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Teacher's Voice Quality and Teaching Effectiveness

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Abstract

The need for teachers to be effective in the course of lesson delivery cannot be over-emphasized. The voice with which the teacher carries out his professional task is vital to attaining effectiveness in teaching. The quality of the teacher's voice is one aspect that is not given attention in the course of training teachers, so, the teacher carries out his tasks on daily basis with little or no attention given to his/her voice quality. This paper highlighted the various aspects of voice that need to be given attention to in order to attain effectiveness in teaching. The aspects discussed include: pitch, volume, tempo, articulation, pronunciation and fluency. It was concluded that teachers need to learn how to use their voices by constantly practicing and improving on the quality. It was therefore recommended that: voice training should be part of the curriculum of teacher education; in-service training on vocal delivery should be made available for practicing teachers across the various tiers of the educational system, and that teachers on their own can enrol for voice training exercises, listen to good speakers, in order for them to improve on the quality of their teaching voice.

Key Words: Voice, Teacher's Voice Quality, Teaching Effectiveness

Introduction

Teaching is a goal-oriented and result-oriented activity. Agina-Obu (2002) remarked that teaching requires the presentation of an activity in which learners participate in, and such activity causes the learners to react in a different way to satisfy the objectives of the activity presented to them. Teaching is targeted at bringing about a change in the behaviour of the

learners who are the recipients of the instructional package. For this target to be met, the teacher must communicate in the classroom.

Communication, a means through which the teacher successfully conveys the instructional message, is very important. Ikpe (2012) as cited by Ogiator and Okafor (2012) viewed communication as the process of creating, transmitting and using information to influence the behaviour of other individuals and in return, being influenced. In the course of lesson delivery, the teacher conveys information with spoken words and bodily clues. The teacher makes use of the voice to produce sounds and the spoken words. How words are uttered matter a great deal for teaching to be effective. This is because learners are influenced to change their behaviour in the desired direction if the sounds and words produced by the teacher are meaningful enough.

As professional voice users, it is impossible for teachers to carry out their professional task without their voice. It has been rightly noted that teaching without a voice is like driving with one's eyes closed and a teacher losing his voice is an occupational hazard (McFadden, 2017). A teacher who loses his voice automatically loses his ability to teach. More often than not, many teachers lack the knowledge of how to properly use their voice in the course of teaching, and this to a very great extent, affects the quality of lesson delivery. A teacher who has good knowledge of the subject matter of the discipline he teaches for instance, and has prepared his lesson carefully to meet the needs of his students but is having difficulty maintaining the attention of the learners, could be that the voice he is using to communicate the instructional content is affecting the teaching-learning process.

The teacher's voice is the link between the learners and what they learn via the auditory system. The quality of a teacher's voice marks him out. Morton (2012) pointed out that voice deficiencies can destroy teacher's effectiveness. As important as voice is to the teacher, teacher education programmes do not place emphasis on the quality of the teacher's voice. In a study carried out by Gyuse (1991) as cited by Amadi (2014), it was concluded that awareness should be created in teachers by teaching them communication skills as part of their method course.

In countries where English language is a second language as well as the language of instruction as it is in Nigeria, there are bound to be problems in its use for instructional delivery. Learners, usually at the receiving side in the teaching-learning process, listen to voices that most times, make it difficult for them to learn with ease. A teacher that wants his learners energised, focused and actively listening to the instructional message he tries to pass on, should be able to mirror such attitudes in his actions via the utterances he makes and his bodily clues. According to Washington (2012), what a teacher says must be consistent with how he says it in order to avoid what communication experts refer to as "static", that is, when what an individual says is inconsistent with how he says it. The need to place emphasis on the quality of the sounds/utterances produced by the teacher in the course of instructional delivery therefore, cannot be over-emphasised.

Teacher's Voice Quality

The quality of an individual's voice is crucial in speech delivery generally. This is because the quality of the voice is capable of arousing the interest of the audience to listen to the speech and engage them as long as the speech lasts. It can as well help to ensure that the ideas are

communicated clearly. These are applicable to teaching also. The teaching-learning process can be made or marred because of the quality of the teacher's voice.

Voice refers to speech sounds produced by the vocal folds or cords. It has to do with the way an individual creates sounds. It is one of the many tools with which an individual communicates. An individual's voice is one of the most important components of his identity. It is a part of who he is and what he believes. The voice and the way it is used is unique to every individual. Voice is produced by breath, through vibrating the vocal folds in the larynx. Every person's shape and size of the vocal mechanism is different thereby producing a unique timbre and thus give a distinct emotional quality to an individual's voice (Adetugbo, 1992; Reiman, 2013).

Voice quality refers to the characteristic features of an individual's voice. The teacher's voice is the voice a teacher uses when he stands in front of his class to teach. It is his professional voice and it is often different from his day-to-day speaking voice. The quality of voice used by the teacher can emphasize and strengthen the delivery of the instructional package. From the sounds of the teacher's voice, learners will make judgments about the teacher's attitude towards them as well as the information and ideas that he is presenting. This affects the way and manner learners respond to the teacher and the instructional message. It has been pointed out that teachers need voice training for the sake of their pupils/students (Voice Care Network UK, 2016).

Aspects of Voice and the Teacher

The voice consists of various elements, components or aspects some of which are: pitch, volume, tempo, tone, pronunciation, articulation and fluency.

Pitch: The pitch of an individual's voice is created through the vibrations of the vocal folds. It is the frequency of the sound waves an individual produce. It has to do with rise or fall of the sounds produced by the individual; his ability to produce high or low notes in his voice. According to Ogum (2018), pitch is the auditory phonetic attribute which a sound possesses, and its sensation helps a speaker and listener to recognise, classify and place it on a scale graduated from high to low and vice versa. In the course of the teaching-learning process, the teacher needs to vary his pitch. Particularly, when a teacher wants to deliver an important piece of information or essential aspect of the instructional task, he needs to apply pitch. This will enable him get the attention of the learners concerning the information he is trying to convey. There is equally need for the teacher to vary his pitch throughout the lesson delivery. This will establish and reinforce the instructional content.

Volume: Volume is concerned with the loudness of the voice. Some people speak at a much louder volume (than probably necessary), while others need to be urged to speak up. It is important that people adapt their volume to the situation that they are in. This implies that appropriate conversational volume is essential. Teachers thus need to maintain the volume that is appropriate for the particular situation in which they find themselves. However, there is need for them to speak loudly enough in order for everyone in the class to hear them appropriately. They should learn to change the volume of their voice whenever there is change in the idea they are trying to pass on, and also when there is change in the approach they adopt in passing on

the instructional message. In addition, a teacher should raise the volume of his speech gradually as he tries to build a point. Whenever learners are unable to hear what the teacher says, they become frustrated and engage in unwholesome acts that are detrimental to the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process. Some common speaking volume errors as identified by Meikle (2017) include:

- Speaking too quietly.
- Speaking too loudly.
- Speaking at a constant volume.
- Allowing the volume to drop off the end of each sentence.

A teacher needs to vary the volume of his speech. Speaking with a constant volume will bring about monotony and this can affect the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process. Meikle observed that the speech volume problems usually come down to two main causes: physical tension caused by fear and 'a limited vocal comfort zone' (that is the habit of using a fraction of one's full vocal range and not being aware of it). He went further to suggest ways to expand ones' comfort zone. According to him, a softly spoken speaker should:

- give himself permission to speak louder
- learn to speak from one's diaphragm
- consider engaging a voice coach.

An overly loud speaker on the other hand needs to learn to modulate his speech volume to give much needed contrast. A teacher's ability to tune down his volume can create a much more intimate atmosphere that attracts and sustains the students' attention and at the same time, gives their ear the much-needed respite. When a teacher's voice is loud continually, the way he is perceived can be damaging and this can affect the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process. It should be noted that the volume of a teacher's voice is so important that a carefully crafted instructional content can be ruined by a dull vocal delivery.

Tempo: This is about how quickly or slowly an individual speaks. It is the pace of an individual's voice. Individuals tend to hurry their speech in moments of agitation and this affects the way in which the recipient perceives the spoken utterance. It is important thus that a teacher consciously slows down the pace with which he presents the instructional message from time to time as this can greatly influence the rate at which learners assimilate the content of instruction. Slowing down the pace with which the instructional content is being presented will as well help the teacher ascertain whether he has the learners' attention or not. To successfully slow down the pace of the lesson, a teacher needs to take deep breaths and use a purposeful pause before he presents a salient aspect of his lesson (Ogiator & Okafor, 2012; Washington, 2012).

Pronunciation: Pronunciation refers to an individual's ability to produce comprehensible utterances that are capable of fulfilling task requirements. Accurate spoken language is produced when individuals are able to correctly pronounce the words that they use when communicating. Pronunciation is very important because it is responsible for intelligibility; it accounts for peoples' ability to get across intended message. When words are wrongly pronounced, it brings about misunderstanding. The situation is even more serious in the

teaching-learning process because whenever a teacher fails to pronounce words rightly, learners get confused and this can bring about so many devastating effects on the learners (Thornbury in Singh, 2013 as cited by Ochoma, 2015). A teacher, irrespective of whatever subject he teaches, must be able to pronounce words appropriately to avoid being misunderstood by the learners and thus make teaching ineffective.

Articulation: This refers to the clarity of sounds and words that are produced by an individual. An articulate speaker produces words clearly and audibly. Individuals are judged by how well they speak in general, and a measure of an individual's perceived education is how well he articulates sounds. It is necessary therefore that every teacher strives to speak clearly. A teacher's inability to correctly articulate certain sounds often causes miscommunication and misunderstanding of the instructional content and brings about ineffectiveness in teaching. Mumbling for instance is an example of poor articulation. Two common challenges to articulation that teachers must guide against in order to articulate sounds and words correctly are inattentiveness and laziness. A teacher should be able to pay attention to the sound he produces to ensure that they are clear enough for his learners to make meaning out of them. Moreover, the teacher must avoid the habit of not articulating sounds well as it is common with some lazy speakers.

Fluency: This has to do with the flow of speech. Speaking with fluency means that the individual's speech flows well and there are not many interruptions to the flow. It is very vital that a teacher speaks with fluency if effectiveness is to be attained. Two main problems that affect the flow of speech are *fluency hiccups* and *verbal fillers*. While fluency hiccups are intended pauses in a speech that usually result from the speaker's forgetfulness about what he was saying, verbal fillers are words or phrases that a speaker uses to fill in a moment of silence between connecting thoughts. Fluency hiccups and verbal fillers are capable of distorting the flow of speech, so teachers should try as much as possible, to avoid them.

For proper use of voice, every teacher needs to be aware of the various aspects of voice and use them appropriately. All the various aspects of voice ought to fluctuate as the teacher presents the instructional message through the medium of language via the spoken words. Where this is missing, the teacher speaks in monotone and this can have a devastating effect on the learners to the extent that some learners can even switch-off. It is pertinent to note that what a teacher does with his body in the course of teaching is as influential as the words he speaks. Washington (2012) averred that the teacher's body, tone of voice and the words he speaks must match. The teacher should be able to 'show' while he 'tells' the learners that what he has got to share is exciting, relevant, and important. In order to have learners that are motivated, energised, focused and actively paying attention to the instructional task, the teacher's personality via the quality of his voice must reflect such.

Teacher's Voice Quality and Teaching Effectiveness

Teaching is effective only when the teacher successfully achieves the targets he sets out to achieve, that is, the learners are able to imbibe the instructional message that results in a behavioural in the desired manner. According to Awotuo-Efebo (2005) as was cited by Ochoma (2016), effectiveness is about doing the right thing. It is concerned with bringing about an effect that is in line with the goal. So, effective teaching has to do with the teacher doing the right

things in the teaching-learning process so that at the end of the teaching event, he can truly say that the goals and objectives of the lesson have been achieved, that is, the learners for whom the lesson was planned, have learnt.

An effective teacher aims at understanding and interpreting the goals and objectives of the school curriculum correctly and from it, arranges teaching events that will lead learners to achieve target goals and objectives. The teacher does this by providing a wide variety of learning experiences through the use of various teaching methods and techniques at his disposal. The variety of learning experiences he provides must be appropriate for the learners and subject matter. With the resources available to them, he nurtures the creative responses in the learners and helps them become better individuals. Effective teaching results in the learners having good understanding of what they have been taught (Ochoma, 2016). All these the teacher does by communicating the instructional package via the use of the voice.

The voice a teacher uses to teach is very important. This is because the voice is the vehicle through which he passes on the knowledge, skills, information, passion and concern to the learners. No learner would want to listen to a teacher with a poor, weak, shrill, harsh or extremely loud voice. The teacher's voice should be able to inspire learner(s) to want to know more about the instructional content that the teacher is trying to pass on. As much as the instructional content a teacher chooses to deliver is important, the way and manner he says what he has to say plays a crucial role in the teacher's ability to engage and influence his learners. Most learners tend to switch off as earlier noted, whenever the voice of a teacher fails to inspire and influence them. For a teacher's voice to be capable of inspiring and influencing his learners, it must convey a sense of strength, urgency, confidence and warmth. The teacher should be able to connect the learners through the passion in his voice. He should be able to engage them with the instructional message and thus spur them to wholeheartedly trust his ability as a teacher, and his competence (Pellicano, 2017).

According to Washington (2012), a teacher's voice needs to reflect passion but more than that, it needs flexibility. This entails having a wide variety of tonal expressions and other skills to select from. How a teacher breathes, for instance, underpins his voice quality. Good breathing and postural habits are essential for an individual to maintain a good voice quality. Weikert as cited by McFadden (2017) gave tips on how teachers can preserve their vocal cord and some of them are:

- ❖ Staying healthy
- ❖ Not speaking too loudly
- ❖ Being aware of your breathing
- ❖ Finding your natural pitch
- ❖ Doing vocal cord straw exercises
- ❖ Staying hydrated

Variety is crucial in the use of the voice in making delivery, be it in regular conversation or classroom discourse. If the various aspects of voice do not fluctuate, the teacher will be speaking in a monotone, which is an indication that the teacher has little to offer. One of the most effective ways a teacher can emphasize the message of his instructional task is his ability

to change his voice without necessarily straining it. For effectiveness to be attained in teaching, the teacher's voice must support the instructional message he tries to pass on.

Conclusion

Without good voice quality, effectiveness in teaching will be difficult to attain. All the various aspects of voice - pitch, volume, tempo, articulation and fluency are essential and contribute significantly to the expression of meaning in the course of instructional delivery and so should be reflected in the teaching voice of the teacher. Every teacher needs to learn how to use his voice by constantly practicing and improving on the quality of his teacher's voice. This will bring about effectiveness in the teaching-learning process and thus affect the learner's behaviour in the desired direction.

Recommendations

Based on the above discourse, it is recommended that:

1. Voice training should be part of the curriculum of teacher education. Trainee teachers across the various disciplines should be properly taught, trained and drilled to be competent to apply the various aspects of voice.
2. In-service training on vocal delivery should be organised for practicing teachers across the various tiers of the educational system – primary, secondary and tertiary to enable them learn the various aspects of voice and how to use them to bring about effectiveness in teaching.
3. Teachers on their own can enrol for voice training exercises; listen to good speakers in order for them to improve on the quality of their voice.

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