

**MAINTENANCE AND PRESERVATION OF THE
NIGERIAN LANGUAGES IN NIGERIA SCHOOLS
THROUGH TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE
21ST CENTURY: THE IGBO EXAMPLE**

BY

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to maintain, preserve and promote the use of Nigerian Languages in Nigerian Schools through teaching and learning. Igbo Language is one of the three major Nigerian Languages taught in Nigerian Schools. It has been observed that our students are no longer interested in learning the Nigerian languages due to the obsolete method used by the teachers in teaching this Language. They regard our Language as vernacular. This study is to re-orientate our students to cherish and embrace our Language for a better identification rather than adulterated identity. The method employed in this study is survey method, whereby teachers were observed on how they were carrying out their teaching activities in the classroom. The study adopted the Stufflebeam's CIPP Evaluation Theory of 1971 as it concerns the teacher input. The theory further illustrated that when the content, input and process are good, the product will be perfect. Related literature were reviewed on Language, Maintenance and Teaching. The study therefore recommended that teachers should make their Teaching and Learning very interesting by employing different Teaching methods and appropriate instructional materials for better understanding of the students, promotion, maintenance and preservation of the Languages. Finally the paper concluded, teachers that should use appropriate Teaching method in Teaching Nigerian Languages, to entice the learners as well as to arouse their interest in using the languages.

Keywords: Igbo Language, Maintenance, Nigerian Languages, Preservation, Promotion.

Introduction

Years past, there was a prediction that some Nigerian Languages are nearing extinction. Igbo Language is one of the Nigerian Languages that is nearing extinction. This is because the owners of the language are not interested in using the language as other language owners do. They do not speak the language and do not encourage their children to speak the language. They prefer Western languages to the indigenous languages. The language that is not used for communication, for education, for commercial and for religious activities is likely to go into extinction. Language is a living thing because it grows and it dies. If a language is not handed over to the new/younger generations, that language is likely to die. This is the situation of Nigeria Languages in general and Igbo Language in particular. To avert this sudden death, there are steps to be taken in order to preserve these Languages. Nigerian Languages can be preserved through effective use in communication, religion, education, and activities like movies, songs (such Ikonne, 2018).

Igbo Language is one of the subjects of study in Nigerian schools. The National policy on Education made it clear that the 3 major Nigerian Languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) be taught in Nigerian schools as first Nigerian Language (NL1) and as second Nigerian Language (NL2). As a result of this status, Igbo Language is being taught in all levels of education in Nigeria. But the problem is that Nigerians do not encourage Nigerian Languages.

To solve this problem, this paper chose to look into various ways in which teaching and learning can assist the maintenance and promotion and preservation of the Nigerian Languages which Igbo is one of them. This is so because every theory or policy in education without the teachers will never succeed. This is because teachers hold the key for every curriculum implementation in the classroom (Dom-Anyanwu, 2016).

Methodology

The survey method was employed in this study to know exactly how the Igbo Language teachers handle the Igbo Language activities in the classroom. The researcher observed the classroom activities from a distance in order to get the real behavior of the teachers and the students toward the learning of Igbo Language.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study includes: To

- arouse the interest of the learners in Igbo Language.
- maintain Igbo Language and culture.
- preserve the language to avoid extinction.
- promote the Igbo Language and culture.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted Stufflebeam's CIPP Evaluation Theory of 1971 as it concerns the teachers input and the performance of the learners which will be seen as the output.

The theory is of the view – that when the teachers teach effectively, the learners will also learn better in a friendly environment and with appropriate and adequate instructional materials. Therefore, if-the Igbo Language teachers teach the Igbo learners well with the necessary materials and appropriate methods and styles, including effective reinforcement, the learners must surely learn and must develop interest in the language.

To preserve a Language, it must be maintained. And to maintain a Language, it must be handed over to the new generations (Dom-Anyanwu, 2023).

How to Maintain and Preserve the Igbo Language in Nigerian Schools

Every language is special and unique in its special way. When the speakers of a language abandon their language in favour of a more populous one, they give up their birthright. When a language dies, an irreplaceable intellectual and social wealth of the people also dies, and the larger society's pool of educational, social and cultural values is diminished.

Igbo people seem to be having problems transmitting their language to their young ones. This is the problem of parents, the problem is manifest among the Igbo children in living in Nigeria even in Igbo towns. Our children in diaspora are usually not privileged to be exposed to the Igbo language that is rich enough to enable them learn it. We can be convinced that through

Igbo awareness and maintenance effort by the creation of learning, Igbo parents can lead their children not only to understand but to speak Igbo. This way, these parents foster the means of safeguarding the future of the language; thus, saving the language from endangerment and possible death or extinction.

This write-up aims at encouraging Igbo parents to go “the extra mile” of transmitting the Igbo language to their children to ensure that safe and secure future.

The Problems of Teaching Igbo Languages in Schools

There are many problems that confront the teaching of Igbo language in schools, they are as follows:

- i. Some writers are reluctant in maintaining the long standing orthography.
- ii. There are discrepancies in writing some phrases and words in Igbo language. As the case may be, to this problem, there exist two schools of thought-
 - a. The Conceptualist school of thought and
 - b. The Atomistic school of thought.
 - i. The Conceptualist school of thought argues that those phrases or words which are seen as concepts when translated to English be written as one word
Examples:
Umụaka – Children
Akwụkwọ - Book
Ugboala – Car

Okwukwe - Faith

- ii. The Atomistic school of thought argues that such phrases or words be written separately.

Examples:

Ụmu – children

Aka – hand

Akwụ - Palm fruit

Kwọ - grind

Ụgbọ - Car

Ala - Ground

Okwu - Thought

Kwe – Believe

It is very important that all these discrepancies need immediate attention to be addressed to, no matter how difficulty they might look to ensure uniformity in writing Igbo text.

- iii. Lack of Proper documentation: The Igbo language needs to be documented and stored in archives so that it can be accessed by everybody with the technological know-how.
- iv. Lack of Igbo dictionary: The Igbo Language does not have a comprehensive dictionary. The available dictionaries written by some of the authors are not standard.
- v. The electronic equipment's such as computers, television, radio and satellite disc are very expensive that teachers find it very difficult to buy some of these equipment to enable them teach the Igbo Language effectively. The use of some of these

materials in the classroom would make the teaching and learning of Igbo language more interesting and lively.

- vi. No good libraries for research: In most Nigerian schools today, libraries are not well equipped, the shelves are empty of Igbo text books and students cannot find what they need in times of research. This will help the students to cultivate the habit of reading and the spirit of enquiry.
- vii. Teachers are not well motivated: The problem of nonpayment of salaries has done more harm than good in our country because they are looking for other means of livelihood in order to make ends meet, thereby hinders them from inculcating the right training to the students.
- viii. Lack of seminars and workshops: Learning of languages is a continuous process, because teachers are not finished products despite that they are professionally trained and certified, still there is need for seminars and workshops in Igbo language to update their knowledge on the current and methods information across the globe.

But the teachers especially those teaching Igbo language in secondary schools are always adamant over seminars and workshops not knowing that education is a systemic process.

The Effective Teaching Methods for the Maintenance of Teaching Igbo Language in Schools

Research has shown that Igbo language is facing a very big problem which the teaching and learning of Igbo language, in the classroom can militate. A good teacher teaches with good styles which help the learners in learning.

The methods of teaching and learning are as follows:

- i. Instructional materials: These materials for teaching and learning of Igbo language is not enough, the materials can be made by teachers and students themselves. Example: pictures, charts, maps, posters and textiles to mention but a few.

It is good to understand that for teaching and learning of Igbo language to be interesting, certain things should be put in place and he need to use relevant instructional materials during teaching and learning become important and not to be taken for granted.

Okafor (2011: 171) supports this when he states that “When a learner hears, sees and touches, understands better, learning takes pace faster and retention is permanent”.

It is obvious that the teacher needs teaching aids that will help to facilitate learning and retention easy because seeing is believing.

These instructional materials can be used to motivate and sustain the interest of the students in the class. Okafor (2011) maintain that instructional materials stimulate the students intellectually, sustain the learner during the learning activities and make them develop positive attitude towards the subject being taught.

- ii. Discussion/Communication method: This method can be used to facilitate teaching and learning of Igbo Languages in schools. The method is all about engaging the students in Communication and Interactive Competence which will be of more help to the learners. In this type of communication, the learner will be engaged in argument in Igbo language to test his or her ability on the subject.

The most important thing is to teach the students how to use the language forms correctly.

- iii. Constructive method: Students can develop understanding through active construction of knowledge rather than depending on the teacher. It can also help the students in cognitive development. Therefore, teachers are expected to provide support for students to explore and develop their knowledge, as well create brainstorming sessions for students with good learning method.
- iv. Set Induction Method: This type of method helps the teacher to get the students ready for the Igbo class. It also helps the teacher to bring back the students body and soul into the class; thereby getting them ready to learn

This method can be achieved through the student's questions on the previous lesson, singing, giving quiz to the students on telling them stories that is related to the lesson to be taught.

- v. Dramatization and Modelling: This type of teaching method gives students practice in spoken Igbo Language. Mackey (1978) says that singing is an aid to pronunciation. It gives the students a great deal of repetitions of sounds and sound pattern which the words of the songs contain. It has been shown that songs motivate the learners and enrich the lessons by new and varieties of activities.
- vi. Reading Method: In this type of Method, the teacher should first of all allow the students to survey the passage, the teacher should also select difficult words which can be explained and illustrated before reading aloud in groups and later individually to ensure active participation of the students.
- vii. Group discussion Method: This type of method can be used by the teacher to assign paragraphs to different small groups to find the theme or the main issue contain in the paragraph. The whole class can also come together for a review.

The type of method is very good because it involves everybody in the class learning experiences.

- viii. Project Method: The project method is also good to maintain the learning of Igbo language because it gives the student the opportunities to think deep into the content. It helps the students to develop independence and interpersonal relationship. In this case, like Festival, ozo, cuts, chieftaincy, traditions, marriage institution, age grade, iwa akwa, Ọmụgwọ and so on. In doing this, they encourage different aspects of Language.

Relevant Literature Review nn Nigeria Language Maintenance and Preservation: The Igbo examples

Akpu and Opara (2015) say that, language is the engine that carries the society around not only as a means for transferring information but a very important means for establishing and maintaining relationship with one another and man can make progress in all sphere of life in the world today is his ability to communicate through his language.

Language is important in maintaining wellbeing, self-esteem and sense of identity (United Nations; 2019, 2020). Despite these assertions, Nigerian Languages are endangered and gradually vanishing into tiny air as a result of foreign language dominance. UNESCO (2022) states that the best way to keep a Language alive, is to use it whether in a written or spoken form. Consequently teaching Nigerian Languages in schools will not only maintain and preserve the languages for the immediate generation but for the one yet unborn. The United Nations declared that it is the rights of indigenous people

to teach their indigenous people to learn their indigenous languages and be instructed with it. Despite this, Nigeria languages are still suffering from the impact of colonization and globalization. Moseley (2010) reports that indigenous languages daily lose native speakers and there are no new speakers of these languages. These can pose a great threat to any languages thereby weakening the strength of their transmission. When any major Nigeria languages are not taught in schools such language is in danger. Krauss (2007) declares that a language is considered endangered if it is not being passed down to the next generation. These passing a language down to the next generation could only be possible through teaching and learning in schools that is why the National Policy on Education made it clear that languages of instruction in the lower primary schools should be mother tongues or language of immediate environment.

Federal Ministry of Education (2022), Adeigba (2016), Araromi (2005), Musa & Osamorege (2020) review that this language policy is yet to be implemented due to lack of awareness of the crucial role mother tongue play in facilitating access to academic success and national development. The language policy is consistently abandoned and is seen as a problem that is too complex to solve. Adidigba (2016), wages can therefore damage people's confidence because it separates children from their culture. Adedigba (2016), Batibo (2009) and Moselay (2010) show that the use of indigenous language promotes respect and understanding amongst

people and aids the preservation of rich cultural and historic legacy that is present in every language spoken today. They further emphasized that the use of a language whether in written or in spoken form is one of the best methods to keep it alive as it serves as a means of increasing linguistic awareness in various context (UNESCO, 2008).

At a meeting in 1951, linguistic recommended that children should start their schooling in their mother tongue. It was argued that when children are taught in a language they are unfamiliar with, it damages their emotional and intellectual development. Fafunwa (1978) agrees with this notion and contended that if children were taught in the language they are most comfortable with, they would acquire intended habits, attitudes and skills more effectively. He considered the mother tongue to be the foundation for learning other languages. This is further supported by Araromi (2005) who claims that if given proper encouragement, mother tongue learning will significantly improve children's performance in a wide range of school subjects as it enables students to generate and enthusiastically express new knowledge while asking and answering questions. Research concludes that education through the mother tongue is a key factor for quality learning as it improves learning outcomes. A research carried on, on the effect of mother tongue languages on primary.

Students reading and numeracy skills by Alimi et al (2020) indicates that using mother tongues for

instruction improved students literacy and numeracy. Adedigba (2016) asserted that instruction in mother tongues helps learners to understand and internalize concepts and encourages continuity in thought. UNESCO (2020) maintains that indigenous language improve the standard of instruction at the elementary school level, which is why it is urgent to prevent their extinction.

Igbo language is the language of the Igbo people of South-Eastern Nigeria. It is a lingua franca in South-Eastern part of Nigeria and also used in the media. It is the mother tongue of the people living in Abia State, Imo State, Anambra State, Delta State, Enugu State, Ebonyi State and part of River State of Nigeria. Igbo language is one of the major Nigerian languages studied in schools. Igbo language according to National Policy on Education (2013) is a core subject in Nigeria both in primary, junior and senior secondary levels of our education system. Akpu and Opara (2015) affirm that issues that cannot be expressed in the public can only be disclosed by the use of indigenous language.

Oparah and Okere (2021) notes that in terms of development of students imagination, creativity, spirit of inquiry and harmonious co-existence, language plays a significant role in communication information, hence teaching and learning would have a problem if there is no indigenous language.

Agboola (2011:325) emphasizes that for a people to keep their language growing, there must be conscious effort made by the owners of the language to meet up with new innovations towards the teaching and learning of such languages in schools. At this point Igbo people should make concrete effort to make their language growing alongside with other languages of the world through teaching and learning in school. Ekere (2010) opines that language is the vehicle for the transmission of culture and for culture of a society to otherwise the culture cannot be transmitted. Oparah & Okere (2021) state that Igbo language is a convention which means that it is acceptable and used by a group of people, community or nation. It is used to pass information or share knowledge from one generation to another where every member is conformed to agree on it.

One of the problems facing the teaching and learning of Igbo language is the poor attitude of Igbo people towards the language. According to Ekere (2010), Igbo people prefer to express themselves in foreign languages as an evidence of being educated and this has given a traumatic blow on the language. According to Nwadike (2011), a people that lose their language will be a people without culture, they cannot be identified as a people. They become people without a future and identity. Language is the livewire of a nation and embodiment of people's experiences in life.

Recommendation and Conclusion

This paper is of the view that Igbo language should be used by the owners of the language in order not to go into extinction. To maintain, preserve and promote the language therefore, the owners of the language must show interest in the language by using it as well as by allowing their children study and speak the language. Parents, the states and federal governments, the school managements, and the philanthropists should please encourage the teaching and the learning of Igbo language in schools just like other subject like English and French.

Through appropriate instructional materials by qualified Igbo teachers, Igbo language will be preserved, maintained and promoted by teaching and learning it in schools. This will help to arouse the interest of the students and pupils in the language. In essence therefore, appropriate teaching of Igbo language in Nigerian schools will help in preserving Igbo language and other Nigerian languages.

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