

PDF - EFFECT OF COMMUNICATIVE METHOD ON STUDENTS ACHIEVEMENT AND INTEREST IN
IGBO LETTER WRITING - researchcub.info **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to find out the effect of communicative method on students' achievement and interest in Igbo letter writing. The influence of gender and school location on the effectiveness of method was also explored. Six research questions and ten hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. A quasi-experimental research design was employed. The type was non-equivalent control group design. Population of the study consisted of SS II students in all the secondary schools within Nsukka Education Zone of Enugu State. The population of SS II students in Nsukka Education Zone in the 2006/2007 academic session was approximately nineteen thousand, five hundred and three (19,503) according to the Planning, Research and Statistics (PRS) Unit of Post-Primary Schools Management Board, Nsukka Zonal Office. The sample size comprised of 174 SS II students. Using stratified random sampling technique, two schools were selected from urban and rural areas respectively. In each selected school, one arm of SS II was randomly selected and assigned to treatment condition. While one urban school was assigned to experimental group, the other one was assigned to control group. The same was done for the rural schools. The experimental group was taught with communicative teaching method while the control group was taught with the conventional lecture method. Treatment lasted for four weeks. Two instruments used for data collection were face validated; and their reliability index are 0.6 and 0.8 respectively. Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to analyse the data collected from this study. Major findings of the study are: (1) Communicative teaching method had significant effect on students' achievement in Igbo letter writing; (2) Gender had no significant effect on achievement and interest of students in letter writing in Igbo language; (3) School location had a significant effect on students' achievement in Igbo letter writing. The influence on the interest of the students was not significant; (4) Interaction effect of teaching method and gender on both achievement and interest of students in letter writing in Igbo language was not significant; (5) Interaction effect of teaching method and school location on both achievement and interest of students in letter writing in Igbo language was not significant. Suggestions for further studies based on the findings of the study include the replication of this study in other branches of Igbo language learning such as reading (Agmag) and grammar (t ass). It was recommended among other things that since this method is relatively new in the teaching of Igbo language, secondary school Igbo teachers should be made familiar with the method through workshops and seminars organized by the Government and other agencies like the Society for the Promotion of Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC).

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The phenomenon of language is natural to man. Language is one of the factors that distinguishes human race from the lower animals (Azikiwe, 1998). It is man's most basic tool without which it will be difficult for man to live and interact together. Language is also a means of social control, an instrument which enables us to communicate our thoughts. This implies that language is a means of conveying meaning which has become accepted and systematized through a long period of use.

Kodilinye (1972) noted that language is a master key to the treasure house of a people's cultural heritage, and where it is not fully developed and cultivated, it reacts on the people and retards their achievement and the expression of their individuality. In recognition of the role of language in expressing the people's culture, the International Institute of African Languages and Culture (1930) at Rome stated that every child must learn to love and respect his culture. One way of doing this is through the use of language.

People can best show their identity and individuality by the use of language. A person cannot understand another person's thought until it is expressed in a language. Okonkwo (1972) believes that no language can be more appropriate for self-expression than the natural language which is the mother-tongue of a people. This is the language that comes almost spontaneously and imperceptibly and grows out of the natural environment of the speaker. According to Adiele in Nwadike (2002:6), "a race whose language cannot be used for literary and serious purposes has no real identity, the race is decadent." He went further to say that the most conclusive conquest of a people is the conquest through language. Nwadike (2002) equally says that the most essential asset of a people is their own language – their mother tongue. According to him, no people under normal circumstances would want their mother tongue to die, for it is after all the language that makes them an ethnic entity or nation. Without a language of its own, a nation becomes merged and lost in the foreign group whose language it is forced to speak. With its own language, a nation identifies itself and ensures its perpetuation. It is those languages, which are taught widely in schools as written languages that will survive and develop.

In view of the above fact, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004:6) states clearly that –

In addition to appreciating the importance of language in the educational process and as a means of preserving the people's culture, the government considers it to be in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major indigenous languages other than his own mother tongue.

Government in the same policy considers the three major indigenous languages to be Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Through this way, Igbo language emerged as an academic discipline, and a core subject at the Senior Secondary Education level, which students must pass before graduation. Still appreciating the use of mother tongue in educating the child, the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004:7) on nursery education states that – "the medium of

instruction should be principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community.” This in our own case is the Igbo language.

Though recognized in schools, the use of English language as a second language in the country, and the language of interaction among the different ethnic groups in the society makes people to look down on the study of indigenous languages like Igbo. The consequence of this is that many Nigerians equate formal education with the knowledge of English language. Naturally, this led to the poor attitude exhibited by students towards Igbo language study. Furthermore, the non-inclusion of Igbo language as a pre-requisite for entrance into institutions of higher learning in Nigeria also contributed to the less interest shown by students towards the study of the subject. Also, playing a major role in this regard is the false sense of value. Since Igbo language is the mother tongue, many students think that they have known it all, and that it is an easy subject and so, they show little or no interest in its study.

Letter writing is an integral part of essay writing in any Igbo language study and this has been shown to be the greatest problem area for students in examinations. The West African Examination Council (WAEC) Chief Examiners' Report of 1997 reads that ... candidates' performance did not reflect the good standard of the questions. They performed far below expectation. It was evident that most of the schools either did not have qualified Igbo language teachers or had teachers who were not prepared to teach. Lack of seriousness on the part of the candidates also contributed to their poor performance, ... lack of attention to proper use of diacritic marks robbed the candidates of vital marks. It was also observed that many candidates did not know the difference between what they speak, and what they were expected to write. In other words, these groups of candidates wrote in their different dialects whereas they were expected to write in the standard Igbo..., this affected the essay questions more... (p. 26)

The Chief Examiners' Report of 2005 further corroborated that of 1997 that students' performance in Igbo language is generally poor. The report indicates that Candidates' performance did not reflect the good nature of the questions; some of them were not well prepared for the examination..., their weaknesses showed in very poor handwriting resulting in illegibility; writing on irrelevant aspects of questions with regard to letter writing; writing less than the required length of essay, and use of dialects in writing (pp. 24-25). From the WAEC reports cited, the students' major weaknesses could be pointed out as: inability to express themselves very well in the standard Igbo, poor knowledge of grammatical rules, inability to put diacritic marks where necessary, inability to understand questions, use of dialects in writing by many of them, and lack of seriousness on their part. These shortcomings pose a great problem to the study of Igbo language in general, and letter writing in particular.

In order to find solutions to some of the problems confronting language

education, Wilkins (1983) stated the need to evaluate methods according to their success in providing real competence in language. Competence in Igbo language implies ability to speak and write the standard Igbo freely without ambiguity and devoid of dialectal interference. Standard Igbo according to Emenanjo (1988) is the Igbo that is generally accepted and understood by all Igbo speaking people irrespective of dialectal differences. It is a collection of different Igbo dialects hence no persons, or groups can lay claim to it as the original speakers of the language. That is the language that is being learned and taught in schools. Standard Igbo is the language students are expected to use in writing their examinations, especially their essays and letters. However, evidence from the WAEC reports already cited reveals that many students have no mastery of standard Igbo, and this contributes to students' poor achievement in Igbo language.

The mastery of any language implies correct usage at the grammatical, phonological and semantic levels. Letter writing is an important aspect of Igbo language study, which exposes students to these aspects of language skills namely – grammatical, phonological and semantic rules as applicable to the language. In support of this fact as it were, Ogbalu (1972:6) stated that “letter writing is very important for testing a student's command of the language; students should be able to write letters with ease and the usual rules for letter writing should be observed.” Some of these rules include:

- Ide adres (writing of address)
- Itinye akara ntp n'ebeokwesiri (correct use of diacritic marks)
- Ide adresi ab makaleta anamachihe (writing of two addresses for formal letters)
- Idezi isiokwu mbunuuche (choosing correct titles for formal letters)
- Ihazi edemleta n'dmmalite, obi/etiti na mmechi (organizing the work in the form of introduction, body of the letter and closing)
- Idezi ihe na nkeji na nkeji (organizing your points in paragraphs)
- Iji ezigbo Igbo izugbe were dee leta (using standard Igbo to write your letter)

Since essay writing generally exposes students to the grammatical, phonological and semantic rules of a language since letter writing is very important for testing a student's command of the language, it naturally follows that these aspects of Igbo language study should be taught well in schools by the teachers if students are to improve their achievement and interest in the subject. This is very necessary because it has been posited that the lack of interest shown by students towards the study of Igbo language is not inherent in the subject itself (Umo, 2000) but could be traced to among other factors, teachers' use of inappropriate methods and materials in teaching. Poor teaching method has been cited earlier as one of the problems confronting effective teaching and learning of Igbo language in schools since its introduction as a school subject. The method that is dominantly used by most Igbo language teachers in teaching virtually all aspects of Igbo language study is the lecture or conventional method. This method is teacher-centred, and that makes students

passive listeners in the class. The conventional method is subject-matter oriented and uninspiring to students. Its emphasis is on cognitive performance especially as it affects memorization and simple recall of facts which students are not interested in. The conventional method deprives the students virtually of all responsibilities for using their own mental abilities to compare and decide what is important to learn. It overlooks the individual differences of the learners, and denies them adequate and prompt attention of the teacher. WAEC Annual Report (2005) also attributes students' poor achievement and interest in Igbo language to poor teaching method, which invariably leads to poor performance in examinations.

It is believed by researchers (Okorie, 1984; Azikiwe, 1989; and Umo, 2000) that students may become more interested and invariably achieve higher in Igbo language examinations if learner-centred active methods replace the teacher-centred passive ones. One of such learner-centred active methods is the communicative teaching method which is the focus of this research work. The communicative teaching method is an alternative approach to language teaching. It is a method which aims at equipping learners with the necessary communicative competence. The method emphasizes communication in the target language of the learner. Communicative teaching method is learner-oriented and involves all the four language skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing. The goal of this method is to achieve fluency in the target language, therefore, the method helps the learners of a language to understand and express themselves in the language. According to Offorma (2000), communicative teaching method emanated from the understanding that the essence of learning a language is for communication and not for learning of grammatical rules. In language teaching, this method tries to bring into the classroom the learners' life-experiences and relates what they experience outside the school to what they do in the school. The learners' needs guide how the lesson contents are selected in the use of communicative method, because the aim is to help the learners become competent users of the target language which in this case is the standard Igbo. The teacher's duty is to make the learners acquire the basic knowledge of the language and so be able to express themselves in the language. The teacher can do this by handling the different aspects of the language such as grammar, lexis and phonology simultaneously.

Communicative teaching method has some peculiar characteristics for it to be effectively employed. One of such characteristics according to Offorma (2000) is the rapport between the teacher and the learner. Language teachers must be ready to work hard to motivate the learners through the learning experiences presented to them. This, they can do by presenting to the class lively activities like finding out missing information, discovering differences and reconstructing story sequence that will involve active participation of the learners, so as to arouse and maintain the learners' interest in Igbo language. As a result of this rapport, the learners look forward to participating in future class activities.

Another characteristic of the communicative teaching method is the fact that linguistic forms such as vocabulary and grammar are no more the focal points of study but they become instruments used to achieve the speech acts. Thus, the learners learn how to use the relevant grammatical forms of the language before even knowing their functions. The teacher then uses the speech acts to fix the grammatical rules in the learners' memory, since the essence is for communication. The knowledge of linguistic forms and structures is applied in determining meaning and in communication. What is learnt is supposed to be used in real life situation by the learners and not just for the purpose of examination.

Based on the above characteristics, it becomes obvious that every language lesson could be made communicative depending on the way the teacher handles it. In line with this fact, Osakwe (2003) presented what she called 'The Indigenous Communicative Teaching Approach (ICTA)'. The ICTA according to Osakwe (2003) is an adaptation of the communicative teaching method to suit the special interests of Nigerians in various environments in teaching not just the English language but all school subjects. It encourages the teacher to be creative and sensitive to the special needs of the learner. The teacher adjusts and reworks the scheme of work to suit the interest and ability level of the learner. He is encouraged to generate teaching materials from local sources. The ICTA can be applied in teaching all school subjects. Some of its characteristics as presented by Osakwe (2003:9) include:

- It is Learner-Centred: This means that the learners are active participants in the teaching and learning process.
- It is Task-Based: This means that learners are mostly engaged in problem-solving activities.
- It is Interaction-Based: An interaction-based lesson achieves its objectives through group discussion and the collaborative efforts of learners.
- It is Communication-Based: This means that the content of each lesson must be meaningful to the learner in such a way that the lesson relates classroom information to information outside, which learners are already familiar with.

Nichols (1978) sees methods as probably the most obvious part of the curriculum when one gets into the school. According to him, the worth of any given method depends on the extent to which it succeeds in engendering interest and performance in a subject. Interest in a subject according to Okoye (1981) is an emotionally oriented behavioural trait which determines a pupil's vim and vigor in tackling educational or other activities. Agwagah (1993) stated that interest concerns preferences for particular types of activities and that it is a tendency to seek out and participate in certain activities. There is therefore the need to emphasize interest in learning activities both in learning outcomes and in subject areas. This also involves assessing interest of learners in subjects which they are exposed. This is very important in Igbo language study because according to Afigbo (1971), an overwhelming majority of the educated Igbo cannot read or write correctly in Igbo language. Also, many

students do not attach much importance to Igbo language study since it is not a pre-requisite for entry into the universities and other higher institutions as compared to English language. Furthermore, linguistic performance is said to differ according to gender (Umo, 2000). There has not been any conclusive evidence as regards gender-gap in comprehension and expression in any language. Some studies believe that females have upper hand over males in linguistic aptitude (Nash, 1979), other studies show that males perform better than females in language study (Uzoegwu, 2004). Yet, there are other studies that found no sex difference between male and female in linguistic understanding in English language (Johnson & Harley, 1980). Following this trend, it seems that gender gap in linguistic aptitude in any language remains unclear hence the question of whether communicative method should show any gender gap with respect to Igbo language becomes crucial.

Apart from gender, linguistic performance is said to differ according to school location. Location refers to the influence of environment on learning. According to Caning (1977), general theories of learning and the conditions under which learning takes place effectively ought to be of vital concern to the teacher. Rural and urban circumstances present different stimulations for the learner. Many studies have been carried out to investigate the effect of location on achievement and interest of learners (Eneh, 2002). While some say that there is no basis for location differences, many agree that rural and urban subjects achieved differently. Based on this assumption, there is need for further studies on the issue of influence of school location on the achievement and interest of students in languages.

From all that have been discussed, it could be deduced that the method a teacher adopts in teaching to some extent contributes to students' level of achievement and interest in that subject. Letter writing is a skill that should be learnt by students in the school. Students should possess good knowledge of the standard Igbo before they can write good letters in Igbo language. One way of achieving this fact is by the use of communicative method which aims at equipping the learner with the necessary communicative competence in the target language which is the standard Igbo. Moreover, because of the importance attached to letter writing in any language examination, there is every need for teachers to adopt suitable teaching methods that will enable students to acquire the skill effectively, hence, this research work which tries to compare the effect of communicative method on students' achievement and interest in Igbo letter writing.

Statement of Problem

Students' achievement in letter writing at Senior School Certificate Examinations has been generally poor (Chief Examiners' Report: 2005). This low level of achievement has been attributed primarily to poor teaching methods (Umo, 2000). The method that is often used by Igbo language teachers is the lecture method. This method makes students passive listeners in the class as indicated earlier. More so, the lecture method does not allow teachers to adapt learning to the level of students' understanding (Mkpa, 1987).

The poor achievement of students in Igbo letter writing may also be attributed to poor knowledge of the standard Igbo. The WAEC Chief Examiners' Report (2005:16) in Igbo language stated that "many students could not express themselves in the standard Igbo..., candidates went straight into answering the questions without properly understanding them..., some of them were not well prepared for the examination." From this report, students' major weakness could be their inability to express themselves very well in the standard Igbo.

Although the use of communicative teaching method has been tried in subjects like English and French languages, its effectiveness is yet to be determined in the study of Igbo language generally, and letter writing in particular. Also, no study to the best of the researcher's knowledge explored the effect of the communicative method on students' interest in Igbo language.

Based on the foregoing, therefore, the problem of this study put in question form is: what is the effect of the communicative method on students' achievement and interest in letter writing in Igbo language?

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to find out the effects of the communicative teaching method on students' achievement and interest in letter writing in Igbo language.

Specifically, the study aims at:

1. determining the achievement of the students taught letter writing using communicative teaching method and lecture method;
2. finding out the effect of sex on the achievement of students taught letter writing in Igbo language using the communicative method;
3. finding out the effect of location on the achievement of students taught letter writing in Igbo language using the communicative method;
4. determining the effect of communicative method on students' interest in letter writing in Igbo language;
5. finding out the effect of gender on the interest of students taught letter writing in Igbo language using the communicative method;
6. determining the effect of location on the interest of students taught letter writing in Igbo language using communicative method;
7. determining the interaction effect of communicative method and gender on students' achievement and interest in letter writing in Igbo language;
8. determining the interaction effect of communicative method and location on students' achievement and interest in letter writing in Igbo language.

Significance of the Study

The teaching of Igbo language since its introduction as a school subject has continued to suffer a lot of problems which hamper students' achievement in the subject. One of such

problems is teacher's use of inappropriate methods in teaching almost all the aspects of the language which include letter writing.

Essay writing generally (of which letter writing is a part) is very important for testing students' command of a language. This is because it exposes students to both the phonological and grammatical rules as applicable to the language. If students are to improve their achievement in Igbo language, it is proper that they be adequately taught letter writing by using the appropriate teaching method. Hence, this study which tries to find out the effect of a teaching method on students' achievement is hoped to provide succor for Igbo language teachers by empirically providing an instructional method that will improve students' achievement in Igbo language generally and letter writing in particular. This is very important because the use of teaching method that appeal to students will increase the learners' active participation in the lesson which consequently leads to an overall improvement of students' performance in the language.

Curriculum planners may find the result of the study useful when trying to match curriculum objectives with appropriate methods of instruction.

If this method turns out to be effective, teachers may even start using it right from primary school level to teach pupils and increase their interest in Igbo letter writing. This in no small way, will boost the study of Igbo language as a whole because according to Nwadike (2002), students learn more when they are interested in a subject, and the method of study is favourable to them. If at the early stages of education, pupils were made to play active role in the teaching and learning through the use of communicative method, their interest towards the study of Igbo language generally will be developed.

Through the findings of this study, educational administrators and principals of schools may become aware of the benefits of communicative teaching method, and so encourage teachers in their school to start using the method in teaching the students especially the essays and letter writings. Textbook writers may become aware of the merits of this method through the findings of this research, and may start creating this awareness to people by including contents that require the use of communicative teaching method in their textbooks.

Scope of the Study

The study focused on the effect of communicative method on students' achievement and interest in letter writing in Igbo language. Letter writing is very broad in terms of content development. It is divided into two main types – formal and informal types of letter writing. While the informal type of letter writing deals with personal and private letters, the formal type is more of official letters like application, excuse duty, business letters and soon. A formal letter was chosen for this study because the researcher felt it would contribute in drilling the students to the proper use of the standard Igbo. This is because in formal letters, the language of expression is strictly official language, which is the standard Igbo. Formal letters do not give room for jokes or use of dialectical slangs, as is the case with informal letter.

Since formal type of Igbo letter writing is equally very broad in terms of topics to be treated, the researcher limited her teaching to only four topics based on the formal type of letter writing in Igbo language. The topics are:

- Nkwaedemede leta anamaachihe
- Degara Ir na-arpta Mman akwkw ka ha were g n'r d ka o debe ego.
- Degara onyeisi lakwkw g leta r ya maka ohere kws akwkw abal at. (Depta ihe mere iji ch ohere a.)
- Degara onyeisi lakwkw g leta mkpesa banyere mp na aghgh m akwkw na-eme n'ule n'l akw kw unu.

These topics were drawn from the SSI Scheme of Work 2006/2007 academic year.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the relative mean scores of students taught letter writing in Igbo language using communicative teaching method and those taught using the conventional method?
2. What are the relative mean achievement scores of male and female students taught letter writing in Igbo language?
3. To what extent does location affect the mean achievement scores of students in letter writing in Igbo language?
4. What are the relative mean interest scores of students taught letter writing in Igbo language using communicative teaching method and those taught using the conventional method?
5. What are the relative mean interest scores of male and female students taught letter writing in Igbo language?
6. To what extent does location affect the mean interest scores of students in letter writing in Igbo language?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of students taught letter writing in Igbo language using communicative teaching method and those taught using the conventional lecture method.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female students taught letter writing in Igbo language.
3. There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of urban and rural students taught letter writing in Igbo language.
4. There is no significant interaction effect of instructional method and gender on students' mean achievement scores in letter writing in Igbo language when they are taught with communicative teaching method.
5. There is no significant interaction effect of instructional method and school location on students' mean achievement scores in letter writing in Igbo language using the

communicative method.

6. There is no significant difference in the mean interest scores of students taught letter writing in Igbo language using communicative teaching method and those taught using conventional lecture method.

7. There is no significant difference in the mean interest scores of male and female students taught letter writing in Igbo language.

8. There is no significant difference in the mean interest scores of urban and rural students taught letter writing in Igbo language.

9. There is no significant interaction effect of instructional method and gender on students' mean interest scores in letter writing in Igbo language when they are taught with communicative teaching method.

10. There is no significant interaction effect of instructional method and school location on students' mean interest scores in letter writing in Igbo language using the communicative method.

EFFECT OF COMMUNICATIVE METHOD ON STUDENTS ACHIEVEMENT AND INTEREST IN IGBO LETTER WRITING

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