

## EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF IGBO LANGUAGE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

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### Abstract

Language education is a vital aspect of education. In Nigeria, the English language is used as the language for instruction in schools, educational administration and as a lingua Franca to the detriment of the development of indigenous languages such as Igbo language. No wonder, Odinaka (2010) posed this ugly question: "Have you noticed how the Igbo language is fast deteriorating in our schools, markets, public places, business sectors and even in homes, as if no one speaks the language anymore"? Nigerian language including the Igbo language has come a long way following their acceptance as national languages. Igbo language is among the three languages elevated and recognized as national languages. The policy that gave this status came into force in 1977. It is disheartening that-from that time till today, it seems that not much have been done to attain the objectives of these indigenous languages. Igbo language seems to be the worst hit. This paper discusses the provision of national policy on education on languages, the constraints encountered in the teaching of Igbo language and proffers solutions to overcoming these constraints as well as what students need to do to improve and develop their learning in Igbo language. The paper will also address the things that need to be put into place urgently to address this ugly situation. Finally, it was recommended that Igbo language teacher should be properly encouraged by motivating them through incentives like given them indigenous language allowances which will promote and encourage more student to study Igbo language in higher learning.

**Keywords:** Effective, Igbo Language, Education and Secondary School.

### Introduction

Language is one of distinct characteristics man has over other creations. Although it is known that other animals communicate, it is yet to be established that they speak a language. Underscoring the importance of language to man, it would have been difficult to carry on governance, family life, complex society without some forms of language we speak. Every race has its own indigenous language within the various languages available.

Language is the pivot around which every activity rotates hence it is unnecessary overemphasizing its importance. It is an instrument of public relations, medium of instrument knowledge, means of national and political interaction and a gateway to national unity. According to Mgbodile (1998) language is the chief means of generating, maintaining and transferring culture and

civilization.

Language as a vital instrument of communication is an invaluable medium through which people and nations of the world interact. Language is a social phenomenon concerning social and cultural notions of the people. It is regarded as one of the most important aspects of the culture of any society present and past. Igbo language is a language of the Igbo who are found in the South East geopolitical zone of the country. Majority of the Igbo speakers are found in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo State, some communities in Delta state also speak the language. Chinagorom (2007) noted that about 50 million people who are living in Igbo land and those living outside Igbo speaks this language.

According to Nwadike (2006):

"Igbo is one of the "kwa" group  
of language spoken widely in

Nigeria by over 50 million people. It is a tone language.... it is a language of education, commerce, technology and social activity”.

The Igbo people are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria. The Igbo people belong to the Negro race in Africa and their language and the Igbo language equally belongs to "kwa" group seen in West and central Africa. The Igbo language is characterized by many dialects, but almost all the Igbo people understand the central language.

### **The Rise of Igbo Language in the Nigerian School System**

Prior to the year 1977, when the national policy education first come into being in Nigeria, Igbo language did not enjoy any federal status as it was only used in the Igbo speaking states alone, though the Igbo man has wielded strong impact in the economic, social, religious and political life of Nigeria since independence in 1960. The acceptance of the three major languages: Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba raised the status of Igbo language from a sectional to a national language, thereby giving the Igbo language a status that is recognized in the whole world. The policy was enshrined in the 1979 National Policy on Education.

The policy later was revised in 1981 and stated clearly in the 2012 N.P.E. section 1:8 that:

Each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother tongue. In this connection, the government considers the three major languages in Nigeria to be Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba.

With this national status, Igbo language was now made mandatory to be studied in all parts of Nigeria as a core course to be taken and passed in WASCE and other qualifying examinations. The policy in other to prove the importance the Federal Government attaches to indigenous languages in Nigeria further states:

- To achieve the above objectives, government will among other things

- ensure that the medium of instruction will be principally the mother tongue or the language of immediate community; (NPE, section II: 3).
- Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community and at a later stage, English (NPE: section 4).
- The curriculum at the secondary school level must include indigenous languages (NPE section 19:4).

One completely feels bad when ones sees the way, manner and level of implementing these indigenous language policy in Nigeria especially in Igbo land and among the Igbo people whose language and culture has been highly elevated to the national status, thereby giving it room to develop in the comity of world languages.

### **Attitude of the Igbos towards their Mother-Tongue**

Most speakers of Igbo language see their mother tongue as inferior to other languages. As a subject, also inferior to other subjects since it neither influences their admission into higher institutions nor their employment opportunities. Agwu (2005) rightly pointed out that Igbo studies may be jeopardize if there is no plan for its continuity by making concerted efforts towards teaching it to the younger generations.

Okafor (2008) observed that many highly educated Igbo people cannot speak nor read Igbo fluently. It is also observed that many Igbo people are not proud of their language and culture as members of other ethnic groups are. They would rather want to promote the English language. In most homes in Igbo land, parents proudly communicate with their children in English languages instead of their mother-tongue. Any child who could speak English very fluently is admired both at home and in the community.

Igbo language, our Nigerian indigenous languages have come under very dire challenges. Presently, in spite of the policy on the use of local or indigenous language at the primary school level, English still remains the sole medium of instruction in our school. Our major languages are

only taught as mere subjects in schools. Our school system, in collaboration with the government, is not doing anything significantly commendable to preserve our local languages. Instead, it blindly leads our children to loose interest in their own mother tongue by prohibiting the use of a native language in class or in some cases, the school premises. Worse still, many private schools in the country hardly teach our major native languages. These negative attitudes therefore hamper the effective teaching of the Igbo language.

### Methods of Teaching Igbo Language

Teaching methods are the strategies, techniques or systems used by the teacher in piloting the pupils to learn.

Teaching method is a way of doing the teaching business, the procedure, orderliness, in planning and execution of teaching with the appropriate integration of instructional materials to achieve the objectives at the classroom level.

Chidi-Ehiem (2009) defines teaching methods as those techniques or systems used by the teacher in teaching the pupils very well with the use of instructional aids which creates room for comprehension and understanding. Teaching methods are also strong instruments in the hand of the classroom teacher to determine the degree of the success of a lesson.

The whole issue of teaching and learning are centred on the teacher, pupil and curriculum. However, teaching is the ingredients necessary for effective teaching and learning activities.

In Igbo language, teaching methods could be categorized according to their operations or functions. Some in their operations organize the class in the formation best suited to the topic. Some are used to communicate with the pupils while some are in activities forms. The instructional methods use in teaching Igbo language is categorized as follows:

- (a) Teacher centred methods which include: lecture method, story telling and demonstration method.
- (b) Student-centred or pupil-centred methods which include: discovery

method, discussion, play method, inquiry and project method.

A teaching method is a recurrent pattern of teacher behaviour, applicable to various subject matters, characteristics of more than one teacher and relevant to learning (Gage, 1969:144) quoted by Mkpa (2009). The term pattern refers to a set of behaviour that occur simultaneously or in a unified sequence. The notion of reoccurring means that the pattern is repeated over intervals measured in minutes or weeks. While applicable to more than one subject matters that the term teaching method is applicable to all subject-matter for example Igbo language.

The negative consequences of the present situation are diverse, but more specifically we can state that the rapid fading of our cultural values is largely due to our native language, language and culture are inextricably intertwined so much that, the existence of one depends on the existence of the other. In order to secure the continued existence of the Igbo language, teaching of the Igbo language should be given the emphasis it deserves at all levels of education.

The Problems of Teaching and Learning of Igbo Language in Schools Igbo language as a subject of study has suffered from so many problems or constraints which have resulted to unexpected result. Anyanele and Ehiem (2011) observed that Igbo language needs reappraisal of its nature and methodology since the subject has remained unactualized in schools. In line with this view, there are many problems to be tackled in the teaching/learning of Igbo language which include:

- **Lack of personnel and skilled manpower:** This is one of the serious problems facing the teaching of the Igbo language in schools. There are very few teachers who are trained specially to teach Igbo language as of now. Existing teachers learnt Igbo language with other subjects such as history, social studies, Christian Religious knowledge and these teachers are expected to teacher Igbo language in schools. Ede (1979:46) in his contribution asserts that: every teacher under normal condition should be specialist in a given

- subject and prove more efficient in it. From the above assertion, teachers of Igbo language must be a specialist in the subject area in other to live up to expectation.
- Absence of good textbooks and non-availability of instructional materials which both the teachers and the pupils could use to promote effective teaching and mastering of the subject. Many schools are not adequately provided with the necessary facilities such as audio-visual materials like radio-set, tape recorders etc.
- The complexity of teaching methodology: The complexity and non-complexity of teaching Igbo language depends on the methodology applied. Mkpa (2004:4) supported the above idea by stating that methodology determines the quantity and quality of learning that takes place in the class. It also will determine the teachers approach to his lesson to enable him gain the children's interest and make learning to take place.
- Lack of computers and social amenities: The low level of computer literacy among teachers is a major factor that hinders effective teaching and learning of Igbo language. The information and communication technology tools (ICT) is almost absent in our most public schools.
- Lack of motivation and incentives: Kalu (1986) suggests that there is a direct link between behaviour and the nature of reward. He goes on to add that people are motivated to work when they have understanding that the work environment will provide them with the things they are looking for. Motivation of teachers of Igbo language could be define as getting Igbo teachers to be enthusiastic about work and work hard to achieve the goals of Igbo studies. Enthusiasm for the Igbo teachers is directly linked to his status. If incentives are not adequately provided for teachers, they would not be motivated to teach effectively.

Epuchie (1990) opined that, there is a significant relationship between the existence of incentives to teachers and the quality of the product. If teachers

of Igbo language were really given incentives like their science counterparts in science education, they would be encouraged to teacher effectively.

#### **Lack of Library and other Resource Materials:**

Ebenyi (2006) define a library as a social apparatus, which is specially designed to perform specified function of information, education, conservation of culture acquisition and organization of knowledge in form of book and non-book materials for the purpose of dissemination of information and knowledge for the benefit of mankind. Some existing libraries, facilities which grossly hamper the teaching of Igbo language because good teaching requires that teachers and students consult sources of information, select and organize their contents into usable form for a determined aim. To corroborate the above, Chikezie (1987) said that the product of this new education programme without adequate library facilities cannot be properly educated since they will need much of the readily culture in them. It is common knowledge that most schools have no functional libraries especially for Igbo studies.

#### **Lack of training and development of teachers:**

It has been observed that most organizations in Nigeria today have stopped training their staff (Ovuorie, 1986). The goal of teaching in general cannot be achieved without properly trained teachers. In the same vein, the goals of Igbo studies cannot be achieved without training Igbo teachers through workshops, seminars, symposia, acculturation programmes and so on, in order to get them acquainted with the current trends in Igbo language studies.

The inability of the teachers to surmount problems encountered in his job because of lack of adequate knowledge of his teaching area can breed frustration even when all other conditions are alright. So lack of training of Igbo teachers stands in the way to effective teaching of the language.

#### **How to make Igbo Language Functional**

Having x-rayed the ugly position of the Igbo language. The question is how do we make this all important means of our national heritage and cultural identity to become functional in the system.

- **Dedicated Igbo personnel are needed:** Men and women who will be honest to themselves, Igbo language and Igbo nation, and show respect to our values as Igbo nation, the policy and Nigeria to make us attain our set objectives in language education especially in Igbo land.
- **Urgent need for Igbo speaking state governments to intervene:** Another measure that needs to be taken is the need for the governments at all levels to show serious concern in the funding of the programme. Anyanele (2008) called on the Federal Government to do something: The Federal Government of Nigeria, as matter of necessity should come up and define its position and strategy to effect the indigenous language policy of the nation, the government should make all Nigerians to be conscious of the importance of the programme to the nation. Many suggestions have been given the government on ways of attaining the objectives of the indigenous languages. Government should begin to make these suggestions seriously.
- including the print media especially in the Igbo states should also come in here to help, through their media, they can use jingles made in Nigerian language especially Igbo language to tell the people of Igbo nation and Nigeria the importance of Nigerian languages to our course as a nation.

### Conclusion

This paper has made serious attempt to x-ray carefully the ugly position of Igbo language in schools. Discoveries by linguists show that language can evolve, grow, develop and even die. If the trends mentioned above are not reversed through the application of the aforementioned recommendations, there may be no language called Igbo in time to come. On the other hand, it is hoped that the implementation of the recommendations will see the growth and development of Igbo language. We should, therefore passionately act swiftly to preserve, protect and respect our great languages the same way other nations respect theirs.

### Recommendations

Having seen the position of Igbo language in schools, and in the society at large the following recommendations are hereby made to bring the study of Igbo language to the level it deserves to be and to attain the objectives of Nigerian indigenous language education.

By the definition meant above, the government needs to state clearly the modality for the funding of the programme beginning from the federal government to the local government level. The government of the five Igbo speaking states of Imo, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi and Enugu states should as a matter of urgency and importance come out with a blue print and road map towards reviving and sustaining the Igbo language in Igbo nation to boast the little or no effort at the federal level. Presently, not much has been seen on the part of the Igbo speaking governments towards enhancing the Igbo language education in the Eastern states.

The governments of the Igbo speaking states should call for Igbo summit where modalities will be set up to enhance the teaching, development and creation awareness of the Igbo languages. The Igbo state speaking state governments will also set aside 2% of each state budget for the course of Igbo language.

- **The role of media:** The mass media

- The government should take a positive stand to fund the study of Nigerian languages especially, Igbo language to make it more functional at all levels.
- Igbo language should be accorded the privileged position accorded English language in the admissions into the higher schools in Eastern Nigeria. There is need to make the passing of Igbo language in junior and senior secondary school levels, a pre-requisite in gaining admissions into any of the tertiary schools in Southern Nigeria, just like the English language.
- Scholarships should be given to all students who show good evidence of studying Igbo language in the tertiary schools in addition to granting bursary allowances to all Igbo language students in the tertiary schools.

- Government should encourage Igbo language writers to write and publish Igbo books by purchasing the scripts and publishing them and making them available to Igbo students free, this will encourage the students and the writers of books in Igbo language.
- The media and the press especially in the Eastern states should intensify their broadcast in uplifting the image of Igbo language. One will commend the efforts of 101.5FM, Abakaliki in Ebonyi state for their programme "Subakwaigbo" and other phone programmes they air in Igbo language. Other media houses, in Eastern states should be directed and encouraged by the government to follow suit.
- The government of the Eastern states through their legislative houses should make laws that will make the study of Igbo language compulsory in all schools in the Eastern Nigeria including the universities and a criteria for admission into all higher schools in Eastern states including: medical, mono and poly institutions.
- Igbo language teachers should be properly encouraged by motivating them through incentives like given them indigenous language allowances. This will make other teachers to envy them and encourage more students to study Igbo language in higher schools.
- Instructional materials, well equipped libraries, language laboratories and other resource materials should be made available to the Igbo language teachers.

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