FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENTS’ PERFORMANCE IN IGBO LANGUAGE SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS

Onwuka Gloria. T.
Department of Arts Education/Cudimac
University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Abstract
The Igbo language is among the three major Nigerian languages to be studied in schools in Nigeria, the others are Hausa and Yoruba languages. This implies that Igbo language occupies a very important linguistic position in Nigeria, hence the federal government approval of it. Unfortunately, Igbo language students have been performing poorly in the senior secondary school certificate examinations. This ugly situation has continued to be of great concern to those crusading for Igbo language growth. This study therefore, investigated the factors affecting students' performance in Igbo language in the senior secondary school certificate examinations. Two research questions were, raised for the study. Data were collected using a set of structured questionnaire which was distributed to 200 respondents which comprised only the Igbo language students. It was discovered that there are insufficient number of teachers to teach the Igbo language. Also the attitude of students, parents, teachers and the larger society constitute some factors affecting students performance in Igbo language in senior secondary school examinations. In the light of the findings, recommendations were made. These include: That the number of qualified teachers who teach Igbo language should be increased and that the government should create more job opportunities for graduates of Igbo language.

Introduction
The importance of language to man need not to be over-emphasized. Language is one of man’s most remarkable attributes. It is an absolute precondition for nearly all our social life, and it is the medium in which most organized thought and communication proceed. Highlighting the importance of language to man, Adetugbo (1980:2) states that “all human societies, and institutions are made possible only by man’s possession of language.”
Odusina (1989:17) in his view observes that “without language, there would be mental isolation and thought stagnation in interaction either”. Closely related to this, Obanya (1981:3) said that language is seen as "man’s most important gift, the vehicle for communication and a good instrument for thought and creativity". For Pickering and Hoeper (1990:87) language is, “the means by which the writer controls and influences the reader”.

Language is so important in teaching and learning process such that the Nigerian government appreciates it as a means for promoting social interaction and national cohesion (FRN, 2004). Igbo as a language is very important especially the cultural aspect. This is because, it is the basis or the foundation of Igbo people. With Igbo language, social, moral, religious and economic values and norms of the Igbo people are inculcated. For instance, values such as respect for elders, hospitality, dressing, beliefs, being hard working are appreciated through the major genres of oral and written literature as works of art and as vehicles of culture and history of the people (Onwuka and Uloh-Bethels, 2010).

In the history of Igbo, a lot of people have made efforts to see that the language does not extinct. Starting from the time of Dr S.E Onwu and his committee, whose effort led to the present orthography in see now. Also, scholars like, Ogbalu, Ugonna, Emenanjo, Nwadike and others, have been promoting Igbo language. For instance, in an attempt to see that Igbo language stays, Ogbalu single handedly introduced the society for the promotion of Igbo language and culture (SPILC) whose among the objectives according to Nwadike (2002) is to demonstrate the capability of Igbo language to serve as a language of communication and transaction at all levels of governmental, educational and commercial concern. However, inspite of these efforts made by these Igbo scholars one wonders why most native speakers of Igbo language do not embraced Igbo language. The attitude is noticeable in many schools especially secondary schools. Supporting this, Maduabum (2010) noted that the most successful terrain in ensuring that the Igbo language disappears from the face of the earth is our schools. According to him, from the nursery to the university level, you are sometimes regarded as being savage if you speak Igbo. Infact, you will be tagged “Jewman” which nobody can explain what it means. In our secondary schools, especially the private schools, you are not only punished but also mocked for
speaking Igbo. As a result of these ill
treatment, students seem to be
looking down upon Igbo language as
a subject and in consequence, they
perform poorly in the subject at the
senior secondary certificate
examination level.

Parents on their own
contribute to enhance the negative
reaction of their children towards
the Igbo language studies. Afuba
(2010) in his view, noted that some
Igbo people even without any undue
influence choose to learn and speak
other language simply to
demonstrate their linguistic prowess.
This although seems a very positive
aspiration but this apparent
liberalism is contradicted by what
amounts to an abandonment of the
mother tongue (Igbo language).
According to him, the so called
desire for sophistication lead some
parents to communicate with their
infants in English at home even as
the Federal Republic of Nigeria
(2004) in the national policy on
education advocates that instruction
in the primary school should be in
the child’s mother tongue.

Actually, it is not only the
students and the parents that seem
to look down on the study of Igbo
language, the teachers are also
involved. Concerning the attitude of
teachers, Ogbalu (1974) said that
some teachers show apathy in
speaking Igbo language in the
classroom. They also impose fine on
students who speak Igbo in the class.
Not only that, some teachers who
claim to teach Igbo language are not
competent in the language, they
also use the time for Igbo in
engaging the children in story-telling
while the teacher himself diverts his
attention to other thing like marking
of students assignments. However,
these negative attitude of teachers
towards Igbo language has led to
negative attitude of students
towards the study of Igbo language.
This in effect has led some of them
to regard it as an obnoxious course
especially in the university. This is in
line with the assertion of Ifemesia
(1984) that at the university of
Ibadan, a female student in the
Department of linguistics and
Nigerian languages who was asked to
register Igbo courses shyingly burst
into tears while another who
registered for the courses
deliberately failed them by writing
nothing in the first semester
examination and was thus allowed to
strike off the “obnoxious” course
from her records.

Considering the above, there
is no doubt saying that Igbo language
has suffered untold humiliation over
the years. However, it has to be
noted that this attitude of students
towards the study of Igbo language
appears to be sequel to the views of
Igbo people in general about the
Most people who are advanced in age seem never to say something positive concerning their mother tongue (Igbo language) and by so doing, students regard the subject as worthless and therefore to study it is a waste of time and energy. Moreover, it has to be born in mind that the more Igbo language is neglected, the worse results the students get in their senior secondary certificate examinations. Past results of students who took Igbo language from 2000 to 2009 attest to this fact. In other words, data collected from four secondary schools in Aboh Mbaise show that in 2006, 517 students took Igbo language in SSCE out of this number, 14 candidates passed with distinction, 54 passed with credit, 167 got ordinary passes, 262 failed woefully while 11 candidates had their results ceased. In 2007, 475 candidates took Igbo language in SSCE in Aboh Mbaise. Out of this number, 30 candidates passed with distinction, 83 passed with credit, 149 candidates got ordinary passes, 200 candidates failed woefully while 13 candidates had their results ceased. In 2008, 421 candidates took Igbo language in SSCE in Aboh Mbaise. Out of this number, 39 passed with distinction, 72 passed with credit, 135 candidates got ordinary passes while 175 failed woefully. In 2009, 453 candidates took Igbo language, out of this number, 58 passed with distinction, 114 candidates passed with credit, 166 got ordinary passes while 115 candidates failed woefully. The schools concerned include: community secondary school Lorji, comprehensive secondary school Amuzu, Oke Ovoro secondary school and Mbutu secondary school, all in Aboh Mbaise local government area of Owerri education zone in Imo state.

The results mentioned above show that candidates who got ordinary passes and those who failed woefully outnumber those who got distinctions and credit passes in Igbo language. A lot of reasons which include the way Igbo language is treated by Igbo people bring about these failures. However, Okoro (1998) earlier on described the condition of Igbo language in Aboh Mbaise as pathetic and in dare need of immediate intervention by the generality of the people within the locality especially parents who have more influence on their children than any other human being.

It is as a result of this pitiable condition, of Igbo language that the researcher delve into the factors affecting students' performance in the senior secondary school certificate examinations.
Statement of the Problem

Igbo language is among the three major languages studies in schools in Nigeria. This approval was given by federal Government of Nigeria and that made it to occupy a very important linguistic position in Nigeria.

Unfortunately, most native speakers of Igbo language hardly develop interest in its study. This situation is more disheartening when most parents from Igbo land seem to prefer English to be spoken by their children to Igbo language which is their mother tongue. This is attested to the fact that in most secondary schools in Igbo land, teachers instructed that any student found speaking Igbo rather than English in the classroom will be fined. Rather than motivating student that speak Igbo, the opposite is the case, that is; those who speak English are encouraged. This is the problem, otherwise how could those who should protect Igbo language speaking become indifferent to it. Thus, the need for the root cause of the attitude so exhibited by most of the teachers in secondary schools with respect to the secondary school certificated examinations in Aboh Mbaise local government Area in Owerri Education zone of Imo state.

Purpose of the Study

Purpose of this study is to find out the factors affecting students’ performance in Igbo language in the senior secondary school certificate Examinations in Aboh Mbaise Local Government Area of Imo State.

Research Questions

1. How adequate is the number of qualified Igbo language teachers in the secondary schools in Aboh Mbaise Local Government Area?
2. In what ways do attitude of students, parents, teachers and the larger society constitute factors affecting the study of Igbo language and students performance in Igbo language in senior secondary certificate examinations.
3. How adequate are the instructional materials used by Igbo language teachers for teaching the subject?

Methodology:

Design

The design adopted for this study was a descriptive survey which aimed at identifying the factors affecting the study of Igbo language and students performance in the senior secondary school certificate
examinations. According to Nworgu (1991) and Ali (1996), survey research involves the assessment of public opinions beliefs, attitudes and motivation using the questionnaire as a means of data collection.

**Population**

The population of this study consisted of four hundred and fifty students, offering Igbo language from the fourteen schools in Abob Mbaise local government area of Owerri education zone.

**Sample and Sampling Technique**

Stratified random sampling techniques was used in selecting both schools and respondents. Six secondary schools were sampled from the fourteen secondary schools in Abob Mbaise local government area in Owerri education zone of Imo State. A total number of two hundred students were sampled.

**Instrument**

The instrument consisted of a questionnaire schedule developed by the researcher to elicit information from the respondents on the factors affecting the and students' performance in senior secondary schools examination in Abob Mbaise local government area in Owerri education zone of Imo State. The questionnaire was developed on a four-point scale of strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. It was divided into three parts. Part A consists of 4 items and it sought to find out the numerical strength of qualified teachers teaching Igbo in secondary schools. Part B which has 8 items sought to elicit information on the attitude of students, parents, teachers and the larger society towards the study of Igbo language while part C which consisted of 4 items sought to elicit information on the availability and use of instructional materials in teaching Igbo language.

**Validation of Instrument**

The instrument was validated by two experts in language education and measurement and evaluation from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

**Data Analysis**

Mean scores were used in data analysis. A criterion mean of 2.50 and above was adopted as positive and as agreement level for the items while all scores below 2.50 were regarded as negative.
Results

Table 1
Mean scores of students on the numerical strength of qualified teachers teaching Igbo Language in Schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/NO</th>
<th>Questionnaire items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>There are insufficient number of teachers to teach Igbo language</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Some teachers who teach Igbo language do not major in the subject hence they do not teach well</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Some teachers who teach Igbo language are not competent in the language.</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Some Igbo language teachers do leave their teaching jobs for other jobs because they are ashamed of being called Igbo teachers.</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 above presents the views of the respondents on the numerical strength of teachers teaching Igbo language in schools. The table shows that item 1-4 have mean scores of, 3.43, 3.37, 2.94 and 3.25 respectively. This shows that the respondents agree with the item questions 1-4. That there are insufficient number of teachers to teach Igbo language, some teachers who teach Igbo language do not major in the subject, some teachers who teach Igbo language are not competent and some Igbo language teachers do leave their teaching jobs for other jobs because they are ashamed of being called Igbo teachers.

Table 2
Mean scores of students on the attitude of students, parents, teachers and the larger society towards the study of Igbo language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/NO</th>
<th>Questionnaire items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Students do not have interest in studying Igbo language because it will lead them no where in life.</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>An ordinary pass in Igbo language in senior secondary certificate examination does not hinder students from gaining admission into tertiary institutions in Nigeria.</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Students who speak Igbo language during school hours are fined by the school authorities.</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. Students feel happy and ready to receive lessons in Igbo whenever the teacher comes to teach the subject in the class.  
9. Parents provide their children/wards with adequate number of Igbo texts.  
10. Parents do not allow their children or wards to attend private lessons in Igbo language as they do in other subjects.  
11. Those who study Igbo language may not do other job but teaching.  
12. Teachers who teach Igbo language are regarded as inferior to other subject teachers by the society.

Table 2 above shows the responses of students with regard to the attitude of students, parents, teachers and the larger society towards the study of Igbo language. The table shows that item 5, 6, 7, 10, 11 and 12 have mean scores of 3.2, 3.56, 3.27, 2.94, 3.12 and 2.93 respectively. This shows that the respondents agree with the items. However, item 8 and 9 have mean scores of 2.1 and 1.55 showing that the respondents disagree that students feel happy and ready to receive lessons in Igbo whenever the teacher comes to teach in the class and that the parents provide their children with adequate number of Igbo text books.

Table 3
Mean scores of students on the use of instructional materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Questionnaire items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Teachers do not use teaching aids in teaching Igbo language</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>You have as many Igbo textbooks as possible and they are made available on demand.</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Students find it difficult to understand the available Igbo language texts</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>There are insufficient workbook for Igbo language students.</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 above shows the responses of Igbo language students on the availability of or use of instructional materials in teaching Igbo language. The table shows that item 13, 15 and 16 have mean scores of 3.13, 2.6, and 2.73 respectively. This shows that the respondents agree with the items. Also, item 14 has means score of 1.53 showing that the respondents disagree that students have as many Igbo textbooks as possible which are made available on demand.

Discussion

It was found out from this study that Igbo language teachers are not sufficient enough to handle the subject. Also some of them are not competent to handle the subject. It was equally observed that some people who claim to be Igbo language teachers never qualified in the subject. Also some of them decided to leave their jobs because they are ashamed of being called Igbo teacher. The researcher is not surprised in these findings because people seem to feel that Igbo is an inferior subject in the university and also because there are not too many people who qualified in the subject, any other people could come up and teach Igbo language. Peretomode (1995) buttresses the above point by saying that in school system, there is dearth of teachers. The existing stock of education personnel at all levels are poorly motivated, hence the current wave of brain. This is unfortunate because without adequate supply and high caliber of manpower in education system, the result will be degeneration in the quality of education and the type of students being produced. Therefore, for any educational programme to succeed, proper staffing of schools are required to a large extent. Hence, a school is properly staffed if it has a fair share of teachers with proper orientation in terms of academic and professional performance.

It was also discovered from the study that students believed that Igbo language does not lead them anywhere in life, again more emphasis is not accorded to Igbo language in senior secondary schools as a measure to gain admission into the university. The result also revealed that, parents do not furnish their children with adequate Igbo language text books, they also find it difficult to allow their children attend private lessons in Igbo language. Again, the study also revealed that teachers rarely use teaching aids in teaching Igbo language and that most schools lack Igbo textbooks, workbooks on Igbo language and as a result, students find it difficult to understand the available Igbo language text.

The findings of this study indicated that students performed poorly in Igbo language in senior secondary school certificate examination. This is as a result of inadequacy of qualified Igbo teachers, inability of teachers to use teaching aids, parents attitude and students themselves contributed so much in this regard. This is because, they believed that Igbo language is not one of such subject people can waste time studying since it is not a qualifying factor as such for non language students to gain admission in higher institutions.

Implication of the Study

This study has some educational implications for the government, the school administrators, the Igbo subject teachers, the students and the entire Igbo community.

Lack of interest in Igbo language studies shown by the parents in particular and the society at large and their laying of emphasis on the use of English language is an apparent way of displaying misplacement of cultural values and injection of insipidity towards the study of
Igbo language into the youth of Igbo extraction. In other words, when the interests of the students are rechannelled towards other people's language (especially English), there is no gain saying the fact that Igbo language students will perform poorly in their senior certificate examinations.

Lack of instrumental materials for teaching and learning of Igbo language will constitute or have a baneful influence on the teaching and learning of the subject. In other words, such incapacitation would reduce teachers to mere theorists and nothing empirical would be brought into play to transform the lopsided nature of students' knowledge of the subject. In consequence, there will be a gradual loss of interest by the students as learning will be boring. This in effect will undoubtedly result in their poor performance during examinations.

Finally, lack of qualified Igbo language teachers will make the government not to achieve its noble educational objectives of providing qualitative education to the masses. The implication is that the few available Igbo language teachers would be over loaded with school work and if they fail to receive remuneration that is not par with their work, they are likely going to look for a more rewarding job thereby making the students to be sheep without shepherd. In consequence, students will stray from Igbo language and will perform poorly in their examinations.

Recommendations
In view of the above educational implications of the result of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Igbo community in its entirety should join hands in the promotion of Igbo studies in schools knowing fully well that Igbo language is theirs. They should desist from castigating Igbo language and the crusaders of Igbo language.
2. School authorities should desist from collecting fines from students who speak Igbo language during school hours. The students should rather be made to understand the need for one to guard one’s property jealously.
3. The government should encourage the promotion of Igbo language by equipping the schools with the needed instructional materials.
4. More Igbo graduate teachers should be trained and posted to handle Igbo language studies effectively. In other words, the employment of teachers to handle Igbo language in senior secondary schools without thorough screening should be de-emphasized.
5. Teachers of Igbo language should be encouraged morally and financially by the parents, the school authorities and the society for the promotion of Igbo language and culture.
6. A credit pass in Igbo language in senior secondary school certificate examination should be made compulsory as a requirement for entry into any tertiary institution in Nigeria for all Igbo people.
7. Parents should endeavour to speak Igbo language to their children fluently where they find themselves.

References


