

The Role of Socio-Economic Status in Mother Tongue Education in Early Childhood: The Igbo Example

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to x-rays the Role of Socio-Economic Status in Mother Tongue Education in Early Childhood. To this effect, the concept of mother tongue, its importance and roles of socio-economic status of parents were all examined. The relationship between socio-economic statuses of parents in the acquisition of the Igbo orthography at all levels of development of the child was highlighted. The research showed that children whose parents are socially and economically handicapped perform poorly in their language education. The study adopted Vygotsky (1978) theory that states that the child's language development is rooted in their society, culture and history. The paper was able to find out that the socio-economic status of parents affects the child's early childhood education. It therefore suggests among other things that parents should provide opportunities that facilitate rapid development of the mother tongue literacy development of their children.

Keywords: Socio-Economic Status, Mother Tongue, Education and Early Childhood

Introduction

The achievement gap between pre-primary pupils in Igbo Language is as a result of differences in socio-economic status of parents. Children at early stage of development have not established their own socio-economic characteristics which are based on their access to scarce and value resources, such as education, wealth, prestige material possession etc. They instead do depend on that of their parents' socio economic characteristics for survival. As the society is stratified into stratum, so is the opportunity and resources to acquire reading and writing skills in Igbo Language among children and this tends to create achievement gap among preschool pupils. Socio economic status of parents affect their children educational attainments, because certain levels of language input by parents are made based on their socio-economic level. Family socio economic status focuses on parent's ability to afford basic necessities and remain free from financial stress. It becomes very clear that once these socio-economic characteristics of parents are affected, then it will surely affect the children's upbringing and academic achievements for example, loss of job or land which are the bases of socio-economic position can impact on the child's academic achievement. Achievement gap refers to any significant and persistent disparity in academic performance or educational attainment between different groups of pupils such as those from higher-income and lower-income households. Vygotsky (1978.) as cited in Kozulin (2013) has considered a child's language development to be rooted in society's history and culture part of which is mother tongue language. Language involves a collaborative activity which the child performs even before full understanding of it. It is this actual engagement in the activity with the parents, and

the medaling words, actions and reactions of the parents that go with that engagement, that allow the child to gain autonomic functioning in this small piece of the shared knowledge of the external culture of the society. By participating in linguistic interactions with the parents of the society, the child learns how to symbolize the world in appropriate, acceptable, and complex ways. According to (Kozulin 2013) through such participation in culturally mediated activities, the child improves his language and cognitions Social interactions play a role in cognitive development of children, Parents are children's first teacher and the capacity to successfully use the mother tongue language in reading and writing in Igbo language requires one to acquire knowledge in a range of such language tools including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and extensive vocabulary of such language which is dependent on the socio-economic status of the parents.

Concept of mother Tongue

This is the first Language that a child is exposed to from birth or within the critical period. The term mother tongue refers to the language of one's ethnic group. It is the first language that a child learns from the time he is being breastfed by the mother. Mother tongue is the first language learned at home in childhood, understood by the individual youths, in a family in which the adults share a similar language experience to the child. It is the Language which the child have good "intuition" of the grammatical rules through experience with the environment. It is commonly used by the child. Mother tongue is therefore any language the child is identified with as a speaker among others. It is the language that the child knows best and uses most to perform communication functions such as

- ✓ to identify objects, events, want and need and acquisition of knowledge within the speech community.
- ✓ an instrument of thought, reasoning and thinking and exchange of ideas
- ✓ instrument of communication mostly used by the child in requesting, apologizing, informing, ordering, promising and refusing as well as reporting feelings and attitudes
- ✓ an instrument for recreation and a means of socialization.
- ✓ to read, write, hear, express and record events.
- ✓ to create funs and jokes and convey poetic messages
- ✓ to impact, receives, idealize and conceptualize knowledge (Finch).

This suggests that mother tongue definition is based on the following principles and guidelines:

1. The individual acquired the language in early childhood and maintains its use
2. - has intuitive knowledge of the language.
3. - is able to produce fluent, spontaneous discourse.
4. - is communicatively competent in different social contexts.
5. - identifies with or is identified by a language community.
6. - has accent of the mother.

Importance of Mother Tongue

Studies have demonstrated that the use of mother tongue is seen as a natural psychological process in language development. Research has shown that in order to read and write fluently, a child needs to understand the spoken language and understand how this spoken language is represented in written form through the use of symbols (Durgunoglu & (Onev. 2000)). Studies indicate that pupils who begin school in kindergarten with higher levels of

their mother tongue acquire other languages, concepts, knowledge, skills and principles more easily. This suggests that there is a relationship between first language skills and other language acquisition. In fact, pupils who had stronger reading skills in Igbo language as their first language tends to perform better reading in other languages than the pupils who had lower reading skills in their mother tongue (Cardenas-Hagan and Carlson. 2007). Order numerous benefits include: Seeing and being able to use the language in the school/class environment. This can help the child to feel included and accepted as part of the school community. It will help the child to feel more confident and secure. Pupils will be more focused and motivated if learning is built on the knowledge of mother tongue language experiences. The use of such original language can support learning in other areas in the class and other situations or circumstances. It's also well known that a strong mother tongue foundation equips children with the skills they need to learn additional languages. The intuitive understanding of grammar that develops when children acquire their mother language can easily be passed on to other languages. Language in mother tongue also plays a huge role in the development of personal, social and cultural identity. Naturally, this flows down into every aspect of their lives, including their academic achievements in Igbo language. Mother tongue helps the child to learn how to value her culture and heritage. If the native language isn't maintained, important links to family members may be lost. When parents and children communicate with one another using the language they know best, they work at their actual level of intellectual maturity. Mother tongue is beneficial to children when learning a second language, and children with strong language skills are more ready and able to learn a second language.

Igbo language as a Mother Tongue

Igbo language is one of the many languages spoken in Nigeria. Since its independence, the main languages in Nigeria have been Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Today Igbo-speaking individuals live all over Nigeria and in diverse countries of the world. As a people, however, the Igbo are located on both sides of the River Niger and occupy South Eastern Nigeria. Igbo Language is the language of the Igbo people, an ethnic group of South Eastern Nigeria. The language is thought to have originated around the 9th century AD in the area near the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers, and then spread over a wide area of South Eastern Nigeria. Igbo is one of the official languages of Nigeria. It is spoken in the Northern part of Delta state, Abia. Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo, as well as in three local government areas of Benue state and in the greater part of the Rivers State. In the States of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo, Igbo is the main language of trade and commerce. It is used in mass media communication such as radio and television. There are approximately 30 Igbo dialects. Standard Igbo aims to include words from other Igbo dialects as well as loan words from other languages.

Socio-economic status of a family

The socio-economic status of a family determines the quality of the educational opportunity a child gets. Family socio-economic status focuses on parent's ability to afford basic necessities and remain free from financial stress. Children at early stage of development have not established their own socio-economic characteristic, but they do depend on their parent's socio-economic characteristics for survival. Pre-primary and primary school pupils are dependent on their family socio-economic background which is defined as the child's parent social economic based on their access to scarce and value resources, such as education, wealth, prestige, material possession etc. It becomes very clear that once these socio-

economic characteristics of parents are affected, then it will surely affect the children upbringing and academic achievement. For example, loss of job or land which is the bases of socio-economic position can impact on the child's sustainable development. For example, if the wife and children of a president, governor, ambassadors etc all acquire the rights, immunity and privileges that are given to such presidential position, some privileges may be given to children in the school based on the social standing of their parents. The child socioeconomic status from birth and through early years of life is based on parents', since they are the ones financially responsible for early development of the child. The child's parents' socio-economic status tends to determine the child early development: such as how he/she views the world; Adequate and sustainable access to material and non material resources enable households to meet basic needs including adequate access to food, potable water, health facilities, educational opportunities, housing, and lime for community participation and social integration (Frankenberg 1992).

The Role of Socio-economic Status of Parents in Igbo Language Development of the Child

There are many ways in which the socio economic status of parents can affect the child's academic achievements in Igbo Language such as

- i. Early Attendance to school
- ii Provision of books and other material
- iii Attendance of the best schools available
- iv Encouragement and motivation in education
- v. Provision of good model Igbo Language books and learning materials
- vi. Development of interest in school activities
- vii. Academic and vocational ascription of children

Relationship between Parent Socio-Economic Status and School Encouragement and motivation in Igbo Language

Socio economic status of parent affect Parental involvement in children educational activities which refers to the amount of participation a parent has when it comes to schooling and her child's life. Parental encouragement and support for learning activities at home combined with parental involvement in schooling is critical to children's education. Parental engagement in children education lends to improve their achievement, reduces absenteeism, and restores parents' confidence in their children's education. Pupil with involved parents or other caregivers earn higher grades and test scores, have better social skills, and show improved behaviour. Epstein and Dauber (1991) have identified six types of parent involvement in childhood education, such involvement includes

Type I Involvement in basic obligations at home (the provision of school supplies, general support and supervision at home).

Type II School to home and home to school communications.

Type III Assistance at the school (volunteering).

Type IV Assistance in learning activities at home.

Type V Involvement in school decision-making, governance and advocacy.

Type VI Collaboration and exchange with community organizations.

In education engagement refers to the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that children parents and teachers show' when they are learning in education, which

extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education. This is predicated on the belief that learning improves when children, parents and teachers are inquisitive, interested, or inspired, and that learning tends to suffer when they are bored, dispassionate, disaffected, or otherwise "disengaged. Engagement may also refer to the ways in which school leaders, educators, and other adults might "engage" in children education including governance and decision-making processes in school, in the design of programs and learning opportunities, or in the civic life of their community. Parents and children motivation, interest, curiosity, responsibility, determination, perseverance, attitude, work habits, self-regulation, social skills, are non cognitive factors that motivate learning, which invariably affect learning results (e.g.. improved academic performance, test scores, information recall, skill acquisition, etc.). Parents may play significant roles in engaging their children when it comes to learning. Some observable behaviours of parents help their children when it comes to attending class, listening attentively participating in discussions, turning in work on time, and following rules and directions. Parents can also motivate children's enthusiasm, curiosity, optimism, interest and aspiration towards learning. There are many ways through which parents participate in their children academic activities.

Relationship between Parent Socio-Economic Status and Attendance of the best schools available in Igbo Language

The easiest way to expose the child to a wider variety of concepts is by enrolling the child in a good and model early childhood education program. These programs are normally privately owned and cost a substantial amount of money. Such schools offer high quality standard education to pupils. The quality of school and its characteristics, including characteristics of peers and teachers, contribute to reading disparities between low and high SES children. Teacher experience, teacher preparation to teach, the- highest degree earned, and the number of courses taken on teaching reading all determine whether or not a reading teacher is qualified. Low SES pupils are more likely to attend schools where there are less qualified teachers, which is associated with their reading growth rates being significantly lower than the growth rates of their high SES counterparts. Research indicates that school conditions and qualities contribute more to SES differences in learning rates and that quality school environment plays an important role in outcomes. Pupil who attends higher quality schools earned more grades than those that attend low quality schools. Children in low-income schools are less likely to have well-qualified teachers. Schools with pupil from the highest concentrations of poverty have fewer library resources to draw on (poor quality staff and other amenities) than those serving middle and high income children. The features of schools that are most important for children's learning generally align around the characteristics and behaviours of teachers and classrooms (Halle et al. 2008; Loeb Rouse, and Shorris 2007; Mayer and Ralph 2008).

Relationship between Parent Socio-Economic Status and Provision of good model Igbo Language

A gap in reading and writing in growth of Igbo language exists between low SES, middle and high SES children and widens as children move on to higher grades. Assessments that test growth in language skills include measures on basic reading skills (i.e. print familiarity, letter recognition, beginning and ending sounds, rhyming sounds, word recognition), vocabulary (receptive vocabulary and reading comprehension skills (i.e. listening comprehension, words in context). Initially, high SES children begin as better readers than their low SES counterparts. As children get older, high SES children progress more rapidly in reading growth rates than

low SES children. These early reading outcomes affect later academic success. Research has shown how children who are born; in lower SES households have weaker language skills compared to children raised in higher SES households. These language skills affect their abilities to learn and thus exacerbate the problem of education disparity between low and high SES children. Lower income families have children who do not succeed to the levels of the middle income children, who can have a greater sense of entitlement, be more argumentative, or be better prepared for adult life. The disparities in experiences in the home environment between children of high and low SES affect speaking, reading and writing outcomes. The home environment is considered the main contributor to SES reading outcomes. Children of low SES status are read to less often and have fewer books in the home than their high SES peers, which suggests an answer to why children of low SES status have lower initial reading scores than their high SES counterparts upon entering kindergarten. How SES parents are also less involved in their children's schooling. Children from low-SES families are less likely to have experiences that encourage the development of fundamental skills of reading acquisition, such as phonological awareness, vocabulary, and oral language.

Distinctive characteristic features of Igbo language

Language is spoken with orthographic representation and can be used in government, administration, education, judiciary, religion and business, science and technology.

Discreteness

Language has discrete phonemes and codified orthography. Basic units of speech are categorized into distinct phonemes that differentiate them from other languages. Three languages have a distinctive phonetical alphabets and symbols which are very peculiar to the language. There are thirty six (36) discrete phonetic alphabets. 8 out of these are categorized as vowels. These comprise of four light vowels a ị ọ ụ and four heavy vowels e i o u with 28 consonants categorized into 9 consonants clusters ch, gb. kp, gh, gw. sh. kw, ny, nw and 19 non-consonant

S/no	Alphabets	Pronunciation	S/n	Alphabets	Pronunciation	S/no	Alphabets	Pronunciation
1	A	/a/ as in <u>a</u> kpa	13	!	/T/ as in <u>i</u> mi 'to bear fruits'	25	O	/o/ as in <u>o</u> ka 'maize'
2	B	/b/ as in <u>b</u> epu 'cut off'	14	J	/dʒ/ as in <u>j</u> i 'yam'	26	P	/p/ as in <u>k</u> pe 'peal'
3	Ch	/ts/ as in <u>ch</u> i 'personal god'	15	K	/k/ as in <u>k</u> ee 'share'	27	R	/r/ as in <u>r</u> uo 'roast'
4	D	/d/ as in <u>d</u> aa 'fLL'	16	KP	/kp/ as in <u>k</u> paa 'weave'	28	S	/s/ as in <u>s</u> aa 'severn'
5	E	/e/ as in <u>e</u> de 'cocoyam'	17	Kw	/kp/ as in <u>k</u> we 'agree'	29	Sh	/ / as in <u>sh</u> iri 'cooked'
6	F	/f/ as in <u>f</u> ee	18	L	/l/ as in <u>l</u> ee	30	T	/t/ as in <u>t</u> aa

		‘fly’			‘look’			‘today’
7	G	/g/ as in <u>gee</u> ‘listen’	19	M	/m/ as in <u>mee</u> ‘do’	31	U	/u/ as in ukwu ‘big’
8	Gb	/gb/ as in <u>gbuo</u> ‘kill’	20	N	/n/ as in <u>new</u> ‘own’	33	U	/U/ as in ukwu ‘leg’
9	Gh	/ə/ as in <u>ghe</u> ‘fry’	21	Nw	/nw/ as in <u>new</u> ‘own’	33	V	/v/ as in voo ‘dig’
10	Gw	/gw/ as in <u>gwam</u> ‘tell me’	22	Ny	/nj/ as in <u>nye</u> ‘give’	34	W	/w/ as in were ‘take’
11	H	/h/ as in <u>ha</u> ‘them’	23	Ñ	/ñ/ as in <u>nuo</u> ‘drink’	35	Y	/j/ as in ya ‘him’
12	I	/i/ as in <u>imi</u> nose	24	O	/o/ as in <u>oke</u> ‘rat’	36	Z	/z/ as in zaa ‘sweep’

Duality of patterning

Duality of patterning refers to the ability to combine and recombine small units of phonemes in different order to produce meaningful words. Igbo language follows rules of symbols to sound correspondence that is a lexical item is pronounce the way it is written and written the way it is pronounced. In Igbo language, the duality of patterning involves the combination of consonant vowel syllabic structure. This suggests that Igbo language follows the cv, vc, and c dual patterning. A consonant (CC) patterning is not possible in Igbo language. The sound inventory of Standard Igbo consists of eight vowels, thirty consonants, and two tones, depending on the analysis. Igbo has only two syllable types: consonant + vowel (the most common syllable type), vowel or syllabic nasal. There are no consonant clusters and no syllable-final consonants.

The consonant system of Igbo is characterized by two notable features:

- Doubly articulated consonants, i.e... Consonants with two simultaneous places of articulation, e.g., bilabial and velar, both produced in the same manner, e.g... Both produced as stops. There are two such sounds in Igbo: /kp/ and /gb/. To pronounce these sounds. Try saying (k) or (g). but close your lips as you would for (p) or (b).
- Kabila velars, e.g. 'k'. /g/. To produce these sounds, try pronouncing (k). (g) or (ng) with rounded lips.
 - /kp. g" ha/ c no equivalents in English
 - /k". g", i] ^ have no equivalents in English
 - '(/ .v/ in /lio/ >
 - .'(T:' c/i in -. ho/)
 - /dj/ / i n I oh
 - /l/ /l first / in canyon
 - /i]/ ng in Mif/i^
 - v ^n;i.s ll() equivalent in English

- /./ has no equivalent in American English
- '!] y in yd

Semanticist

This is a fundamental aspect of any communication system. Every specific word in a particular speech community can be matched with specific meaning. There is a fixed relationship between a word, gesture, symbol and a meaning. Semantics is the study of the meaning of words and phrases. Semantics covers vocabulary, which is affected by SES. Children of high SES have larger expressive vocabularies by the age of 24 months due to more efficient processing of familiar words. By age three, there are significant differences in the amount of dialogue and vocabulary growth between children of low and high SES. A lack of joint attention in children contributes to poor vocabulary growth when compared to their high SES peers. Joint attention and book reading are important factors that affect children's vocabulary growth. The linguistic environment of low and high SES children differs substantially, which affects many aspects of language and literacy development such as semantics, syntax, morphology, and phonology.

Syntax:

Syntax refers to the arrangement of words and phrases to form sentences. SES affects the production of sentence structures. But low SES does contribute to difficulty with complex sentence structures. There is lag in the sentence formation abilities of low SES children which may be caused by less frequent exposure to complex syntax through parental speech. How SES parents ask fewer response coaxing questions of their children which limits the opportunities of these children to practice more complex speech patterns. Instead, these parents give their children more direct orders, which have been found to negatively influence the acquisition of more difficult noun and verb phrases. In contrast, high SES households ask their children broad questions to cultivate speech development. Exposure to more questions positively contributes to children's vocabulary growth and complex noun phrase constructions.

Morphology:

Children's grasp of morphology, the study of how words are formed, is affected by SES. Children of high SES have advantages in applying grammatical rules, such as the pluralization of nouns and adjectives compared to children of low SES. Pluralizing nouns consists of understanding that some nouns are regular and denotes more than one, but also understanding how to apply different rules to irregular nouns. Learning and understanding how to use plural rules are important tool in conversation and writing.

Phonology:

Phonological awareness, the ability to recognize that words are made up different sound units, is also affected by SES. Children of low SES between the second and sixth grades are found to have low phonological awareness. **Montessori notes that the** first sensitive period category is language. During this sensitive period, a child would be extremely sensitive to vocal sounds and mimicking the sound of the immediate environment. A child would be more attracted to human speech than to other sounds in their environment during this period. During this period, children develop skills of language development. The four **skills of language** are a set of four

capabilities that allows the child to comprehend and produce spoken **language** for proper and effective interpersonal communication. The four skills are most often acquired in the order of listening first, then speaking, then possibly reading and writing.

Recommendations:

Parents should provide opportunities that facilitate rapid development of the mother tongue literacy development of their children through high quantity and quality input directed to the child that enables such child to practice semantics, syntax, phonology and morphology of the language

Opportunity for joint performance of a range of speech acts, reading and writing in the mother tongue that enables the child to express linguistic skills and structures should be provided by parents. Parents should provide materials and motivations that encourage children to read and write in their mother tongue

Parents of young children should encourage using their mother tongue to prepare the child to interact with their native-language community. When parents are unable to communicate well with their children, they cannot easily convey to them their values, beliefs, or advice on how to cope with their experiences.

Ideally, the foundation of mother tongue should be solid before the child begins to learn in any second language. In order to ensure quality and equity in preschool education, government should embrace Early Head Start and Head Start curriculum model as a strategy for keeping young children out of the street and achieving equitable education among children of diverse socio-economic group. Government should emphasize more on free education for boys and girls. Government should establish quality pre-school with lower fees and highly trained teachers to tackle the challenges of childhood education

Parents should also engage in activities that can mobilize them vertically upward in the hierarchy of social class through participation in religion, politics, education and other socio-economic activities.

Parents should encourage early attendance to school of their wards, provide books and other materials and encourage children in their school activities and become fully involved in their children's education.

Conclusion

Children's language development depends much on environmental variables which socio-economic status is one measured by parent access to house, material possession, education, occupation, monthly income, land, social participation and understanding. For pupils to read and write Igbo as a mother tongue proficiently, the socio-economic standing of their parents matters. This is because access to qualified language teacher and material requires financial resources. In fact, to speak Igbo language as mother tongue, is quite different when it comes to reading and writing the orthography of the language with its semantics, syntax, morphology and phonology of the language, to be grounded in the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing of Igbo language as a mother tongue, parents have to make investment in terms of the scarce resources and this depends on the financial stratum of the parents.

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