speech organs needed for the production of the sounds. S/he should be able to highlight both internal and external speech organs by telling them what they are called in their MT. For illustration, a teacher may want to teach place of articulation, and s/he highlights bilabial, labio-dental, dental, among others. One, in teaching the identified places of articulation, the teacher may decide to use Yorùbá language to better teach his/her students. S/he can start by telling the students that bilabial means 'afètèpè' in Yorùbá. That is, when their two lips come together to produce consonants /p, b, m, w/ bilabial sounds are produced. This method is in contrast to Obiegbu's (2016) claim that "where the general means of communication is indigenous language, one discovers that the local language is a hindrance to the easy learning of the English language. There won't be any impediment if the context of teaching is appropriate. Two, if there is a contact between the lower lip and upper teeth, labio-dental sounds, such as /θ, ð/ are produced. Labia in Biology mean lips while in Yorùbá mean ètè. Dental means *eyín* in Yoruba. Three, the teacher may ask his/her students to itemise consonant sounds in English that are not found in their MT. In Yorùbá language, the dental consonants /θ/ and / ð/ are not found. Four, the students should also know that while English language is a stressed timed, Yoruba language is a syllable-timed. E.g. I can't 'come 'tomorrow (English-stress timed), mi ò le wá lóla (Yoruba- syllable timed). It should be reiterated that grammatical words such as prepositions,

pronouns, auxiliary verbs do not take stress. That is why 'I and can't' do not take stress in the given examples above. It is the duty of the teachers to guide their students how to overcome these challenges in their MT. These challenges can be done by contrasting the consonants. A Yorùbá speaker of English substitutes /θ/ for /t/, /d/ and /ð/ in the following words: birthday /batdei/ instead of / bɜ:θdei/, thought /tot/ instead of /θɔ:t/ and breathe /brid/ instead of /bri:ð/ respectively. But if the teacher has specified how to overcome these challenges, the students won't have challenge with their speaking skills. The moment the teacher applies this method, the students will fully understand the speech sounds. If a teacher refuses to apply this method, the students may lack interest on the topic. This supports Odoemanam (2007) that " a language teacher who fails to introduce variety in his/her methods of teaching will neither arouse the interest of the English as a second language (ESL) learners nor motivate them." The appropriate teaching method to be used depends on the situation and result desired by the teacher (Okonkwo, 2005).

Again, teachers of TVET students should reveal to their students the difference between tone and syllable-timed languages. By doing so, two obligatory skills of communication are needed, that is, *motor-perceptive at interaction skills*. The former pertains to perceiving, recalling and articulating sounds and structures of the language in the right order. The latter is concerned with more complex and multifaceted matter (Bygate, 1987, p. 6). A student can employ the knowledge s/he has of the language and the motor-perceived skills to accomplish communication.

Speaking Skill and Its Challenges

According to Moses et al (2018), the following challenges are highlighted:

- Context of teaching speaking skills;
- Classroom challenges;
- English as a second language (ESL) foundational problem;
- Unfriendly language environment;
- The inter-lingual challenge;
- Poor reading culture;
- Laissez-fair attitude of the students;
- The structure of English;
- The phobia towards using English;
- Teachers lack of training for specialisation;
- Inappropriate teaching methods;
- Time factor; and
- Teachers attitude.

In addition to the above challenges, the following challenges are also present in teaching speaking skill:

- 14. Lack of teaching equipment like spectrogram, power point ;
- 15. Students insufficient competence in both L1 and L2.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the adoption of mother tongue in teaching TVET students speaking skills, with insights from Bachman & Palmer's (1996) framework. We adopted Yorùbá language in teaching speaking skills in order for the students to find learning easier. We also added two challenges to the ones given by Moses et al (2018). We however, conclude that for economic and employability development, the teachers of TVET students must adopt MT in their teaching methods.

Recommendations

Having highlighted some of the challenges faced by both teachers and students in teaching and learning speaking skill, it is high time we gave the following recommendations:

- Technical institutions should support teachers' training in form of conferences, seminars, symposiums, workshops, among others.
- Teachers of English language should make presentation compulsory for students in order to improve their speaking skills.
- Government should help with the provision of adequate teaching facilities.



- Teachers of English language can also adopt Hausa and Igbo in teaching speaking skills.

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