

Problems of Teaching Igbo Language to Non-Native Speakers

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Abstract: *This study investigates the problems of teaching Igbo language to non-native speakers in National Institute for Nigerian Languages' Nursery/Primary Demonstration School (NNPDS) Aba. These problem ranges from parents/teachers attitude towards teaching in Igbo language. Quasi experimental research design was adopted for this study. The population consists of 40 pupils of basic two children (two arms A&B) from NNPDS Aba. Interview and observation were used to collect data. The study reveals that parents and teachers attitude towards Igbo language inhibits learning among school children. The study concludes by encouraging parents, teachers and pupils to develop positive attitude towards learning using Igbo language, government should endeavour to provide instructional materials like text books specially written in Igbo language and distributes freely to non- native Igbo speakers.*

Key words: *Igbo language, parents, problems, pupils, teachers, teaching, non-native speakers*

1.1 Background to the Study

Language is an indispensable tool for communication, transmission of culture and socialization. In Nigeria language plays a very important role in transmitting the culture of the people to the younger generation see Imu & Amazu (2023). People who are not proud of their language do not love their culture and are not worthy to live. Among the three major languages spoken in Nigeria; Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. Igbo language is one of the major languages spoken by almost 20 million speakers (Udoye, 2019). Most definitions of the name "Igbo" often collectively referred to the land, language, and ethnic people of Nigeria who occupy the south eastern part of eastern Nigeria. Five state make up the Igbo race which are Imo, Anambra, Enugu, Abia and Ebonyi State. Some parts of Rivers and Delta speak Igbo (Udoye 2019). Igbo language should be a medium of instruction at the junior primary school according to national policy on education (NPE) (2014).

According to NPE the medium of instruction at the junior primary school will be the language of the immediate environment or the mother tongue; while English language should be taught as a subject (see Imu & Amazu 2023). With the advent of western education and the rate at which our people value English language, which ought to be the second language, most parents do not want their children to be taught using the language of the immediate environment which is Igbo language. To such parents, intelligence is rated with how much the child can communicate using English language and as such they want the teacher to use English in teaching their children. Schools are also rated based on the use of English as a medium of instruction. This makes it difficult for the child to master neither the art of speaking Igbo language effectively, since at home, parents use their mother tongue in communicating and in school English language effectively, and at home, parents use their mother tongue in communicating to the child. This situation ends up putting the children in a state of confusion. The child is neither good in Igbo language nor good in English language.

Apart from the confusion created by parents most school teachers at the primary school level especially private schools do not have basic foundation in Igbo language. They cannot teach effectively using Igbo language. And so they prefer using the English as a medium effective of instruction in the classroom. The use of indigenous language for effective teaching and learning cannot be over emphasized. Ezeani (2001) is of the view that the use of indigenous language in the teaching and learning will help students to understand the subject very well. Mkandawire (2017) discovered in Zambian schools that children participate actively in class when the language of the immediate environment that is, mother tongue is been used by teachers than when second language (L2) is used in teaching and learning. Children tend to participate actively in class when the language of immediate environment is used as a medium of unstructured.

Most children found it difficult to pronounce most word in Igbo, they found it difficult to read simple Igbo text which could be as result of not teaching the basic alphabet in Igbo language because basic understanding of Igbo alphabet will lay a good foundation in pronunciation and reading in Igbo. It will go a long way to help them master part of the body in Igbo and can use it in making sentence. In order words, the poor attitude of students toward teaching and learning in Igbo language. Igbo has created a big vacuum in the education system not only to the Igbo speaking student.

1.2 State of the Problem

A lot of interest has generated in investigating reasons for problems in teaching Igbo language at the primary school level of education. Expect in the language have observed that most pupils score little or nothing in identifying things, objects, human part and making simple sentence in Igbo language example simple body parts like ; aka, ukwu, anya, isi to mention but few. This study investigates problems like identification of object in Igbo language. In doing so, it attempts to investigates such variables as attitude of parents/student and class (speaking and non-speakers) of Igbo language. The problem of this study, therefore is to identify the problems in learning Igbo language to non-speakers of Igbo language

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study in broad terms, is to investigate the problems of teaching Igbo language to non- speakers. Specifically the study aims at finding out the following.

- ❖ Parents attitude towards teaching and learning in Igbo language
- ❖ Students attitude towards teaching and learning in Igbo language

❖ Attitude of non-native speakers towards teaching and learning in Igbo language

This study has both theoretical and pedagogical significance. Theoretical; it fills the gap in that there no proof that student attitude to learning in the language of the immediate environment (Igbo) in recent time among private school has not attracted any research interest. Research interest has been generated in such areas like implementing the national policy on education. Not much attention has been paid to parents/students attitude of non-native speakers towards teaching and learning in Igbo language especially in NNPDS Aba.

Pedagogically; it can be relevant in sensitizing teacher on the importance of impacting to the younger generation in their mother tongue. The study argues that poor performances in other subjects are due to the fact that most concepts they learn using English language are terms they are not familiar with their concept in Igbo language which will hasten the mastering of such subjects, this should make teachers at the junior primary level of education to device means of motivating the students in developing interest in his/her mother tongue.

This study is limited to problems, teaching in Igbo language mainly at basic level with special emphases on basic two this study will also be limited to National Institute for Nigerian Languages Nursery/Primary Demonstration School (NNPDS).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual definitions

Language: the goal of education is not easily achievable without a language. The process of imparting knowledge has to be carried out through a language (Aguiyi, 2012), and also through methods Imu (2018). Aguiyi (2012) state that language is the surest way through which people can retain, safeguard knowledge, wisdom and authentic culture inherited from their ancestors as well as hand them to generation after them. Gomwalk (2000) opines, that language, regulates all human activities, embodies culture and understand culture, one must understand and appreciate that language of the culture as an essential medium of cultural transmission. According to Ezeudu (2013) language is a means of preserving the people's culture. He asserts that language and culture are inseparable and separate a child from his/her language and culture at an early stage of his/her school or education is to make him or her have no regard for his/her culture.

Olurewaju (2006) insist that mother tongue as a medium of instruction, impairs/inhibits the development of the child's personality and ability. In order to avoid the child's educational problems, the republic, of Nigerian (FRN) (2014) in its national policy on education NPE states that the medium of instruction in the primary school shall be the language of the environment for the first three years while English language shall be taught as a subject.

In Nigeria, primary education is referred to as the education given in an institution for children aged 6 to 11 years. It is universal compulsory and tuition free (FRN, 2014). It is where the foundation of secondary and tertiary education is laid. Therefore, the selection of the suitable language as a medium of instruction is important. This is because it is generally an accepted fact that a child's learning is severely hampered if he/she does not understand the language of instruction used in the school. This is the problem in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions, where English language is the medium of instruction because of the problem and dangers of imposing one indigenous language group or to all other linguistic groups in a multi lingual country like Nigeria.

According to Igbojinwaekwu and Nneji (2012), despite the policy of using language of the environment as medium of instruction in the first three years in the primary school as contained in the NPE, no record has shown any school be it public or private, implementing it, except that the language of the environment is taught in primary and secondary schools as a subject. One likely reason of non-complementation of the policy of using the language of the first three years in the primary school is that it entails much more than knowing how to speak the language.

The emphasis in the NPE (2014) is on using the language of the environment as medium of instruction for the first three years in primary school, but there is no programme in place to give teachers course or training in the use of the language of the environment to enhance their instructional methods. This is why the policy has been difficult to implement. In Aba, the commercial city of Abia State, the language of the environment is “IGBO” which happens to be the pupils’ mother tongue.

Igbo Language: Igbo is one of the major languages spoken by one of the major tribes, the Igbo’s in the south-east geo-political zone of Nigeria. The mid-western Ibo’s on Delta North Senatorial District, Ikwere’s in the present River States and the Igbankes in the present Edo state, all in Nigeria speaks divers of Igbo language. Igbo as a language, is taught as a subject in primary and secondary schools, colleges of education and the universities in Nigeria. So, it is a Nigerian language that has orthography and literature. It is widely spoken in any part of Nigeria (Igbojinwaekwu and Nneji (2019)

2.2 Theoretical Studies

The Easy Acquisition Theory

This theory was advocated by Wiseman (1989). To Wiseman (1989) orthography should sound familiar with the native speakers, for when they (native speakers) should have confidence and feel comfortable with the sounds of the alphabets of the orthography for this will make it easier for learning. However, Ugorji (2009) proposed a “sociophonological” model for Igbo orthography. Based on this, school orthography do not contain phonemes but socio-linguistic activism and the aim according to him is to re-vitalize dialects communities. This position is also an echo of Emenanjo (1995) where he advises that

Written standard Igbo will have to grapple with
the problems of handling dialect morphemes,
words, phrase, idiomatic expression, proverbs, tongue
Twisters etc which by implication will come in expected
avalanches into standard Igbo.

Spelling and Alternative Theory

Spelling theory as it concerns Igbo and some African languages stipulates that each word should be written the way it is pronounced in isolation. In the alternate spelling theory it is postulated that when two spellings have equal claims to represent in the orthography, it is advisable to admit the spelling forms. This brings to mind the criticism of the standard orthography for not representing the seconds of dialects. As Emenanjo (1996) observes in some dialects spoken in central Igbo areas, people use “v” where others use “b” as in Mbaise

Mbaise	Standard Igbo	Gloss
IVU	Ibu	fatness
Mvo	mbo	finger nails
Ivo	ibo	dissect

According to this theory alternative spellings should be admitted in the orthography since both letters “v” and “b” are represented in the orthography.

2.3 Empirical Studies

Ikekeonwa, C. (2011) investigates on the issues pertaining to language identification, study and management from the perspective of Nigerian languages. Her findings reveal that teachers and learners alike can take advantage of results of linguistic researches to impact positively on their teaching and learning of Nigerian languages.

Doogu, T. E (2015). The study investigated the effects of Igbo language as medium of instruction on the enhancement of retention level of primary pupils. Her findings reveals pupils taught mathematics using Igbo language had higher mean retention level than those taught in English language.

Udoeye I. E (2019) investigates the problems associated with teaching and learning of the Igbo language. The findings indicates that lack of Igbo pedagogical materials, attitude of people towards the language among other things prevent the smooth teaching and learning of Igbo language.

Ekeke, O. K. M (2020) investigates the factors affecting teaching and learning of Igbo language among young Igbo people in Ogun State. The findings revealed that teaching and learning is bedeviled with a lot of problems ranging from inadequate materials and personnel to handle the teaching of the recommended ones in the country.

Imu F. O & Amazu A. N (2023) investigate the nature and nurture on senior secondary school students in learning the Igbo language, Aba education zone. Expost-facto research design was adopted. The study concludes that genetics plays a role in language development, and some children may be predisposed to certain language abilities or difficulties. However, the environment in which a child grows up and the experience they have also play a significant role in language development. The study recommends that parents and the people around the children should interact with them in Igbo language during early development.

3. Data Presentation and Data Analysis

3.1 Raw scores for Group A (experimental Group) = 10, 8, 10, 8, 10, 8, 8, 8, 6, 10, 6, 10, 6, 8, 8, 4, 10, 6, 10, 6.

Table 1: calculate the mean using raw scores of basic two on Igbo test.

X	F	FX
4	1	4
6	5	30
8	7	56
10	7	70
	F= 20	=160

$$\frac{X = \text{EFX}}{F} = \frac{X = 160}{20} = 8$$

Mean =8

From the table above the mean of the experimental group (native speakers) was 8 indicating that the student/pupils have little or no problem in being taught using Igbo language.

3.2 Rows scores for group B (control group) = 8, 4, 2, 2, 4, 6, 10, 10, 2, 2, 2, 4, 4, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 4.

Table 2: calculating the mean using row scores of Basic two on Igbo test.

X	F	FX
2	10	20
4	6	24
6	1	6
8	1	8
10	2	20
	F=20	= 78

$$\frac{X = \text{EFX}}{F} = \frac{X = 78}{20} = 3.9$$

Mean =4

From the table above the mean of the control group (non-native speakers) was 4 indicating that the student/pupils have problem in being taught using Igbo language.

3.3. Result and discussion

Lack of interest from the pupils: from the test scores it was observed from the table 1 where the mean of the experimental group (native speakers) was 8 indicating that the student/pupils have little or no problem in begin taught using Igbo language this could be as a result that they either interact with their parents in Igbo and do other things around the home using their mother tongue. While the control group had a mean score of 4 indicating that there is lack of interest from the non-native speakers (see appendix 5). From the interview it was discovered that the child had no interest

in Igbo language and probably had no reading text in Igbo thus their lack of interest in learning with Igbo language.(see appendix 4)

2. Lack of reading materials from the pupils: based on the interview with the pupil in Appendix 5 most children lack reading text indicating their lack of interest. Availability of reading material goes a long way in motivating children in their studies but lack of it inhibits learning in like manner, lack of Igbo reading material will always inhibits teaching and learning among pupils.

3. Parents attitude towards using Igbo language in teaching their children: most parents believed that intelligence is rated based on how well you speak English language, to them children n that speaks Igbo are rated low academically. This is not so because individuals who have strong foundation in any Nigerian language performs greatly in English later in life. Parents go to the point of threaten to withdraw their children from such school where the language of the immediate environment are used in teaching.(see appendix 2).

4. Teachers attitude: most teachers do not have interest in teaching the children using the language of the immediate environment why? Because they do not have the knowledge of the language since they read another thing in the school and here they are meant to teach with another language they are not used to and which they cannot speak fluently. (See appendix 3).

5. Government attitude towards use of native language: it is true that government has made a policy on the use of mother tongue especially at the junior primary level as seen in NPE but no effort has been made to monitor if the policy is been kept or not. Most schools especially the private sectors in other to have population and in order for parents not to withdraw their children from their school do not go by what was stipulated in the NPE. (see appendix 2)

Summary of Findings

From the test score, it revealed that the experimental group (native speakers) had a mean score of 8 indicating that they have little or no problem learning with the language of the immediate environment. This support the opinion of Ezeani (2001) and Makandewire (2017) that teaching and learning in indigenous language will help students to understand the subject very well and they will participate actively in the class.

The control group (non-native speakers) had the mean score of 4 which indicate teaching using Igbo language inhibits learning.

The interview between the researcher and Mrs. Kalu indicates that parent's attitude towards teaching in Igbo language also inhibits learning among pupils. This also in line with what Aguiyi (2012) said that parents attitude is one of the challenges using Igbo language in the act of teaching and learning. To such parents intelligence is rated with how far the child can communicate using English language, for instance in the interview between the researcher and Mrs. Kalu who had no interest in her child been taught using Igbo language.

Interview between the researcher and Mr. Bright revealed that parents are ready to pull their children out from schools where they use Igbo language as a medium of instruction to any school where they use English language as a medium of instruction.

The result also revealed that teacher's attitude has a role to play in teaching and learning in Igbo language this can be seen from the interview between the researcher and Mr. Bright it was discovered that teacher's attitude contributes to the challenges of teaching in Igbo language.

Another discovery that was made is that some teachers have no basic foundation in Igbo, no teaching materials such as text books written in Igbo languages, such teachers need training and re-training, seminars and conference as to enable them have the basic foundation in Igbo language.

Conclusion

This paper has revealed that teaching with Igbo language as medium of instruction is faced with lots of problems. The problem emerged due to parent's attitude towards teaching their children in Igbo language, teachers attitude, lack of materials like text books written in Igbo language, poor background of pupils. To solve these problems parents/teachers, pupils and government should join force to ensure that Igbo language should be preserved so that it won't become extinct.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1

Instruction

Horo otu n'ime ihe no na Igbe a wee mejuo ahiri okwu ndia

AKA	ISI	ANYA	NTI	UKWU
AFOR	IRI	ONU	IMI	AZU

1. Anyi na eji _____ Ede ihe
2. Anyi n'iji _____ aga ije
3. Anyi n'iji _____ ahu uzo
4. Anyi n'iji _____ anu ihe

Appendix 2

An interview between the Researcher and the Mrs Kalu

Researchers: Ndewoo Oriaku Kalu

Mrs. Kalu: Ndewoo Aunty, how are you.

Researchers: Adim mma; Biko oriaku Kalu gini mere ije n' akparita uka
gina nwa gi n' asusu bekee

Mrs. Kalu: I want her to start learning how to speak English; as an
Igbo girl she will surely learn igbo language when she grew
Up

Researchers: Oriaku Kalu, marakwa na oburu na Nkechi amutaghi
asusu Igbo ugbu a, o ga ara ya ahu imuta ya ma otuo

Mrs. Kalu: Aunty don't worry about that when time comes I will take
care of that. Good bye.

Researchers: Imeala Oriaku Kalu, noo nke oma.

Appendix 3

Second interview between the researcher and Mr. Bright

Researchers: Ndewoo, abum nwanta akwukwo biara ime ihe nyocha
maka aramahu di iji asusu igbo na omumu na nkuzi ihe
na ulo akwukwo primary.

Mazi Bright: Nno, Ibiala

Researcher: Biko mazi, I nwere ike igwatu anyi aha gi

Mazi Bright: Aham bu mazi Bright

Researcher: O doro anya n'ibu otu onye nkuzi n'ulo akwukwo
NNPDS ebe a

Mazi Bright: E E E Abu m otu onye n'ime ndi nkuzi n' ulo
Akwukwo ebe

Researcher: inwere ike igwatu anyi ihe ichere bu aramahu ije ausus
Igbo kuzie na omumu ihe na primary

Mazi Bright: E E E na- mbu egweghi ngwa ndi eji akuzi
asusu igbo (instructional materials text book
written in Igbo language) nke ga enyere ndi
nkuzi aka ikuzi ihe na asusu igbo. Akwukwo ndi
abughi nke di n'oba akwukwo anyi ha nke ga
enyere onye nkuzi aka.

Nke abuo

ndi nne na nna anyi ha na akpo asusu anyi asi ha naghi enwe obi uto ebe a na eji asusu igbo akuziri umuanyi ha ihe ufodu na akpopu umu ha na ulo akwukwo ebe a na eji asusu igbo akuzi ihe ma kpo ga ha ebe ana eji bekee akuzi ihe.

Nke ato

atutu ndi nkuzi bu ndi na amaghi nke ha riri
na asusu igbo nke na o na abu ihe aramahu ebe
nkuzi na omumu ihe n' asusu igbo.

Researcher: meela mazi, ka m juo kwa gini ka a ga eme ka
onodo a di nma ozo?

Mazi Bright: (i) gomenti na ndi odi n'aka ihu maka aguma akwukwo
na mutaga abalizike ihu na ha weputara ngwa oru eji akuzi asusu igbo a, oba
akwukwo(library) anyi buru ebe emejuputara otutu akwukwo edere na asusu igbo, ha ga
ahukwa na azulitere ndi nkuzi ndi mara nke
ekwe na aku na asusu ekwesi kwara na aga enye ihe
nkuzi zuzu nke ndi bekee na akpo (training re-training, ndi seminars nakwa conferences)
ima otu ka

mma bu uzo egasi wee kuzire umu anyi ha ihe n'asusu igbo.
Nke ozo bu ndi nne na nna ga abalisike I hu na ha ga aru olo diri ha na ulonke bu ikuziri umu aka
a asusu igbo, jiri asusu igbo kparita uka n'clo gin a umu
aka ha. n

Researcher: Imeela onye nkuzi anyi obi di nnukwu uto maka asusu igbo

Appendix 4

An interview between the research and the school pupil

Researcher: gini bu aha gi ?

Pupil: aham bu Rita ebere ukaegbu

Researcher: you are a pupil in NNPS

Pupil: yes

Researcher: inwere ike ikurum kurum akiku na asusu igbo

Pupil: no

Researcher: gini mere I geghi eji asusu igbo aku akiku?

Pupil: yes because amaghi etu esi a call some words in igbo

Researcher: o buru na asi gi kuo ya na bekee I ga kuo ya

Pupil: yes

Researcher: O doro gi anya dika nwata akwukwo I ekwesiri imuta etu Esi ekwo okwu na asusu
igbo?

Pupil: yes

Researcher: inwere akwukwo edere na asusu igbo

Pupil: yes

Researcher: I na agu akwukwo ndi a

Pupil: no

Researcher: gini mere iji inaghi agu ya bu akwukwo ndi ha edere na
asusu igbo?

Pupil: I don't know how to read them

Researcher: o dim ma I ga ejisike na okpirita uka gi na ndi enyi gina
asusu igbo, nwere ya n'ekwu okwu mgbe obula, ma

baliasike I gu akwukwo ndi ha edere na asusu igbo.
Imeela nwada ebere Rita ukaegbu