

CHALLENGES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IGBO LANGUAGE IN PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN GWAGWALADA, (FCT)

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Abstract

The study examines the challenges of teaching and learning Igbo language in private secondary schools in Gwagwalada Area Council of the Federal Capital Territory, (FCT). Although the study has received much scholarly attention, regarding the public institutions in the south eastern part of the country, limited reports exist with regards to its investigation in respect of the private secondary schools. With reference to UNESCO's 2003 framework for evaluating language endangerment and vitality, the study explores these challenges. The study was conducted using a mixed methods descriptive survey design, involving quantitative and qualitative data. The target population comprised of private secondary school proprietors and proprietresses, teachers, administrators and students in Gwagwalada. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 100 participants for the study, while the data was collected through structured questionnaires, in-depth interviews and focused group discussions (FDGs). A pilot testing among some non-sampled private secondary schools was carried out to ascertain the reliability of the instruments. The qualitative data were analysed using frequency counts and descriptive statistics while the qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis. The findings reveal that the teaching and learning of Igbo language in private secondary schools in Gwagwalada is faced with inadequacy of trained Igbo language teachers, multiplicity of dialects, negative attitudes of the language learners, insufficiency of literacy materials and maximization of profit by the school owners and the problem of immediate need. The study concludes that teaching and learning of Igbo language in private secondary schools in Gwagwalada is severely challenged and recommends that an introduction of reward systems, creation of awareness on the consequences of language loss, campaign for language patriotism, adequate funding by the government and positive attitude of the Igbo language learners to their language, will positively contribute towards remedying Igbo language scholarship in private secondary schools in Gwagwalada and beyond.

Keywords: challenges, scholarship, language endangerment, profit maximization and literary materials.

Introduction

Igbo language is one of the largest languages in West Africa and is spoken majorly in the south eastern states of Nigeria: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. It also has some few speakers across the southern and north eastern Delta, southern parts of Rivers and Cross River states. It has about 20 million speakers (Udoye, 2018), and belongs to the Benue Congo group of the Niger-Congo language family. Igbo is one of the three major languages in Nigeria

and is the main language of trade and commerce in the south eastern part, where it is also used in the mass media, like radio and television, and is also taught as a subject in their primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Although Igbo language is taught and studied in the south-eastern schools, its teaching and learning beyond the region is still faced by a lot of challenges for so many reasons.

In the first place, it is learnt alongside with English; a foreign language considered to be of higher status and of more socio-economic value. In addition, the study of English is also made compulsory for all Nigerian students, who must pass it at a credit level, if they must be admitted into higher institutions of learning in Nigeria and must also gain fluency in it, if they must get good jobs. This situation is even more pronounced in private secondary schools located in northern regions such as Gwagwalada, FCT, where institutional support for indigenous languages is minimal and where proprietors and proprietresses often prioritize profit-making over curricular diversity. Thus, a systematic investigation of these challenges is imperative to understand the broader implications for language maintenance and cultural identity.

Another major problem is that Igbo language does not have a standardized spoken or written form. This is occasioned by the large number of dialects that make it up. It has about 30 different dialects, some of which are not mutually intelligible, and those that are, also exhibit some lexical and phonological differences. The study is anchored on UNESCO's (2003) framework on language endangerment and vitality and through this lens, it explores the degree to which challenges of Igbo language education hinders continuous transmission and effective use of the language in different language domains, resulting in its gradual endangerment or eventual loss.

The study addresses three research questions:

- (i) What are the challenges of teaching Igbo language in private secondary schools in Gwagwalada?
- (ii) What are the challenges confronting Igbo language learning in private secondary schools in Gwagwalada?
- (iii) What are the solutions to the challenges confronting the teaching and learning of Igbo language in private secondary schools in Gwagwalada?

Accurate answers to these questions will not only contribute to contemporary debates on Igbo language education, but will also proffer solutions to indigenous language preservation and vitality in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Globally speaking, language is seen as being so vital to human existence that there is hardly any situation or human function, where it is not required (NSUKTEXTS, 2011). Apart from its central role in communication, it also serves as a marker of individual and group or ethnic identity, encapsulating the cultural, spiritual and intellectual life of a people, such as prayers, myths, ceremonies, poetry, greetings, habits, humour, etc, which every speech community must fight to protect.

UNESCO in 2003, established nine evaluative factors for the determination of the endangerment status or otherwise of a language with intergenerational language transmission, materials for language literacy, community members' attitudes towards their own language and amount and quality of documentation as some of the key factors. In view of this, it is clear that language teaching and learning are inevitable tools in transmitting language to the younger generation for the maintenance of language vitality.

A lot of empirical researches on Igbo language education are in concert with the view that Igbo language teaching and learning is beclouded by severe challenges. Among the Nigerian scholars that have contributed in this regard are: Umo (2013), who examined Igbo and identity, a research work that indirectly impacts on effective teaching and learning of Igbo language. She discovered that orthographic disparities and diachronic problems were the major challenges to effective teaching and learning of the language.

Another scholar who also contributed in this area is Onwuka (2009). She conducted her research among the secondary schools in Aboh Mbaise LGA in Imo State. Her study was centred on the factors that affect students' performance in Igbo language Senior School Certificate Examinations (SSCE), and concluded that lack of teachers, poor attitude of students, parents and the general public as well as lack of teaching aids were some of the impediments against effective teaching and learning of the language.

Furthermore, Okudo (2013), investigated the problems and prospects of teaching and learning Igbo language in secondary schools in Lagos State, and concluded that the major problems that hindered effective teaching and learning of the language in Lagos state were

inadequate Igbo language textbooks, lack of language laboratories and poor method of instruction. From the empirical evidences above, these scholars contributed significantly to the investigation of the challenges confronting the teaching and learning of Igbo language in our institutions of learning, but a clear research gap still exists in this regard. While majority of these scholarly works focused on the government secondary schools located within the south eastern part of Nigeria, a few studies directly investigated the private secondary schools, particularly with regards to FCT, regardless of its disposition as both the seat of power and the centre of unity. Again, the sociolinguist setting of FCT and entire Northern Nigeria are completely different from that of the South Eastern Region, such that an investigation of the challenges confronting the teaching and learning of Igbo language in Gwagwalada or any other part of the Northern Region will provide more insights to the significant threats to Igbo language education in particular and its survival or maintenance in general.

Methodology

The research work adopted a descriptive field survey design, involving a mixed methods approach to examine the challenges of teaching and learning of Igbo language in private secondary schools in Gwagwalada. The choice of the design was based on its ability to capture both the quantitative and qualitative data for evaluating these challenges. The quantitative surveys enabled the study to have statistical analysis of the responses from the questionnaires in respect of facts relating to the teachers, proprietors and proprietress, administrators and students, while the qualitative responses from interviews and focus group discussions assisted the research in exploring the attitudinal behaviours of the participants towards Igbo language teaching and learning. The research covered some private secondary schools in Gwagwalada - one of the Area Councils of the FCT. The study population consisted of proprietors/proprietresses of private secondary schools, school administrators, teachers and students. A multi-stage purposive sampling technique was employed, involving the private secondary schools in Gwagwalada satellite towns, and a few private secondary schools in the remote parts. The research participants were selected based on their knowledge of private secondary school education, as well as their involvements in the teaching and learning processes. The final sample included:

- 100 questionnaires respondents, comprising 30 Igbo language teachers, 40

students and 10 administrators, 10 proprietors and 10 proprietresses.

- 5 focus groups discussions (FGDs), each with 5 - 6 participants from some of the selected private secondary schools.
- 10 in-depth interviews with proprietors/proprietresses of some selected private secondary schools.

Three main instruments were used to collect the data:

- i. Structured Questionnaires - designed to gather quantitative data on general school population of Igbo students, population and qualification of teachers, perceived challenges of teaching and learning Igbo language and their remedies. The questions were comprised of both closed-ended and Likert-scale formats.
- ii. Focus Group Discussion Guides - used to explore the perceptions of the participants, regarding the challenges of teaching and learning of Igbo language in the selected schools. The discussions were held in Igbo or English, depending on the participants preference.
- iii. Key Informant Interview Schedules - designed to gather detailed experience based accounts of the challenges of teaching and learning Igbo language in the selected schools.

All instruments were validated through pilot testing in non-sampled private secondary schools in the area. Minor adjustments were made to improve on the clarity and contextual relevance of the instruments. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while frequency counts, percentages and mean scores were calculated using Microsoft Excel and SPSS, to ascertain Igbo students and teachers population as well as the perceived challenges. Quantitative data from interviews and FGD on the other hand were transcribed, coded, and subjected to thematic analysis.

Finally, the combined data were interpreted through the lens of UNESCO's (2003) framework for assessing language vitality and endangerment. The combination of statistical trends with contextual narratives contributed greatly to the comprehensive understanding of the challenges confronting the teaching and learning of Igbo language in private secondary schools in Gwagwalada.

Ethical Consideration

This research was conducted with full ethical consideration for the safety, dignity, and privacy of participants. All data collected adhered to established humanitarian and academic research protocols. Informed consent was obtained orally or in writing from all respondents - including proprietors and proprietresses, school administrators, teachers and students. Participation was entirely voluntary, and individuals retained the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. No identifying personal data were recorded, ensuring respondents' confidentiality and data protection.

Results

The result or the findings of the research as revealed from the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data are presented in two sections: Quantitative result from the survey of 100 participants and qualitative insights drawn from 10 interviews and 5 focused group discussions. These results provide a true picture of the challenges of Igbo language education in Gwagwalada.

1. Quantitative Results

a. Availability of Teachers and Distribution of their Qualification

Table 1: Distribution of Teacher Qualifications

Teacher Qualification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
B.A./B.Ed. in Igbo Language	8	27
B.Ed. in Education (Non-Igbo Major)	10	33
NCE (Non-Igbo) or Others	12	40
Total	30	100

Across the sampled schools, out of the 30 teachers surveyed only 8 (27%) held a degree in Igbo while 10 (33%) had qualification in education. The remaining 12 (40%) had no formal training in Igbo language. Again, the table reveals obvious scarcity of trained Igbo language teachers in the sampled schools. This has a direct adverse effect on Igbo language instruction in Gwagwalada. Furthermore, according to the respondents, in-service training is not allowed in the private schools and this makes the matter worse.

b. Weekly Time Allocation per Subject

Table 2: Weekly Instructional Time Allocation

Subject	Time per period	Period per week	Time per week	Rating
English	40 minutes	8	320 minutes	High
Mathematics	40 minutes	8	320 minutes	High
Igbo Language	40 minutes	2	80 minutes	Low
Chemistry	40 minutes	4	160 minutes	Moderate
Biology	40 minutes	4	160 minutes	Moderate
Physics	40 minutes	4	160 minutes	Moderate

Table 2 above shows that Igbo language receives less instructional time compared to subjects like English and Mathematics. Igbo language instruction is allocated 80 minutes per week as against 320 minutes allocation each for English and Mathematics. All the Igbo language teachers also reported that limited class time is not in the interest of Igbo language instruction and does not in any way encourage effective teaching and learning of the subject.

c. Igbo language Learners' Attitude to the Language

Table 3: Attitude of Igbo language learners to the language

S/N	Student population	Responses	%
1	25	To fulfil examination requirements	62.5
2	10	To comply with school policy	25
3	5	Interested in the subject	12.5
Total	40		100

In response to why the students were studying the language, 62.5% indicated that it was just to fulfil examination requirements, 25% said they were forced by their school's policies, while 12.5% expressed real interest in learning the subject. Again, all the students affirmed that English offers better career opportunities than Igbo, hence their preference of English to Igbo. Undoubtedly, this revelation shows the students' negative perception about the language, because they lack adequate motivation to study the language.

d. Availability of Instructional Materials

70% of the respondents reported that there were inadequate textbooks and other literacy materials for Igbo language education. An overwhelming 100% of the respondents affirmed that the language laboratories as well as audio-visual aids which enhance teaching and learning were completely absent in their schools. One of the proprietresses asserted: “language laboratory is frankly out of my reach. It is so expensive that I cannot even dream of having it in next 10 years. Some teachers also affirmed that while English language has multiple publishers, Igbo language publishers are few and there is limited market for Igbo language books, especially within the Northern region.

e. Issues of Funding

70% of the proprietors and proprietress stated that financial constraints restricted their investment in Igbo language scholarship, while 30% openly stated that they prioritized subjects like English, Mathematics, Science and Computer Studies because of their market values. This explains why Igbo language teachers are poorly remunerated, consequently translating into poor motivation for both the teachers and the students in the teaching and learning process of the language.

2. Qualitative Results

Thematic analysis of interviews and FGDs corroborated and enriched the survey findings, bringing to light several interrelated themes.

Theme 1. Insufficiency of Igbo Language Teachers

With only eight (8) trained Igbo language teachers in all the sampled schools, it is obvious that the Igbo teachers are in short supply in the private secondary schools in Gwagwalada. Many reasons are however responsible for this; the teaching profession is generally looked down on by many youths who, instead of aspiring to become teachers, aspire to become lawyers, doctors, engineers, pharmacists, etc. There is also the brain drain syndrome, where many young school leavers prefer to travel abroad for greener pastures. This mass exodus of the youths creates unnecessary scarcity of teachers in general, and the Igbo language teachers in particular.

Theme 2. Insufficiency of Teaching Time

100% of the administrators affirmed that in all the private secondary schools in Gwagwalada,

each subject is allowed forty minutes per period, while English language and Mathematics are allowed double periods, that is 80 minutes every day, from Monday through Thursday, that is a total of 320 minutes per week, while Igbo language is allowed to be taught twice a week, that is a total of 80 minutes per week. This disparity in the timing and teaching of these subjects, definitely affects the output of the Igbo language instruction. Consequently, the teachers always hurry in and out of the classes like people under pressure, and this also translates into poor quality and content delivery.

Theme 3. **The Problem of Immediate Need**

Majority of the Igbo students stated:

“We are learning Igbo only to complete the number of our credit passes to 5, at a sitting”.

Many of the Igbo language students, learn the subject simply to pass their tests and examinations. They therefore approach the learning process through short cuts, avoiding the nitty-gritties in acquiring the basic language skills. In other words, these students disregard the commitment to its mastery to pursue mere examination success to satisfy their immediate needs.

Theme 4. **Perceived Lack of Prospects**

One student said:

“Studying Igbo language is a waste of time as it has no good prospect”.

Majority of the Igbo Language students in private schools in Gwagwalada prefer to be associated with prestigious languages and languages of high social economic values. Their choice of subject is influenced by the supposed prospects, there in. They do not see Igbo as a language of opportunities and therefore show a laissez-fair attitude in learning it. To them, the few opportunities open to people who learn the subject include ending up as a local language interpreters or teachers as against English with a wide range of opportunities. Since these 8 students naturally desire lucrative jobs for better life, they decline Igbo language studies to aspire for disciplines like Accountancy, Medicine, Law, Architecture, Nursing, Engineering, Computer Science, English, etc.

Theme 5 **Exploitation/marginalization**

One school proprietor said:

“We are here because of passion and money. If we don’t maximize profit, we will be out of

business tomorrow”.

Although some of the private school proprietors/proprietresses have passion for education, their primary aim of running their schools is to make a living through their profits. To this end, they exploit the parents and pay teachers peanuts and also fail in providing the enabling environment for effective teaching and learning, like provision of language laboratories and well-equipped libraries.

Theme 6. Multiplicity of Dialects***Two Igbo language teachers stated:***

“One major problem in teaching Igbo language is the multiplicity of its dialects, with no one knowing the one to be taught”.

Igbo language has approximately 30 dialects. These large number of dialects are said to be responsible for the non-development of its standard spoken or written form. The purported standard dialects in use now, is not universally accepted, because it was developed based on two out of the thirty dialects. With the multiplicity of dialects, it becomes difficult to know which dialect to teach and which to learn. An acceptable dialect would aim at including words from all the dialects as well as loan words from other languages in contact.

Theme 7. Lack of Funding by the Government

All the proprietors and proprietresses claimed that they do not receive funds from the government. This implies that private secondary school funding in Gwagwalada is solely dependent on the owners of the schools. In other words, only the public schools in Nigeria receive budgetary allocation or funding from the government, while the private schools suffer from lack of funding from the government. This is because in Nigeria, running a private school is seen as a private business and consequently neglected in terms of governmental funding. This negligence translates into poorly equipped language laboratories and libraries as well as poor remuneration of teachers. An Igbo language teacher who does not have the right tools to carry out his or her assignment and is not also happy with his or her take home pay, will hardly give out his or her best.

Discussion

From the findings of the research, the teaching and learning of Igbo language in the

private secondary schools in Gwagwalada is absolutely severely challenged. One of these challenges is the inadequacy of trained Igbo language teachers, with only 27% possessing degree in Igbo or related fields. This is in conformity with the observations of scholars like Onwuka 2009, Uno 2013 and Okudo 2013. To add salt to injury, the few available trained Igbo language teachers are poorly remunerated, perhaps because the language is seen as having low economic value compared to English and other science subjects. This challenge is counter-productive as it leaves the teachers ill-equipped to execute the task of effect teaching of the subject. This is a clear repression of UNESCO's (2003) Factor 6 - materials for language education and literacy - since qualified teachers themselves are inevitable tools in the business of language pedagogy.

Another major challenge revealed by the study is inadequate instructional time allocation. With Igbo language time allocation at 80 minutes per week as against the 320 minutes for English, it is crystal clear that English is valued and preferred over and above Igbo, may be because it is a local language. The reason behind this is not different from why English is made compulsory in our schools and is also use as a medium of instruction and even a *lingua franca* in the whole nation. This obvious inequality or disparity is one of the demoralizing and challenging factors in Igbo language scholarship resulting in declining outcomes.

In addition, the study uncovered the challenge of Igbo language learners' negative attitude to the language. Here, the students claim that they study the language because they are compelled by their school's policies in addition to merely fulfilling examination requirement. This negative attitude by the language learners constitutes a major threat to the inter-generational language transmission as observed by Fishman (1991). Again, this clearly represses Factor 1 of UNESCO's 2001 framework - inter-generational language transmission, which is its most factor in language maintenance and vitality.

Furthermore, the issue of multiplicity of dialect also emerged strongly in both quantitative and qualitative data. With over 30 dialects, Igbo language teachers and learners are beclouded with the confusion of which dialect to teach and which to learn. Although this problem is common among African languages, Emenanjo 2015 believes that the emergence of one acceptable dialect as a central Igbo variety will be difficult as speakers of other varieties or dialects will view as exclusionary. The truth about the matter is that the lack of this consensus, undermines the teaching efficiency of the language and diminishes learners'

confidence in the subject's legitimacy.

Finally, the proprietors and proprietresses' exploitation and funding priorities also calls for concern. Proprietors and Proprietresses openly acknowledged prioritizing profit over investment in Igbo language, indicating that Igbo education is primarily a business enterprise. This singular act by the proprietors and proprietresses constitute a high level of institutional negligence of language and cultural preservation which weakens Factor 8 of UNESCO 2003 framework - governmental and institutional attitudes and policies, signaling that indigenous languages are expended in the pursuit of economic sustainability.

However, regardless of these challenges, the study also proposes the way out for Igbo language education in particular and Igbo language maintenance and vitality in general. In the first place, the study believes that creating awareness on the dangers of Igbo language endangerment and eventual loss could help refrain Igbo not only as a mere school subject, but also as a cultural heritage worthy of preservation. Again, the study believes that introducing reward system for outstanding students and teachers, as suggested by some participants may also serve as motivational tools to counteract learners' negative attitudes. Furthermore, governmental support in the form of funding of private secondary school in Gwagwalada and beyond could address the obvious infrastructural and teaching materials deficits in our institutions of learning. Together, these interventions could strengthen multiple UNESO vitality factors enhancing both intergenerational transmission and institutional support.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Studies

While the study offers insights into the challenges of teaching and learning Igbo language in Gwagwalada, several limitations must be acknowledged.

- (i) **Limited Scope:** As a result of several logistic challenges, the study was limited to Gwagwalada Area Council. Other area councils of FCT were excluded. This is an under-representation of the totality of the FCT experience and the outcomes may lead to over generalization.
- (ii) **Short Term Scope:** The study represents a snapshot of the problems beclouding Igbo language teaching and learning. The consequences of these challenges have more devastating outcomes and need to be studied extensively in the overall interest of the vitality of the language.
- (iii) **Reliance on Self-Reported Data:**

The findings of the study are based on self-reported data from questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions, which are not totally free from emotional bias, especially coming from the teachers that are not adequately remunerated and the proprietors/proprietresses, whose major interest in the business is maximization of profit.

Future Research Directions

To build on this study, further studies might explore:

- (i) the consequences of the decline in Igbo language scholarship.
- (ii) the prospects of studying Igbo language
- (iii) the promotion of Igbo language education.
- (iv) the importance of maintaining Igbo language vitality.

Conclusion

The present study examined the challenges confronting the teaching and learning of Igbo in private secondary schools in Gwagwalada, FCT. Through a mixed-methods approach involving surveys, interviews, and focus group discussion, the research uncovered some challenges, ranging from teachers' shortages, inadequate instructional time, and insufficient resources, to student apathy, dialect multiplicity, and proprietors' profit-oriented priorities. All these have both short- and long-term effects on both the language literacy and vitality. On the short time, it is capable of degradation of the educational quality, and on the long time, its continuous presence will culminate into a significant regression of the vitality of the language. In view of the findings of the study therefore, a proactive response becomes inevitable, not only to ensure that the teaching and learning of the language is sustained with so much vigor in private secondary schools in Gwagwalada, but also to ensure the promotion and overall maintenance of the vitality of the language. The following recommendations are offered.

- (i) **Creation of Awareness on the Dangers of Language Loss:** A conscious effort must be made to re-awaken the consciousness of the Ibo youths, that Igbo language is their key means of communication, and defines their existence. It is also needed for their social integration and overall survival, and must not be sacrificed on any alter.
- (ii) **Advocation of Language Patriotism:** Igbo language teachers and learners need to

have a positive disposition towards the language, so as to hold it in high esteem and cherish it, over and above any other language.

- (iii) **Introduction of Reward Systems for Distinguished Language Teachers and Learners:** The government of the south eastern states should work in collaboration with educational administrators and well-meaning individuals to institute reward systems, to reward distinguished Igbo language teachers and learners, through scholarships and other enhancement packages.
- (iv) **Provision of Instructional Materials:** The government should ensure the provision of adequate and relevant instructional materials as well as modern language laboratories in private secondary schools to enhance effective language teaching and learning. Teaching without teaching aids makes the teaching process abstract, effortful and retards productivity. Again, teaching aids also help to attract, motivate and excite the students during learning.
- (v) **Provision of Adequate Funding:** The federal government in collaboration with the FCT government should endeavor to be actively involved in the funding and monitoring of the private secondary schools in FCT, to minimize over maximization of profit by the proprietors and proprietresses. Adequate funding will also enhance the remuneration of teachers which is a catalyst for effectiveness and high productivity

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