

The Use of New Technologies for the Teaching of the Igbo Language in Schools: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract. This paper examines the experience of teachers in the use of new technologies to teach the Igbo language spoken in South East Nigeria. The study investigates the extent to which new technologies are available and accessible to Igbo teachers, the competence of the Igbo language teachers in the new technologies and the challenges they face that limit the use of the new technologies in the teaching of the Igbo language. Forty respondents from two Nigerian universities were used for the study. The instrument is made up of fifteen questions divided to generate answers to five research questions. The findings show that new technologies are both available and accessible to the Igbo language teachers, and most of them are very competent in use. Furthermore, they are positively disposed to the use of computers in teaching, but do not sufficiently use them for exercises because systems and application software are not available by default for Igbo. This creates the need to advocate some interventions to enhance the utility of the Igbo language as a vehicle for new technologies in language teaching. Comparisons of responses from the two universities also reveal some significant differences in the extent of access to and expertise in the new technologies as well as perception of the need for and challenges to these technologies.

Keywords: computer, internet, access, competence, challenges, Igbo language.

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1. Introduction

The world has become a global village, thanks to developments in computer and internet technologies. The life wire of these new technologies is language. In other words, it is only through the instrumentality of language that information in and about computers and related technologies are made available to the world. Thus, technologies have a dual relationship with language. First, it is driven by language, and second it is a catalyst for language propagation. Little wonder then that the dynamics of many fields of endeavor have been influenced by revolution brought about by new technologies, and practitioners in these fields have been making efforts to become relevant to the new order.

The field of language teaching is not left out of this great wind of change as many teachers make use of ‘cutting edge’ technologies in their bid to achieve the desired language instructional objectives. Yet we know that languages do not just acquire new technologies. In other words, language teachers do not just wake up one morning and boot the computer, for instance, for use in teaching, at least not for some less commonly taught languages, even if it is possible with the likes of English, French, etc. Therefore, while many languages effectively serve as both media and object of new technologies, many others are battling with teething problems associated with the new technologies.

The Igbo language spoken in South East Nigeria belongs to the latter category. Though a less commonly taught language (LCTL), the Igbo language is one of the three major Nigerian languages, and is fast developing. It is a medium of instruction in the junior primary schools in south east Nigeria and it is studied both as a first and alternate language in government secondary and tertiary institutions in the country. The age of globalisation requires that the teaching of Igbo be taken to another level. [Shyamlee and Phil \(2012\)](#) warn that if we neglect or ignore technological developments they will continue and perhaps we will never be able to catch up, irrespective of our discipline or branch. For this reason, many Igbo teachers especially in the higher institutions make efforts to infuse new technologies into their jobs not just to become relevant to the new age but also to post Igbo on the global village map. This explains why [Shyamlee and Phil \(2012\)](#) assert that “the new era assigns new challenges and duties on the modern teacher” (p. 150).

It is therefore imperative to assess the extent of use of the new technologies in the teaching of the Igbo language and ascertain the challenges that teachers most commonly face in order to seek interventions that will facilitate their response to this call to duty. In carrying out this major objective, the following research

questions confront this study: To what extent are new technologies available to teachers? To what extent are new technologies accessible to the teachers? How competent are the teachers in the use of new technologies? Finally, what challenges confront the use of new technologies for teaching the Igbo language? Answers provided to these questions will lead to some suggestions of possible solutions.

2. Literature review

According to Zhao (2003), “technologies is an ill-defined concept that encompasses a wide range of tools, artifacts, and practices, from multimedia computers to the Internet, from videotapes to online chat rooms, from web pages to interactive audio conferencing” (p. 8). The onset of technologies in the past few decades has revolutionised various activities of man. Interaction and information dissemination has particularly been enhanced in most professions including teaching where language teaching has a considerable share. The use of technologies is not new in the teaching of many European languages like English, French and the like. Concerning English, for instance, Shyamlee and Phil (2012) assert that “as the number of English learners is increasing, different teaching methods have been implemented to test the effectiveness of the teaching process. Use of authentic materials in the form of films, radio, TV has been there for a long time” (p. 150). The high status enjoyed by English across the globe has earned it a principal position as both a subject and a medium for technologies, and these developments continue to advance its fortune. In Nigeria, for instance, the use of computers and Internet mainly depends on English.

The findings of reviewed studies on the use of new technologies in language teaching reveal that there is no limit to the advantages that accrue from it (Godwin-Jones, 2013; Tella, Tella, Toyobo, Adika, & Adeyinka, 2007; Xing, 2008; Zhao, 2003). Others reveal challenges associated with it especially in Africa and most developing countries (Anderson, 1997; Hennessy & Onguko, forthcoming; Winke, Goertler, & Amuzie, 2010; Uchechukwu, 2005).

The challenges of new technologies have been a major setback for Igbo teachers and this does not only dampen their morale but also limit the possibilities of the language as a vehicle for new technologies. This poses a serious survival problem for Igbo in a multilingual, multicultural world in which language maintenance and language learning aptitude have become very important. At a time when Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has dominated language pedagogy, it will amount to language ‘linguicide’ not to create the necessary platform to launch Igbo into these new technologies. Hence, the need for this study.

3. Methodology

The research design adopted for this study is a descriptive survey. Questionnaires were distributed to 40 teachers of Igbo in two higher institutions (one federal and the other state) in South east Nigeria. 15 question items were constructed to elicit responses in line with the objectives set for the study. The questionnaire was studied and validated by experts in language and education. The statistical tools used in the analysis were percentage, mean, standard deviation and T-Test. In the analysis, mean of 2.0 or more and 2.5 and above are considered significant on 3 and 4 point scales, respectively.

4. Results

Percentage distribution of responses on the availability and sources of 12 items of new technologies shows that computer is the most available, with 100% score on availability, and 65% and 35% on self and institutional provisions, respectively. Internet facilities, e-library, and e-mail are the three most available new technologies provided by the institutions with percentage scores of 97.5, 82.5 and 57.5, respectively on availability, and 67.5, 57.5 and 55, respectively on institutional provision. Camcorder is the least available with 35% availability and 35% institutional provision, while iPad/iPod is the least provided by the institutions on 7.5% score.

Mean (X) and standard deviation (SD) of the responses of teachers on the extent of their access to the new technologies measured on a 3 point scale reveal that computer is the most accessible with $X = 2.63$ and $SD = 0.54$. This is followed by printer ($X = 2.58$; $SD = 0.50$), internet facilities ($X = 2.55$; $SD = 0.55$) and photocopier ($X = 2.55$; $SD = 0.60$). Ipad/Ipod ($X = 1.70$; $SD = 0.62$), midget ($X = 1.70$; $SD = 0.62$) and camcorder ($X = 1.75$; $SD = 0.73$) are not accessible to Igbo language teachers with mean scores < 2.00 .

Mean and standard deviation of responses on competence measured on a 4 point scale show that teachers are competent in 8 out of the 12 items listed in which mean ≥ 2.5 , but not competent in power point preparation ($X = 2.03$; $SD = 1.01$) and presentation ($X = 2.46$; $SD = 1.05$), the use of photocopier ($X = 2.39$; $SD = 1.24$) and digital camera ($X = 2.11$; $SD = 1.23$), which mean responses are < 2.50 .

Percentage utilisation of the new technologies: five areas of utilisation surveyed reveal non-use of manual typewriter, blackboard technology, and lecturers' social network platform, each scoring 0%. On the other hand, surfing the net (95.0%),

long hand notes (52.5%), writing on white/chalk board (97.5%), computer typing (57.5%) and hardcopy print out (57.5%) scored highest on each of the five areas of utilisation.

Mean and standard deviation of responses to challenges measured on a 3-point scale show that 2 of 14 items with mean < 2.00 pose no challenges of any extent. Others have mean ≥ 2.00 and so very significantly pose challenges to the teachers' use of new technologies with highest $X = 2.74$; $SD = 0.55$ and the least $X = 2.00$; $SD = 0.40$.

Mean comparisons of the extent of access to and expertise in the use of new technologies among the two institutions reveal t-values > 2.00 for 9 out of 12 items on access, and t-values > 2.00 for 5 out of 12 items on expertise in favour of the younger and state university. These indicate that teachers in the younger institution have more access to and expertise in the use of the relevant items than teachers in the older institution.

Mean comparisons of responses from the two institutions on the perception of the need for and challenges to the use of new technologies show that the older university teachers perceive new technologies as 'very needed' while the younger university teachers perceive them as 'needed' with t-value of the mean comparison of their needs perception set at 2.50. Moreover, 8 of 14 items measured on challenges produced t-values > 2.00 when mean responses from the two institutions were compared. This implies some significant differences in the perception of challenges to the use of new technologies among teachers in the institutions.

5. Summary of findings

The study suggests that new technologies are available and accessible to teachers in the two institutions. These teachers have skills in the use of these facilities. However, they make limited use of them for teaching the Igbo language because some symbols and diacritics used to write the Igbo languages are not available by default on the standard keyboard, neither are there software programmes (system and application) that support easy use of Igbo on the computer and internet. The implication of this is that in spite of the availability of, accessibility to and competence in the new technologies established in this study most teachers still adopt more traditional language teaching practices, such as preparing long handwritten notes, writing on a white/chalk board, while their students type assignments by combining keystrokes on standard keyboard and submit hardcopy printouts. Furthermore, the result of comparisons of responses of teachers from

the two institutions surveyed shows more competence, perceptions of the need for and challenges of the use of new technologies on the part of teachers of the younger university. This confirms that age is a relevant factor in the utilisation of new technologies. Among other things, the study recommends that Igbo teachers should use the new technologies as a platform to collaborate with one another and with teachers of more commonly taught languages to seek interventions that will facilitate the teaching and learning of Igbo using the new technologies.

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