

THE TEACHING OF IGBO AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RIVERS STATE: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

by

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Abstract

Igbo language and culture promoters like Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC) and other educators and lovers of the language are greatly concerned on how best to teach the language in order to reduce the high rate of failures in this subject. The study investigated the problems and prospects of the teaching of Igbo as a second language in secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. It adopted the descriptive survey design. The sample consists of 30 students and 40 teachers selected by simple random sampling. The instruments used were observation and interview. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained by use of Cronbach Alpha and its index is 0.71. Findings show the following: Teachers use the curriculum meant for Igbo L1 students to teach the Igbo L2 students; Igbo L2 teachers do not use the required textbooks to teach Igbo L2 students; the medium of instruction being used in the urban schools in Port Harcourt is not the mother-tongue but rather English Language.

Introduction

Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction, national cohesion, and preservation of cultures (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). Thus, every child is mandated to learn the language of immediate environment. Moreover, for the interest of national unity, it is important that every child learns one of the three major Nigerian languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) other than his own mother tongue as second language. Through the process of learning a language, the culture of the host language people is promoted, preserved and transmitted. Hence, any nation that relegates its language to the background has missed tremendously a major vehicle of national development. That is why Anukam (2015) insists that the compulsory use of mother-tongue as a medium of instruction in pre-primary as stipulated in National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) should not be ignored. She is also of the opinion that a child who learns the mother-tongue (L1) before the second language (L2) masters the (L2) faster than the child who started off with the (L2). Hence, a child will be able to learn and understand the things around him better and easier if taught in his mother tongue. That is why the National Policy on Education promulgated by the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria emphasises the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in early formal education

In view of this, the policy applies to four levels of education, viz:

- a) At the pre-primary level, government will ensure that the medium of instruction will be principally the mother tongue or language of the immediate environment and to this end produce textbooks in Nigerian languages. How far this has been achieved is yet to be determined.

- b) At the primary level, government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the first three years of primary school is initially the mother tongue and at a later stage, English.
- c) At the secondary school level, mother tongue comes as a basic subject to be chosen in junior secondary and made compulsory in senior secondary, where it is stated that in selecting Nigerian language, students should study the language of their own area in addition to any other one of the three major Nigerian languages: Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba, subject to availability of teachers.
- d) In the case of the adult education, The National Commission for the Development of Adult Education will work out the overall strategy for the inclusion of Nigerian arts, culture and languages in adult education programmes.

Problem of the Study

Teachers encounter so many problems in teaching Igbo as a second language In Rivers State. Some of the problems are identified as follows:

- The use Igbo L1 curriculum to teach L2 Igbo students. There is no standard curriculum for L2 students. Hence teachers make use of the existing L1 curriculum which is not suitable for the students hence leads to slow comprehension of the subject matter.
- Lack of required teaching materials to teach. The instructional materials used for L2 is above their status. This also poses a big problem.
- Metropolitan nature of the State. There are so many local languages in Rivers State .This create difficulty in identifying the language of the immediate community and as such create negative attitude on the part of the parents.
- Teachers do not vary their teaching methods and they pay less attention to methods like guided inquiry, activity, field trip, etc. that are activity-oriented, which facilitate language mastery and better acquisition.

Therefore, this study intends to look into the problem and recommend ways of improving the teaching of Igbo as a second language in Rivers State as well as other states in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study is hinged on the theory of constructivism. Constructivism is a contemporary view of learning, which states that learning is an active process of creating meaning from different experiences.

Agulanna & Nwachukwu (2014) opined that students will learn best by trying to make sense of something on their own with the teacher as a guide to help them along the way. It challenges the assumption that the learner is a mere receiver and processor of knowledge, absorbing information as he or she encounters it.

Eggen et al (2004) is of the view that knowledge is first constructed in a social context and then appropriated by individuals. According to them, learning is an active process where learners should learn to discover principles, concepts and facts for themselves.

Woolfolk (2010) suggests that students should work together, ask and answer questions, engage in group projects/research and teach others in their group.

In this theory, the teacher's role is that of a facilitator; he/she displays different sets of skills, observes the learners as they work together, directs a discussion, and helps learners to understand the content (Brownstein, 2001).

The constructivist approach to teaching and learning is based on the combination of subset of research within cognitive psychology and a subset of research within social psychology. The basic premise is that an individual learner must actively build knowledge and skills (Bruner, 1995) and that information exists within these built constructs rather than in the external environment. However, all supporters of constructivism agree that it is the individual's processing of stimuli from the environment and the resulting cognitive structures that produce adaptive behaviour, rather than the stimuli themselves.

For the teaching and learning of Igbo L2 as stipulated in the National Policy on Education, there should be well-designed, well-structured environment and child-oriented activities that will engage learners with some problem-solving discussions. The use of language aids are required to facilitate language acquisition. The language aids include: audio aids, audio-visual aids, language laboratories, etc. The Igbo L2 learners should interact regularly with the owners of the native language to ensure effective mastery of the language. This implies taking regular trips into the communities in order to learn the language better.

Objectives of the Study

This study is guided by the following objectives:

- 1) To determine the problems of teaching Igbo L2 in secondary schools in Rivers State.
- 2) To ascertain the prospects of teaching Igbo L2 in secondary schools in Rivers State.
- 3) To ascertain whether teachers use the curriculum meant for Igbo L1 students to teach Igbo L2 students.
- 4) To ascertain whether Igbo teachers use the required the textbooks.
- 5) To determine the medium of instruction used.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

- 1) Do teachers use the curriculum meant for Igbo L1 to teach the Igbo L2 students?
- 2) Do Igbo teachers use the required textbooks during teaching?
- 3) Do Igbo teachers use Igbo language as their medium of instruction during Igbo classes?

Method

The study adopted the descriptive survey design.

Population of the Study

The population of this study comprised of fifteen (15) junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area in Rivers State, Nigeria. They were selected because not all the schools in Port Harcourt City, Rivers State, teach Igbo Language as one of their languages.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The subjects for the study were 30 junior secondary school students and 40 teachers from schools in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area of Rivers State.

The instruments used to collect data involved class observation and oral interview from the 30 junior secondary school students and 40 Igbo Language teachers. The purpose of interview is to gather relevant information concerning events, work results, knowledge, opinion, perspectives, values, attitudes and others in face-to-face contacts. Classroom observation technique was used to validate other data gathering methods like interview.

Teachers' Oral Interview

Oral interviews in addition to classroom observation conducted for teachers.

The following questions were asked:

1. Do students show interest in Igbo Language study?
2. Why are you using the Igbo L1 curriculum to teach Igbo L2 students?

Results

- 1) It was observed that the teachers find it difficult to teach Igbo as second language in Rivers State. Also, most of the students do not like to speak Igbo. This is because students that make up the population of the school come from different geographical areas of the country, making it difficult for a particular Nigerian language to be taught. These urban schools therefore resort to the use of English language as the medium of instruction. Moreover, most parents do not approve its study.
- 2) The teachers said that they only know of the Igbo L1 curriculum and have been using it to interpret what they teach the L2 learners.
- 3) The teachers also said that they do not have textbooks published for L2 Igbo; that they extract what they teach the L2 learners from L1 textbooks.

Oral Interview in addition to Classroom Observation Conducted for Students

The following questions were asked:

- 1) How do Igbo teachers engage you in class work or activities?
- 2) How many times have you gone out on field trip into the communities to interact with the native speakers of Igbo language?
- 3) How and when do your Igbo teachers use instructional materials while teaching?

Students' Oral Interview Analysed

- 1) It was observed that 10 students out of 30 agreed that their Igbo teachers give them class activities during and after their Igbo L2 lessons, while 20 disagreed.
- 2) 23 students said that they have not for once gone out to interact with the native speakers of Igbo language because their parents refuse to pay for their trip. But seven (7) indicated that they have gone once to interact with the native speakers of Igbo language. .
- 3) All the students indicated that their Igbo language teachers use teaching materials to teach them during the lesson.

Summary of the Findings

The researcher's major findings are:

- 1) Teachers use Igbo L1 curriculum to teach the L2 learners instead of L2 curriculum, and they do not vary their teaching methodology to teach L2 as indicated in the National Policy on Education. For example, when teaching the Igbo's cultural life, various methodologies should be employed to enable the L2 students understand better.

- 2) Most students do not like to speak Igbo language because of the metropolitan nature of the school.
- 3) Most parents discourage their children from studying Igbo language by withdrawing both financial and moral support.

Discussion

The parents' negative attitude towards the study of the language posed a big problem to the study of Igbo L2. Students could not go for acculturation program which is geared at interacting with the native speakers of the language. The finding is in line with Tobias and Duffy, T.M. (2009) who opined that people construct meaning through their interpretative interactions and experience in their social environments. Agulanna & Nwachukwu (2014) lending credence to the assertion emphasised that there are many channels one uses to construct understanding. The channels include reading, listening, exploring and experiencing.

The second research finding implied that teachers use the curriculum meant for Igbo L1 students to teach the Igbo L2 students. The finding is in agreement with Ibe (2016) who observed that a good language teacher should plan his/her lesson in such a way that the objectives will be attainable. In planning his lessons, he/she should take into consideration the age, interest, class of the students or learners and making sure that ambiguity is avoided in the lesson preparation. He/she should also vary his teaching methodology.

The research findings also indicated that Igbo L2 teachers do not use the required textbooks to teach Igbo L2 learners. Again, the instructional materials were not use by the teachers during Igbo lessons. According to Ezekoka (2009), instructional materials are the vehicles that carry messages/information from a transmitting source (teacher) to the receiver (learner). The vehicles that carry information interact with the learners through their senses. The more senses are stimulated in the teaching-learning process, the easier it is for the learners to remember what they have learnt.

The research findings also indicated that the medium of instruction used in urban schools in Port Harcourt city is not the mother tongue but English Language. This situation poses a problem for the teaching and learning of Igbo as L2. This is contrary to the view of Anukam (2015) which states that a child who learns the mother tongue (L1) before the second language (L2) masters the L2 faster than the child who started off with the L2. Such a child will be able to learn things around him better if taught in his mother tongue.

Hence, the learning of indigenous language at any level (L1) or (L2) is a welcomed development. This is because it will not only help in the actualisation of one of the injunctions of the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) but will go ahead to cement the unity of the country.

Retrospectively, the implementation of the national policy on education as regards Nigerian languages, which Igbo languages is one of them has great prospect for the nation and the people as a whole by the actualization of the following:

1. The study of Igbo as L2 will help the government to accomplish her educational goals concerning the teaching of Nigerian languages as L2 when students from different geographical areas will begin to interact and relate as a result of studying together.

2. It will help to attract the interest of other students who never wanted to learn Igbo L2, especially when the teachers make use of appropriate teaching aids and teaching methods.
3. Publishers and authors will produce credible L2 textbooks to enhance the teaching and learning of Igbo as a second language.
4. Students in Igbo department will be gainfully employed.
5. The study of the three major Nigerian languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba), other than the mother tongue, will go a long way to cement the unity of the country.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. Regular training and re-training of Igbo L2 teachers should be organised through seminars, workshops and conferences to update teachers on innovations in the curriculum.
2. Government on its own should employ more qualified Igbo L2 teachers and give scholarships to interested students who are desirous to study the subject to higher levels.
3. Parents should support and finance Igbo language field trips.
4. SPILC and education authorities should organise seminars for teachers and students.
5. Government and stakeholders should provide an enabling learning environment.
6. Teachers of Igbo language need to provide conducive learning environment that will meet the needs of the students and usher them in towards achieving their potentials.
7. Igbo language teachers should use various teaching methods to make their teaching learner-centred or activity-based.
8. Igbo language experts should be encouraged to write books for L2.
9. The society should encourage the use of Nigerian languages in their businesses, meetings, and neighbourhood.

Conclusion

The result of the study revealed that some major factors hampering the teaching of Igbo language as L2 in Rivers State include: negative attitude of parents, lack of uniform medium of instruction, inefficient teaching materials, and inadequate teaching methods. Hence, the teaching of Igbo language as L2 is not an uphill task. It is surmountable if the schools adhere strictly to the directives of the NPE. On the other hand, the government on should make available the required curriculum and instructional materials for effective teaching and learning. The status of indigenous languages such as Igbo should also be elevated to create a higher market value. This will motivate students to study the language and parents will in turn motivate their wards to study Igbo. All hands must be deck curriculum planners, the government, students and parents for the realisation of this noble objective.

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