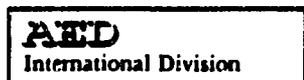


Academy for
Educational
Development



PJ-AAQ-884
ISN 362-58

USING RADIO TO TEACH
LANGUAGE ARTS

by

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January 1982

This paper was prepared by the Academy for Educational Development under Contract No. AID/DSPE-C-0051, Extension of Rural Primary Schools (Radio Language Arts), with the U.S. Agency for International Development.

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USING RADIO TO TEACH LANGUAGE ARTS

Can children learn to read and understand English from radio instruction? Answering this question is the purpose of a pilot project being developed for Kenya primary public schools. Like many developing nations, Kenya suffers from an expanding school population and a scarcity of qualified teachers, particularly in rural schools. The Radio Language Arts Project¹ is an attempt to provide a language program pertinent to the needs of children outside the urban areas and to improve the quality of the instruction of English as a second language in a cost-effective manner.

The instructional design is based upon methodology successfully applied in the Nicaragua Radio Mathematics Project implemented by the Institute for Mathematical Studies in the Social Studies, Stanford University, in 1973.² This project was a joint venture of the United States Agency for International Development and the Nicaraguan Ministry of Public Education. An evaluation of the project indicated that students in the experimental radio classes scored significantly higher on tests than their non-experimental counterparts. Because of the success and design of the Radio Mathematics Project, its methodology was considered applicable to other subject areas in other nations.

Background

Pupils in Kenyan public primary schools are taught in their mother tongue for the initial three years. As delineated in the Kenyan Statement of Objectives,³ instruction in English as a second language is phased in, beginning in the first school year. By the end of the third year, "the child should have acquired a sufficient command of

vocabulary and language patterns to enable him to use English as the medium of learning." Starting in standard 4 (grade 4), English becomes the language of instruction and by the end of standard 7 (grade 7) pupils are required to pass the Comprehensive Proficiency Examination to qualify for secondary school enrollment.

With the elimination of primary school fees in 1973, enrollment soared, straining the economic and educational resources of the nation's schools. Instructional materials, schools, faculty housing, and qualified teachers were in short supply. To meet the aspirations of the people and the growing needs of the nation's children, this pilot project will attempt to increase comprehension of oral and written English by using radio as the basic instructional medium for pupils in standards 1, 2, and 3.

Curriculum and Methodology

The Radio Language Arts Project (RLAP) must follow the official goals and curriculum for primary pupils of Kenya's Ministry of Basic Education. While the goals and curriculum of the RLAP and the conventional curriculum are the same, the means by which the RLAP achieves these goals and actualizes the curriculum through radio lessons will differ. In Kenya, English is taught as a second language and parallels the basic skills of the language program in the mother tongue. The RLAP will use an integrated language arts approach which will focus on language function, emphasize meaning and communication activities. Listening and oral language will precede reading and writing. Readiness experiences in both reading and writing will be implemented from the start of the program. Each facet of language arts will be used to

reinforce and expand the others.⁴

Radio instruction will require active participation and response by pupils to enhance learning. Children will talk, write, and respond physically throughout the program. Each skill will be carefully developed, presented, and practiced in short, frequent lesson segments. Pupils will receive immediate correction or encouragement to stimulate learning.

The lesson content is based upon criteria which will assist the student in learning a specific skill but will relate to the learner's needs and interests in his rural environment. Materials will be screened by the Kenyan team members to ensure that they are appropriate and reflect the values of the culture.

Since cost is a major concern of the project, efforts will be made to reduce the materials which will be supplied to each class. Books require not only paper and printing but also distribution, which is costly and difficult. During the first year and part of the second, charts and worksheets will be developed, but as children become proficient in writing, worksheets will be phased out. Whenever possible, materials found in local classrooms will be utilized. Teachers will be asked to write exercises on the board and after the pupils learn to write, pupils will be asked to copy materials from the board and, more importantly, to create some of their own reading matter.

Lesson Design

Children in standards 1, 2, and 3 will receive their English instruction via daily radio broadcasts of 30 minutes in length. Each radio lesson will consist of two parts, the radio broadcast and post-

broadcast activities directed by the classroom teacher. There will be 165 new lessons developed for each of the three years.

Each radio lesson will consist of several brief segments of varied learning activities, a segment being an independent unit which teaches or maintains a skill. Using the principle of distributive learning, each segment will provide short intensive activities, 2 to 6 minutes in duration. An instructional segment may be related to another in the same radio lesson or it may be independent of other segments. Segments can be used for instruction of new skills or maintenance of previously taught skills.

In order to retain interest during the length of the broadcast, the Radio Mathematics Project had great success with segmented learning periods requiring active participation by the students. The RLAP will follow this design, planning for as many as 4 to 8 pupil responses per minute in some segments. Learning segments will be interspersed with change of pace activities such as singing, clapping, choral and motor activities which will utilize language skills and vocabulary previously taught and which will provide the participatory activity so necessary for young pupils.

Role of Classroom Teacher

Recognizing that teachers' education, professional training, and skill in the English language will vary greatly, the radio lessons are designed to provide the major instruction. But teachers will have important functions to perform since their attitude toward and participation in the radio lessons will influence their pupils' reactions and enhance the effects of the radio programs.

A teacher's guide will provide classroom teachers with information about each lesson and suggestions for their participation. Teachers will be asked to assist in preparing the classes for each broadcast. During the radio lesson they will be urged to participate actively, and directions specifically for teachers will be included in the broadcasts. After each broadcast, teachers will direct additional language exercises, oral and written. Specific vocabulary and learning exercises will be displayed in the teacher's guide, but teachers will be encouraged to adapt them according to the needs of their children.

Evaluation

The project research design provides for two types of evaluation, formative and summative. Curriculum and script writers require a method for determining the effectiveness of their lessons in meeting the intended curriculum objectives. A trained team of observers will visit classrooms during the broadcasts to note the reactions of pupils and report to the designers on various aspects of the lesson. Each lesson will be observed by a minimum of two observers. Observers will be alerted by the writers to comment on particular aspects of each lesson. Weekly tests will be used to determine whether the objectives of the lessons have been achieved.

For the summative evaluation, the important question which the RLAP must answer is: Can children learn to read and understand English from radio instruction? If they can, then the next question is: Do they learn more from radio instruction than from conventional classroom instruction? A carefully planned summative evaluation will be designed to compare achievement of pupils taught by regular methods. For pilot

testing, schools have been randomly selected within seven linguistic target areas of Kenya. Classes from the preceding year in the same school will serve as control groups. Measuring instruments will be carefully constructed using a large sampling of items selected at random from the curriculum. Care will be taken to insure that results will not be influenced by intuitive judgments.⁵

Conclusion

Language instruction by radio offers unique challenges and advantages. If successful, the RLAP will provide improved instruction of English at a lower cost to a greater number of students, particularly in rural areas. The design of the program will allow for its transfer to other geographical locations, intact or with alterations, to meet local needs. For many emerging nations presently committing large percentages of resources toward basic education, the results of the Radio Language Arts Project may answer their critical need for cost-effective language education for primary school children.

Notes

1. Funded by the Office of Education, Bureau for Science and Technology, United States Agency for International Development. Implemented by the Academy for Educational Development, Washington, D.C., and the Kenya Institute of Education, Nairobi, Kenya.
2. Friend, Jamesine; Searle, Barbara; and Suppes, Patrick. Radio Mathematics in Nicaragua. Stanford: Institute for Mathematical Studies in the Social Sciences, Stanford University, 1980.
3. Kenya Institute of Education. "Statement of Objectives, Primary Education Project." Nairobi: Kenya Institute of Education, 1980.
4. Imhoof, Maurice. "Reading by Radio: A Position Paper on the Use of Radio in Teaching Skills for Educational Development." Washington: Academy for Educational Development, 1981.
5. For further information about this project, write Maurice Imhoof, Project Director, Academy for Educational Development, 1414 22nd Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037.

Cutler: Appeared in Development Communication Report, Clearinghouse on Development Communication, March 1982, No. 37