
**IBIBIO AND IGBO LANGUAGES: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF LEARNING
DIFFICULTIES OF THE TWO LANGUAGES**

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ABSTRACT

The study was to assess the Ibibio and Igbo languages: a critical analysis of the learning difficulties of the two languages. Language is an integral part of human behaviour and it serves as the primary means of interaction between people learning Ibibio and Igbo languages. The ability of an Igbo learner of Ibibio and an Ibibio learner of Igbo to communicate effectively is hinged upon the appropriate selection and ordering of phonological structures. Igbo learners of Ibibio and vice versa would ordinarily experience a learning and pronunciation problem bordering on interference as a result of differences between Igbo and Ibibio phonology. The problem could make it difficult for the Igbo learners in Ibibio and vice versa to achieve success in their learning endeavors. The study concluded that human beings need languages to share ideas, experiences, and emotions with other people in society or in the environment. The Ibibio and Igbo languages are the surest ways through which people can retain and safeguard knowledge, with wisdom authenticated by culture and transmitted from one generation to another. However, the process of imparting knowledge has to be carried out through the Ibibio and Igbo languages in Nigeria. The speakers of these languages usually come into contact in areas of endeavour such as tourism, trade or business, education, and even in hospitals and law courts. One of the recommendations made was that the government should improve the standards of all academic institutions studying the Ibibio and Igbo languages and also equip the language laboratories.

Keywords: Ibibio, Igbo, Learning Difficulties and Language

Introduction

Language is one of the most important attributes of mankind because it is the medium of communication. There is no country without a language. We all live in a world of many languages (Edem, 2020). Language is so vital to us that it

can be compared to the air we breathe. The goals of education are not achievable without learning the language. The process of imparting knowledge has to be carried out through the Ibibio and Igbo languages in Nigeria. According to Ebo (2014), the Ibibio and Igbo languages are the surest ways through which people can retain and safeguard knowledge, with wisdom authenticated by culture and transmitted from one generation to another. According to Yusuf (2012), language is potentially a communicative medium capable of expressing issues and concepts as well as moods, feelings, and attitudes. Adedeji (2015) views language as an integral part of human behaviour and the primary means of interaction between people learning Ibibio and Igbo languages. This means that this language is an inevitable and inseparable tool for human beings, as it permeates their lives from birth to death. No aspect of human activity can be successful without the effective use of language. Human beings need it to share ideas, experiences, and emotions with other people in society or in the environment.

Nigeria is a densely populated country with many languages. The 21st-edition ethnologue data listed 509 indigenous living languages for Nigeria. Among them are Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, which are recognized as the three languages spoken by the three major ethnic groups (Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba), while Ibibio, Tiv, Igala, Nupe, Ijaw, Fulfulde, Idoma, Efik, Itsekiri, etc., are languages spoken by these minor ethnic groups. Etim (2019) noted that speakers of these different languages usually come into contact in areas of endeavour such as tourism, trade or business, education, and even in hospitals and law courts. So, learning an additional indigenous language apart from one's mother tongue is necessary, though these languages may be similar or different in their sound inventories and structures. Thus, the ability of an Igbo learner of Ibibio and an Ibibio learner of Igbo to communicate effectively is hinged upon the appropriate selection and ordering of phonological structures (MODISH, 2022). Igbo learners of Ibibio and vice versa would ordinarily experience a learning and pronunciation problem bordering on interference as a result of differences between Igbo and Ibibio phonology. The problem could make it difficult for the Igbo learners in Ibibio and vice versa to achieve success in their learning endeavors.

Concept of Language

Language refers to the ability to produce and comprehend spoken and written words, and linguistics is the study of language (Lumen, 2020). Language is a system of conventional, spoken, or written symbols through which humans communicate. Language is an original noise used in actual social situations by human beings. Language is a symbol system based on pure or arbitrary conventions that is infinitely extendable and modifiable according to the changing needs and conditions of the speakers (Neo-English, 2010). Language is God's special gift to mankind. Without language, human civilization, as we now know it, would have remained an impossibility. Language is ubiquitous. It is

present everywhere in our thoughts and dreams, prayers and meditations, relationships and communication. It is our ability to communicate through words that makes us different from animals. Language is a very important means of communication between humans. According to Collins Dictionary (2021), a language is a system of communication that consists of a set of sounds and written symbols that are used by the people of a particular country or region for talking or writing. Language is a system of communication that consists of a set of sounds or written symbols.

Language refers to the system of conventionally spoken, manual (signed), or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves. The functions of language include communication, the expression of identity, play, imaginative expression, and emotional release (Crystal, 2020). A language is a structured system of communication. The structure of a language is its grammar, and the free components are its vocabulary. Languages are the primary means of communication for humans and can be conveyed through speech (spoken language), signing, or writing. Many languages, including the most widely spoken ones, have writing systems that enable sounds or signs to be recorded for later reactivation (Evans & Levinson, 2009). Human language is unique among the known systems of animal communication in that it is not dependent on a single mode of transmission (sight, sound, etc.), is highly variable between cultures and across time, and affords a much wider range of expression than other systems. Hakim (2018) noted that language is an arbitrary system of signs constituted by the signifier and signified. Language refers to the system of traditional, spoken, or written symbols that humans use to communicate.

Concept of Ibibio

The name "Ibibio" identifies the largest subdivision of people living in southeastern Nigeria, in Akwa Ibom State, and it is generally accepted and used for both ethnic and linguistic descriptions. The Ibibio are members of the Ibibio ethnic group from southeastern Nigeria, primarily in Cross River state. They speak dialects of Efik-Ibibio, a language now grouped within the Benue-Congo branch of the Niger-Congo language family (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2017). The Ibibio proper comprises the following major divisions: Efik, Northern (Enyong), Southern (Eket), Delta (Andoni-Ibeno), Western (Anang), and Eastern (the Ibibio proper). On the meaning of Ibibio, Jeffrey, as quoted by Ekpo (2019), the name may have come from Igbo-obio, which can be resolved into Ibi-ibio. Ibi comes from a root meaning "people" or else from another root, "gbo," which means "slave." Obio comes from a root that means country, bush, or forest. The name Ibibio is either from Ibi-obio, which means people of the bush (or bushmen), or from Igbo-obio, meaning slaves of the bush (or bush slaves). According to Wikipedia (2022), the Ibibio people (English: /ɪbɪˈbiːəʊ/) are coastal people in southern Nigeria. They are mostly found in

Akwa Ibom and Cross River States. They are related to the Annang and Efik people. During the colonial period in Nigeria, the Ibibio Union asked for recognition by the British as a sovereign nation.

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Ibibio (proper) is the native language of the Ibibio people of Akwa Ibom State and Abia State, Nigeria, belonging to the Ibibio-Efik dialect cluster of the Cross River languages. The name "Ibibio" is sometimes used for the entire dialect cluster. In pre-colonial times, it was written with Nsibidi ideograms, similar to Igbo, Efik, Anaang, and Ejagham (Wikipedia, 2021). Ibibio has also influenced Afro-American diasporic languages, such as AAVE words like buckra and buckaroo, which are derived from the Ibibio word mbakara, and the Afro-Cuban tradition of abakua. In his contribution, Abasiattai (2005) recounts that, by 7000 BC, permanent settlement of some of the ethnic groups in Ibibio land had already begun and that their language, also known as Ibibio, is probably the most ancient of all the semi-Bantu languages. According to Ekpo (2021), on the strength of a preliminary ethnographic survey, their sub-groups comprise Asutan, Eket, Etinan, Ibeno, Ibesikpo, Ibiono, Ikono, Ikot Abasi, Ini, Itu, and Mkpat Enin. Others are Nsit Atai, Nsit Ibom, Nsit Ubium, Uruan, and Uyo. The people are also related to other sub-groups, namely: Andoni, Annang, Eastern Obolo, and Oron. Despite these different groups, there is relative homogeneity in their cultural beliefs and shared customs, including music, mode of dressing, food, and child rearing system. Also, there are numerous music types common to all that function effectively in them.

Concept of Igbo

Igbo people are also called Ibo, and they are people living chiefly in southeastern Nigeria who speak Igbo, a language of the Benue-Congo branch of the Niger-Congo language family. The Igbo may be grouped into the following main cultural divisions: northern, southern, western, eastern (or Cross River), and northeastern. Before European colonization, the Igbo were not united as a single people but lived in autonomous local communities (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020). By the mid-20th century, however, a sense of ethnic identity had strongly developed, and the Igbo-dominated eastern region of Nigeria tried to unilaterally secede from Nigeria in 1967 as the independent nation of Biafra. By the turn of the 21st century, the Igbo numbered some 20 million. The Igbo people (*English: /'i:bou/ EE-boh, also US: /'igbou/; also spelled Ibo and formerly also Iboe, Ebo, Eboe, Eboans, Heebo; natively Ị́dị ịgbò*) are an ethnic group in Nigeria. They are mostly found in the states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. A sizable Igbo population is also found in the Delta and River States (Adeboyejo, 2018). Large ethnic Igbo populations are found in Cameroon, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea, as well as outside Africa. There has been much speculation about the origins of the Igbo people, as it is unknown exactly how the group came to form.

The Igbo language happens to be one of the indigenous languages that falls into the acclaimed majority group languages in Nigeria and therefore receives the privilege of being taught and learned as a second language in some of our schools, especially in colleges of education where teachers are trained (Aaron, 2013). The Igbo language, originally, like any other language, serves a purpose, which is essentially a communicative one for a particular tribe known as the Igbo in the midst of other tribes with their respective languages in the nation of Nigeria. Geographically, the Igbo homeland is divided into two unequal sections by the Niger River: an eastern (which is the larger of the two) and a western section. The Igbo people are one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa (Slattery, 2016). The Igbo language is part of the Niger-Congo language family. It is divided into numerous regional dialects and is somewhat mutually intelligible with the larger "Igboid" cluster. The Igbo homeland straddles the lower Niger River, east and south of the Edoid and Idomoid groups, and west of the Ibibioid (Cross River) cluster. However, Igbo is one of the four official languages of Nigeria and is a member of the Volta-Niger branch of the Niger-Congo family of languages. It is spoken in Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea by about 25 million people.

Difficulties of Learning Ibibio Language

The Ibibio language laboratory is a room in a school or college that contains special equipment to help students learn Ibibio languages effectively. Despite the government's efforts to improve indigenous language learning, students still dislike studying the Ibibio language, and those who have taken a university course in the language perform poorly on examinations. It has been noted that pupils studying Ibibio in schools are not given reading materials by their parents or the school administration. According to Dunhill (2004), people should be able to read deeply and obtain a different perspective on the issue after listening to the teacher's exposition. The above statement implies that exposure to appropriate content has a positive impact on a student's intelligence. Without this exposure, the student's understanding of the new variety of Ibibio language remains at its lowest ebb, and this becomes a hindrance in the student's learning process, thereby affecting their academic performance. Nyoho and Essien (2021) noted that this deficiency apparently could be curbed if appropriate language learning approaches and instructional materials were adopted. Instructional materials, in contemporary considerations, describe all teaching aids, resources, apparatus, or instructional media used to make the learning process of the Ibibio language effective.

For Ibibio language learners, it is necessary for them to have a good command of the language for communication reasons. Clarity and precision are crucial for effective and efficient communication (David & Thayalan, 2007). Learners of the Ibibio language, for example, would be able to assess their speech in order to identify areas of weakness. As a result, students are able to assimilate the Ibibio language's suitable sound and grammatical qualities, thereby

improving their academic accomplishments in the language. In other words, the Ibibio language laboratory allows learners of Ibibio to learn at their own pace. According to Richard (2001), to acquire the sensibility of the sound, rhythm, and syntax, one must listen to the best samples of Ibibio's spoken language. As a result, sound qualities that may be studied in the lab are innate in the Ibibio language. Learners of Ibibio have been shown to have a very high level of speech insufficiency due to the lack of or non-use of standard language laboratories in schools. They, for instance, are unable to show, in their pronunciation, a clear distinction between the two nasal sounds, /n/ and /m/, "ñka" and "mkpa," paying attention to the fact that while the former is an alveolar nasal, the latter is a bilabial nasal. This shows that a lack of an Ibibio language laboratory could create difficulty for learners in identifying the verbal errors they make while communicating. According to Nyoho and Essien (2021), the Ibibio language laboratory is particularly useful for assessing students' speech since it gives them the technical tools they need to get the best samples of the Ibibio language's pronunciation.

Difficulties of Learning Igbo Language

Recently, there has been an increasing amount of studies on the difficulties hindering the learning Igbo language and many scholars including Umo (2013) have identified that some pedagogical problems, tone, orthography and diacritic problems that are the issues that stall the effective teaching and learning of the Igbo language. However, Okudo (2013) examined and identified the problems and prospects of teaching and learning the Igbo language, including:

- ❖ Inadequate Igbo language texts,
- ❖ Lack of language laboratories for teaching of the language and
- ❖ Poor method of instruction.

Accordingly, Onwuka (2013) examined the factors affecting students' performance in learning Igbo language and identify them as:

- ❖ Inadequacy of qualified Igbo teachers
- ❖ Inability of teachers to use teaching aids
- ❖ Parents and the general public attitude towards Igbo language
- ❖ Students lack of interest in studying Igbo language
- ❖ School authority's policy of speaking Igbo language in school environment

However, she noted that these hideous factors are due to the fact that many students believe that Igbo language is not one of those subjects they can waste time studying since it is not a qualifying factor as such for non-language students to gain admission in higher institutions (Onwuka, 2013). However, in supporting the work of Umo, Okudo, and Onwuka, Udoye (2019) recently broadly identified the challenges of teaching and learning the Igbo language as:

Lack of language laboratory: Pronunciation problems emerge mainly from a lack of language laboratories. The language laboratory enhances students' performance. It is a vital tool for teaching vocabulary, grammar, and listening comprehension. The language laboratory is an audio-visual medium that is important in the teaching of the Igbo language. It involves listening to voices and imitating them.

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Lack of linguistics textbooks written in Igbo: Language textbooks on morphology, syntax, and semantics written in Igbo are not available. Hence, Igbo language lecturers use linguistics textbooks written in English to teach Igbo language students in an Igbo language class. This is a great factor that militates against effective teaching and learning of the Igbo language.

Poor attitude of students towards the teaching and learning of the Igbo language: Most Igbo language students have a negative attitude towards the Igbo language (Onwuka, 2013), and this attitude has affected their value system. Chidi-Ehiem and Ogbu (2017) observe that students cultivate a nonchalant attitude towards learning the Igbo language at the secondary school level. Onwuka (2013) further observes that elderly native speakers of the language are responsible for the negative attitude of students towards the language because of their uncomplimentary remarks about the language. These comments influence their children negatively. Hence, they have no regard for their mother tongue.

Lack of updated Igbo language dictionaries: Although many linguists and lexicographers are trying in the area of dictionary writing, such as Echeruo (1997) and Igwe (1999), Anagbogu (2004) opines that Igwe's (1999) dictionary failed to adhere to the principles of lexicography, hence the reason for the enormous problems found in the way he handled Igbo major lexical categories. Without a good and standard Igbo language dictionary, effectiveness in the learning of the language by second language learners will be stalled. Dictionaries should be updated yearly the way English lexicographers update the English language dictionaries because, language is dynamic and it changes every day hence the dictionary should capture the changes that take place in the language.

Conclusion

The study concluded that human beings need languages to share ideas, experiences, and emotions with other people in society or in the environment. The Ibibio and Igbo languages are the surest ways through which people can retain and safeguard knowledge, with wisdom authenticated by culture and transmitted from one generation to another. However, the process of imparting knowledge has to be carried out through the Ibibio and Igbo languages in Nigeria. The speakers of these languages usually come into contact in areas of endeavour such as tourism, trade or business, education, and even in hospitals and law courts.

Recommendations

1. The government should improve the standards of all academic institutions studying the Ibibio and Igbo languages and also equip the language laboratories.
2. The government should recruit qualified Ibibio and Igbo language teachers in Nigeria to reduce the difficulty of learning the two languages.
3. Ibibio and Igbo language teachers in Nigeria should be exposed to sensitization programmes like seminars, workshops, and conferences to update their knowledge of the new trends in the teaching of the two languages in Nigeria.

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