

Factors that Hinder E-Learning among Igbo Language Teachers: Implication for National Consciousness

Udoye Ifeoma

Department of English, Anambra State University, Igbariam Campus

Akpamgbo Uche

Department of Igbo Language, Anambra State University, Igbariam Campus

Asimuonye Augusta

School of Education, Federal College of Education (Technical), Umunze

Abstract

The world has become a global village and everything is fast becoming technologically based including the teaching of indigenous languages. Information and Communication Technological (ICT) has advanced the teaching and learning from the traditional method of teaching like the talk and chalk board to a more sophisticated, exciting and resourceful method through the use of internet, CD-ROMS and computers. The paper sought to present issues which hinder successful adoption of e-learning among Igbo language teachers at secondary school level and the need for national consciousness in language teaching. Data were collected using interview method. Findings reveal that most indigenous language teachers are not conversant with e-learning. Based on the findings, few recommendations were made.

Introduction

Nigeria is a multilingual community with over 400 indigenous languages with Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba as the three major languages (Crozier and Blench, (1992), Grimes (2000), Heine and Nurse (2000). Indigenous language teaching has been a subject of debate for a long time. Fafunwa (2003) is of the view that mother tongue education is the fundamental right of every child therefore its denial means the denial of the child's human rights. Supporting this, D'Oville (2008) asserts that to realize the human right freedom of expression, it is important that people can express themselves in their mother tongue as often as possible. In its wisdom, the National Policy on Education (NPE) (1984, 2004) stipulated the use of indigenous languages or mother tongue as the medium of instruction for pre-primary and primary education respectively. This is because a child learns better and develops faster cognitive skills if he is taught in his mother tongue continuously over a period of time. Mother tongue is also known as first language or L1. It is referred to as mother tongue because it is believed that the mother of a child virtually rears up the child and helps the child to build his language. L1 plays an important role in moulding the child's early concepts since children conceptualize and think with language. Additionally, mother tongue is useful in the transmission of culture as it helps the child to express his ideas about the world he lives in. Above all, mother tongue in the first years of schooling enhances continuity in the child's learning process and as a result maximizes his intellectual development. The efficacy of teaching in mother tongue has been experimented with successful outcomes in many developing countries like Philippines (Ramos et al, 1967), Mexico (Modiano, 1968) and Nigeria (The Ife-Project- Afolayan, 1976). Above all the NPE encourages the development and production of relevant reading and teaching materials in all local languages.

Language is the expression of ideas by means of speech sounds combined into words which expresses an ethnic identity. Language is a catalyst for actions that can contribute to the preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. It further helps to promote access to knowledge. Akudolu (2004) explains that language is a complex human phenomenon that is so banal and yet sublime to be adequately defined. Thus it is an indispensable tool for human communication and national consciousness. Language is therefore the key to the heart of the people and without language, man would be incomplete. Communication is the main goal of learning a living language; it is through the interaction subsequently engendered that friendly relations can be established. Therefore daily contact with language provides constant practice which is important for mastery of the language. The achievements of these programmes underscore the importance of effective teaching of the Igbo language.

The Igbo language is spoken in the South eastern part of Nigeria. The states where Igbo language is predominately spoken are Anambra, Imo, Ebonyi, Enugu and some parts of Bayelsa, Delta and River states (Udoye, 2009). It is also spoken in several African countries including Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea and Congo among others. It has fifteen million speakers (Census, 2006) and it is ranked fifty in the ranks of languages based on the number of native speakers after Chinese, English, French and the likes (www.mirror.com). It belongs to the Benue –Congo family of languages, which is a subgroup of the major Niger – Congo family of languages. It is similar to Yoruba and Chinese in the sense that it is a tonal language. Like many Africa

languages, the Igbo language has to its credit a number dialects, distinguished by accent or orthography but almost universally mutually intelligible. However, of all the dialects of the Igbo language, the central Igbo, a dialect of the Ezinbite group of Igbo in Central Owerri province is the standard Igbo used in schools, media and government offices. The importance of Igbo language surpasses communication. It has been identified as a veritable tool generating a sense of belonging, identification, unity and integration. It is a language of education, education being one of the unifying factors of this country. It is on the basis of this that the National Policy on Education (2004) recommends that:

Each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his mother tongue; and a language of his immediate environment should be used as a language of instruction in the first three years of primary education. The major languages are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

The implication of this language policy is the need to develop national consciousness, pride in our indigenous languages, cultural dynamism, pedagogical efficacy and effective mass communication.

Unfortunately, Igbo language has been reported to be an endangered indigenous language and faces the risk of going into extinction in the next 50 years if nothing is done to revive it. (UNESCO). Many factors have been blamed for the gradual death such as non inclusion of the Igbo language as one of the three major languages in Nigeria in April 2005 when the 1999 Nigerian Constitution was reviewed, like the unacceptability of the language by younger generation, negative attitude of the people towards the language (many people are not proud to use the language in public), and globalization which encourages homogenization of language and discourages diversity invariably leading to a shift in language. Statistics reveal that 7% of children between the ages of 6-11 and 9% of children between the ages of 5 and below in Imo state were unable to speak the Igbo language when they were interviewed. (National Mirror, 2011). This is caused due to attitudinal indifference towards the language on the part of parents who will go to the extent of banning their children from using their mother tongue at home. Oyatade (2001) confirms that many parents especially the elite send their wards to fee-paying primary school where the medium of instruction is English. This is predicated on the conviction that the earlier a child begins learning English the higher the chances of better mastery of the language. Some others believe that, the Igbo language is limited in vocabulary and as a result does not have equivalent words for certain scientific concepts. These are the reason behind the gradual extinction of the Igbo language.

It was observed that the Anambra state government under the leadership of his Excellency, Mr. Peter Obi, the Executive Governor of Anambra state has been working tirelessly to revitalize the Igbo language. Laws have been enacted on the usage of Igbo language among the Igbos which is titled 'Igbo Language Usage Enforcement Law 2010'. The law made Igbo language a compulsory subject to be taught at both primary and secondary schools in Anambra state and also a general course at state owned tertiary institutions. In addition, Wednesdays are made to be Igbo day for public servants in the state and for proceedings in the State House of Assembly.

Based on the facts and figures given above, the Igbo language teacher is faced with a lot of burden and thus the teacher is made to work harder in the face of possibility of the language going into extinction. Hence teacher's use of e-learning would motivate, arouse the interest of people and popularize the learning of the language which will be accessible to all and sundry. Consequently, e-learning is more important at this time considering other revitalization struggles made by well meaning Igbo leaders and educationists like Professor Pita Ejiofor (founder of Otu Subakwa Igbo). Although few efforts have been made by few scholars like (Uchechukwu, 2000) to develop Igbo soft-ware for effective use of e-learning, still, the teacher has not been adequately positioned on the best practices in using e-learning. Like testing, navigation, delivery, communication, feedback and management of e-learning packages.

Teachers are trained at various Colleges of Education and Universities in Nigeria to handle the teaching of indigenous languages at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Teachers are seen as key factors in any innovation to enhance pedagogical practice and support blended learning therefore, teachers must obtain quality education in order to teach students properly (Onwuka, 2009). In the same light, the Federal Government of Nigeria in its revised edition of the National Policy on Education continues to give priority to teacher education and development (FRN, 2004). Regrettably, the teachers are not adequately prepared to handle new innovations such as ICT. Neuhauser, (2002) stated that teachers need to acquire or understand the principles of effective layout so that they will be able to provide students with web page and other resources that are attractive and easy to navigate.

The introduction of computer and internet into education has transformed the overall teaching and learning process. E-learning is effective in language teaching and learning as a result is fast growing prominence in language lesson preparation and instructional delivery. Language teachers in this information age need to possess a broad range of ICT skills that could be used in language lesson preparation and for effective teaching delivery. This means that the traditional method of teaching such as face to face teachers, copying of voluminous notes, talk and chalk, and board approach are gradually fading away for a more sophisticated method of e-learning for effective language teaching delivery in schools. E-learning is important for the teacher to achieve the

objectives of clarifying concepts effectively for letter recognition, words or sentence formation, tone marking, discussion lessons like story telling, festivals and ceremonies. With language laboratory, teachers can develop and improve the skills of language learning. Furthermore, e-learning has freed language learning and teaching from abstractions by enhancing classroom communication and improving pronunciation. Above all, it motivates learners to be critical thinkers and creative.

E-learning is basically the use of some devices like computers, (CD-ROMS, television, mobile phones) to facilitate the transfer of skills and knowledge (Education Trust Fund, 2006). It is the most prestigious form of education for attaining technological literacy. E-learning is a flexible form of education with advantages which has made its importance not to be over emphasized. It allows for individualized, self-paced, self-directed or instructor led form of education. Nicholas (2003) emphasized that e-learning is the teaching method which may be used in different educational models for instance distance teaching method may be used in different educational models like, distance teaching and other teaching philosophies. Engelbrecht (2005) viewed e-learning as the delivery of teaching materials via electronic media such as internet, intranets, extranets, satellite broadcast, audio, video tape, interactive TV and CD-ROM. It utilizes web-based communication, collaboration, knowledge transfer and training to add values to the individuals and organizations (Kelly & Bauer, 2004). E-learning according to Allen (2003), is a structured and purposeful use of electronic system or computer in support of the learning processes.

In this era of technological know how, teachers are faced with the responsibilities of learning and knowing how to use the internet for e-learning purposes. Fung, Nqwani, and Hang, (2005), opine that the professional use of the internet for e-learning involves teachers' use of internet to improve their lesson planning, network, communication with others, seeking of information to solve problems in the academic environment, satisfy their in-service requirements and enhance the quality of their teaching. With the advent of e-learning, teachers would need to be educated. Timperly and Robinson (2000) suggested that teachers would need to be helped to make a new and different approach to tackling the variety of demands placed on them if they are to avoid becoming overwhelmed with the multitude of demands they face. Moreover, no teacher, whatever his qualification claim to be a master of all knowledge and skills required for effective instruction. Without adequate training in ICT, language teaching would become challenging. E-learning enables teachers in the 21st century to update their knowledge to be able to make appropriate use of ICT. Although e-learning appears to create infrastructure required for the promotion of learning, the extent to which teachers use the available technology is very important (Misko et al, 2005). There is need for Igbo language teachers in secondary schools in Anambra state to be properly trained in the use of e-learning in order to make students compete favourably with others globally and mobilize the public for national consciousness. This study will be useful to computer scientists so that they will develop technological packages for teachers and also train teachers on the use of the soft-ware developed. The study will also be useful to students of Igbo language in learning the language with comfort and ease anywhere they are in the world. Additionally, the study will further contribute to revitalization efforts made in preserving the language from going into extinction through innovative practice which will arouse the interest of the youths to study the language and at the same promote national consciousness. Therefore the purpose of this study is directed towards investigating those factors which hinder the competent use of e-learning among Igbo language teachers in secondary schools in Anambra state.

Research Questions

The study sought answers to the following questions:

- To what extent do these factors frustrate the use of e-learning among language teachers?
- To what extent could these strategies be developed to motivate the teacher to achieve best practices in the use of e-learning for teaching?

Methodology

The study was conducted in Awka Local Government Area of Anambra state. The population of the study was 50 Igbo language teachers from all the secondary schools in Awka South L.G.A. 20 Igbo teachers were selected from the population. 2 teachers each from the schools were selected through random sampling. Two research questions were designed to elicit information from the respondents. The research instruments used were structured and unstructured questionnaire. The items in the questionnaire sought to find out the extent. Analysis used for the study is simple percentage.

Results

Research question 1: What are the factors that frustrate the use of e-learning among Igbo language teachers?

Table 1: Analysis of factors that frustrate the use of e-learning among Igbo language teachers.

	Frustrating factors (items)	Great Extent	High extent	Low extent	Very low extent
a	Schools lack the fund to provide e-learning facilities	Great extent	-	-	-
b	Insufficient supply of computers and instructional facilities	Great extent	-	-	-
c	Igbo language teachers not assisted to acquire ICT skills for managing e-learning	Great extent	-	-	-
d	Poor power supply	Great extent	-	-	-
e	Poor knowledge of ICT by teachers	Great extent	-	-	-

In Table 1, all the items a-c were rated great extent. This reveals that access factors that frustrate the use of e-learning by teachers

Research question2: What are the strategies that may be developed to motivate the teacher to achieve best practices in the use of e-learning for teaching.

Table 2: Analysis of the strategies used to motivate Igbo language teachers on the use of e-learning.

	Motivating factors	Great Extent	High extent	Low extent	Very low extent
a	Commending teachers that apply e-learning in teaching	-	-	Low extent	-
b	Training teachers on ICT through seminars and workshops	-	-	Low extent	-
c	Creating awareness on the importance of e-learning	-	-	Low extent	-

Table 2 shows that all the items below the decision rule of low extent. This indicates that Igbo language teachers are not motivated in the use of e-learning.

Discussion

There is a clear evidence from the findings of the research that e-learning has not been integrated into secondary schools due to unpreparedness of government to provide adequate computer facilities for teacher effectiveness. Table 1 states that there are many frustrating factors which hinder the inception of e-learning. This supports Olorube et al (2006) who state that for proper commencement of e-learning in schools, three categories of ICT facilities must be provided. They are: computer system, telecommunication system and multimedia. The finding supports Anowor (2010) who commented that every classroom is expected to have computer hardware which includes micro-process, storage devices, input devices, output devices and network devices.

Table 2 states that there are no motivations for teachers for proper inauguration of e-learning. This is inline with Timperly and Robinson (2000) who are of the opinion that teachers would need to be helped to make a new and different approach to tackle the variety of demands placed on them if they are to avoid becoming overwhelmed with the multitude of demands they face. Misko et al (2005) further suggest that for satisfactory setting up of e-learning, teachers should be adequately trained in ICT and sufficient infrastructure required for the promotion of e-learning provided.

Conclusion

The following conclusions could be made from the results of the findings of this study that integrating ICT into Igbo language teaching is crucial for harnessing ICT developmental potential in secondary education. ICT can promote quality delivery of Igbo languages services. Igbo language teachers should be competent in the use of internet and entire communication network for effective teaching.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. There should be series of training and re-training programmes in ICT for Igbo language teachers as the programmes are aimed at keeping Igbo language teachers abreast with developments in the use of e-learning.
2. Government should provide facilities for proper e-learning take-off in schools.
3. Government should make frantic efforts in finding lasting solutions to the problems of unrealistic power supply and telecommunication services.

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