Enhancing teaching and learning of the Igbo language through information communication technology (ICT): Best practice for sustainability

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Abstract
Language, undoubtedly, is a crucial tool for communication and interaction in the globe. As the world develops from one level to another so also has man continued to develop new ideas and new ways of living and doing things. When these new ideas and ways are introduced effectively, they aid in enhancing both the individual and societal progress and development. Today, the world is globalizing in all the facets of human endeavours, be it commerce and industries, in education, in politics, in economics, in religion and so on. This paper, therefore, sets out to investigate how to enhance the teaching and learning of the Igbo language through Information Communication Technology to enable the language be sustained. The paper identifies some of the tools to be employed in the teaching and learning of the Igbo language. It also addresses some of the problems, which are likely to militate against the teaching and learning of the Igbo language. The work recommends among others; effective documentation, compilation of standard comprehensive Igbo dictionary and government intervention.
Keywords: Language, best practice, sustainability, information technology

1.0 Introduction

An individual cannot be well equipped without the use of language. The most fundamental function of language is to be used in communication. It is important to acknowledge that it is the primary medium for the expressions of ideas, thoughts, feelings, beliefs and mind's attitude. Man is a social being and therefore needs language to interact, enhance development and attain self-actualization. Its role in human endeavour cannot be overemphasized. It provides a screen or filter to reality and determines how speakers perceive and organize the world around them. Language exists where there is human beings. The two are inseparable. The vital feature of language is communication. In this 21st century, people are inquisitive in exploring the world around them through Information Communication Technology (ICT). This results in making the universe a 'global village' and also enhances dynamism especially in the area of indigenous languages and cultures. Igweike (2003:3) posits that "dynamism unarguably is the only constant characteristics feature in the world of man". One of the characteristics of language is cultural identity. Therefore, Nigerian cultural heritage must be guided seriously, preserved, shared and transmitted from one generation to another for sustainability.

In Igbo cultural setting, we have tangible heritage such as mode of dressing and technology and intangible heritage such as oral tradition, folklores, folktales, songs, poems, riddles, jokes, beliefs, taboos and so on which made the Igbo world view very fascinating. It is through the above that the cultural heritage can be transmitted from one generation to another. Consequently all these cultural heritage need to be preserved and sustained as far as the Igbo ethnic group exist through this modern trend information communication. Therefore as quoted in Matemilola (2012), to prevent the extinction of Igbo (one of the three major Nigerian indigenous languages), and probably others in less than fifty (50) years as predicted by UNESCO, concerted efforts should be devoted to serious and committed study as well as practical use of Nigerian languages especially Igbo language on the internet. As mentioned in the foregoing language is one of the basic characteristic of identity. We need

to work towards sustaining our identity, which is gradually decaying to avoid endangering the existence of the entire Igbo race.

This paper has seven sections. Section one is the introduction. Section two is the overview of ICT. Section three looks at the meaning of best practice and sustainability respectively. Section four discusses the challenges of teaching and learning of Igbo language. Section five discusses the tools to be applied to help in the teaching and learning of Igbo language. Section six gives recommendations and section seven is conclusion.

2.0 Information communication technology (ICT): An overview

Information Communication Technology is of fundamental value to the extent that it enables individuals perform desired activities in a given society. It is the bedrock of civilization and development. Onah (1999) quoted in Aniekwe (2003:2) maintains that no nation can afford to ignore the impact of technology in the field of education or tread slowly on the path to technological development if it were not her wish to provide herself as a dumping ground and at the same time makes her citizens guinea pigs foreign products. The information age is essentially a logical step beyond the industrial age. In fact, technology has aid to transform the lives of many people, communities including nations. Some of the practices that evolved as a result of information communication technology include current methods of information storage and retrieval in various organizations, electronic banking, internet-based advertising, modern electronic transactions and mailing system. All these have helped to solve the problem of time, speed, space and also enhance positive condition of living in the world. Files that would require a vast majority of shelves to stock up are now filed electronically, stored in a devise tinier than the little finger and retrieve anywhere in the world without having to go through the rigors of sorting and transporting. It has become apparent that much information posted on the internet reaches a far wider audience within a slightest period than the one disseminated via bills and posters. The area that has immensely

benefited from ICT is the field of education. One would imagine what life would have been without some of these technological advances.

Furthermore, ICT deals with the handling of information using all kinds of electronic devices (Ncet, 1995). These electronic systems can be used for broadcasting, telecommunication and all forms of computer-mediated communications. ICT centred education covers the use of computers, online self-learning packages, interactive CDs, satellite, radio, optical fiber technologies, telepresence systems and all types of information technology (IT) hardware and software (Akudolu, 2002, Adebayo, 2002). Evans (1984:31) describes information technology (IT) as "the acquisition, processing, storage and dissemination of vocal, protocol, textual and numerical information by a microelectronics-base combination of computing and telecommunications". The term "technology" could be seen as the selective adaptation of one or more of the processes and materials identified and described by science and their embodiment in services designed to serve the needs of mankind in the progress from savagery towards advanced social evolution. Therefore, technology centers on design, development and production which utilizes science ideas for the benefit of mankind. The quest for technological growth and self reliance should be matched with a corresponding progress in technology. Modern technology has come into the market to enhance communication. This is why Roger and Albert-Hesse (1984:14) comment:

> Springing from the deepest root of men's history, spreading its branches throughout ages, the tree of communication has now reached stars. Man and communication are inseparable. The astonishing multiplicity of messages is now complemented by the no less astonishing techniques for preserving them, the storage of sound opened up an extra-ordinary new cultured era.

Today, the dissemination of information is advanced in all facets of life through the employment of the vehicles of information such as radio, television, fax, films, recorders, cameras, video cassettes, cable, computer, telex, e-mail and internets. It is observed that ICT has virtually

transformed the world into a global village. In view of this, Agba (2002:vii) postulates:

> Thanks to the advances in communication technology, the entire world has shrunk into a small community. Thus one's neighbor is no longer only the fellow who lives next door. He could be in the remotest part of the hemisphere separated from one not only by time and distance, but also by differences in language, culture, norms and values yet, what happens to one is known by the other vice versa within a split second.

3.0 Best practice and sustainability

Best practice implies the process, practices and systems identified in public and private organization that performed exceptionally well and are widely recognized. Best practice is the process and activities that has been shown in practice to be the most effective. ICT best practice would therefore be described as the super, excellent and standard approach to harness the potentials of ICT especially in teaching and learning of Igbo language and other languages. The term is used to refer to the internet and the "information super high way". Enhancing the teaching and learning of Igbo language would demand the integration of such technologies such as internet, browsing, television programmes, e-classroom, e-learning, computer tutorial lessons so as to enable students learn at their own time and pace.

Sustainability could be defined as the ability or capacity of something to be maintained or to sustain itself. It is the ability to be sustained, supported, upheld or confirmed. It is about taking what we need to live now, without jeopardizing the potential for people in the future to meet their needs .www.landlearnnsw.org.au/sustainable … 09/02/2016. If the activity is said to be sustainable, it means that it should be able to continue forever. Etymologically, the name is derived from the Latin word *sustainere* (tenere to hold, sub, up) en.wikipedia.org./wiki/sustianability10/02/2016. It also means being able to last or continue for a long time.

4.0 Challenges of teaching and learning of the Igbo language

There are some difficulties that can confront the teaching of Igbo language. They include:

i. Some writers are reluctant in maintaining the long standing Igbo orthography. For instance, Uwalaka (1996:25) recognizes phonemic aspirated plosive sounds in Igbo as exemplified below:

1. a. Úchè kụ̀rụ̀ égwú.
   Uche play-rvpst music.
   Uche played a music.
   b. Há khụ̀rụ̀ ákhá.
   3pl clap-rvpst hand
   They clapped (their) hands.
   c. Íbè hụ̀rụ̀ Àdá.
   Ibe see-rvpst Ada.
   Ibe saw Ada.
   d. Íbè dhàrà ádá.
   Ibe fell-rvpst fall.
   Ibe fall down.

In data (1b) and (1d), the aspirated forms in each of the examples are not the standard usages. These conventions should be written as their counterparts appear in the unaspirated forms in (1a) and (1c). In other words, the writer is claiming that aspiration is not phonemic in standard usages though it exists in some dialects. For example in Urratta-Owerri, nasality is significant as in examples below:

2. a. árá- 'madness'
   b. ãrã- 'breast'

Echeruo (2001:viii-ix) presents entries that are not of standard forms. According to him in attempt to remove some technical typographical complications, he uses the following style to present the following light vowels ï, ö, ü. These fronted sounds are not in use in Standard Igbo. The subscripts are used in the standard usage thus: ị, ọ, ụ.

ii. There are discrepancies in writing some phrases and words in Igbo. As regards to this problem, there exist two schools of thought – the conceptualist school of thought and the atomistic school of thought. The conceptualist school thought argues that those phrases or words which are seen as concepts when translated to English be written as one word thus:

3. a. eziokwu ‘truth’
   b. ụlọụka ‘church’
   c. onyeisi ‘head’

The atomistic school of thought argues that such phrases or words be written separately thus:

4. a. ezi okwu
      true word → truth
   b. ụmụ akwụkwọ
      children book → students/pupils
   c. onye isi
      person head → head

It is interesting to note that all these discrepancies need urgent attention to be addressed to, no matter how trifling they might look to ensure uniformity in writing Igbo text.

iii. Lack of comprehensive Igbo dictionary. Till today, the language does not have a standard comprehensive dictionary. The available ones written by some authors are not comprehensive.

iv. Lack of proper documentation. The language needs to be documented and stored in archives so that it can be accessed by everyone with the technological know-how.

v. The electronic equipments such as computers, television, radios and satellite disc are very expensive that teachers find it difficult to procurer some of these equipments to enable them teach the language effectively. Importantly, the use of some of these equipments in the classroom would make Igbo language teaching and learning more interesting and lively. Furthermore, they would also help the teacher to acquire new

experiences and information. The teaching and learning process in this 21st century should not solely rely on the available textbooks since information and materials can be obtained instantly using information technology.

vi. There are still some institutions and individuals in remote areas of the South-eastern Nigeria and beyond who cannot afford these expensive electronic devices.

5.0 Information technology tools identified to help in the teaching and learning of the Igbo language in order to enhance sustainability

As a matter of fact, ICT tools offer us new opportunity that will help in solving foregoing challenges and also sustain the Igbo language; even there is a ray of hope to reverse the alarming trend towards the Igbo language going extinction. It is a fact that the hardware and software were first designed to process the English text. Today, American, German, Japan have followed the trend. It is imperative for every living language to key in her characters into the system. This will enable and attract global knowledge of the language. Therefore, the Igbo language, as a living language should not be left out in the trend. Igbo must follow the trend to enable it to survive and attract global knowledge.

The application of ICT tools relevant to the teaching and learning of the Igbo language is likely to create greater awareness and skills of technologies involved, to provide responsibility assumed for ones learning and to offer an opportunity to teachers to teach the language. Access to technology by the teachers and students will increase efficiency and effectiveness of their learning. We are going to list and explain the ICT systems that can be employed in the teaching and learning of the Igbo language in order to overcome the challenges and sustain the language. The tools include:

i. Use of computer
ii. Use of internet
iii. Use of radio and television
iv. Use of video
v. Use of Igbo movies

5.1 Use of computer

The Igbo language is very rich in traditional songs, drama, poems, folklores, folktales, oral literature and grammar. These can be stored in CD-ROM. The information stored in CD-ROM cannot be wiped out. These CD-ROMS can be used in teaching the language in the class. This implies that such class should be held in the language laboratory where there are computers and other facilities. It should be noted that when a learner is working with computers, the learner will be very active in the class. This is why Onuko (2001) maintains that the use of computers help to eliminate boredom in the class and saves the time of the teacher and creates the opportunity for learning to take place at the students free time.

Since the lessons are programmed, the students can visit the language laboratory individually to learn lessons on phonetics and pronunciation exercises, including perception and transmission exercises on Igbo sound system without fear or being ashamed of any person. This will go a long way in meeting the National Policy on Education which states clearly that classroom practice is expected to encourage the student's involvement and participation in learning and to make learning real in the lives of the students. The language laboratory provides the privacy that encourages the shy students to speak without any hesitation and the teacher can also speak to individual or group of students in privacy without interrupting the rest of the class. It encourages motivation on the part of the students and develops the listening and communication skills, since the students hear correct pronunciation through their headphones.

5.2 Use of internet

Manir (2009) comments that the emergence of internet has resulted in a fundamental change in all aspects of our lives, including knowledge dissemination, social interaction, business practices, political engagements, media, education, health, leisure and entertainment. The

internet provides varieties of information like connecting with the persons interested in teaching and learning Igbo language, accessing downloadable materials on Igbo language, supplying instant messaging which can be employed by the teachers and learners in communicating with the specialists in Igbo language. As a result of the benefits of internet connection Lecoup and Ponterio (200:1) posits that "we can share well all sorts of things with the world, get authentic materials from anywhere and interact with people in distant locations as never before".

5.3 Use of radio and television

It is clear and obvious that radio can be helpful in the teaching and learning of Igbo language, because it gives the learners the privilege to hear the language directly from trained native speakers of the language. Presently, there are some radio and television programmes in the Igbo language. Such programmes can be recorded and employed by the Igbo teachers in the class especially to facilitate listening and speaking of the standard Igbo. The tape recorders procures accurate models for exert drills or dialogues. In this situation, a language laboratory is essential. It will provide the forum for further drill works to receiver controlled error-free practices of basic structures in Igbo language. It will also add variety by providing an alternative to classroom practices. When such recorded programmes are played, they will create active atmosphere for discussions and motivate the interest of the students to learn the language. Students can benefit from listening exercises on different topics. The above technologies if integrated into the teaching of Igbo language very well have the potentials and promises to motivate students to learn and sustain their interest in learning and also raise their vision of creativity. This would help to prevent the language from vanishing.

5.4 Use of digital video recording

This is a means through which individuals learn languages. It will not just help advance the course of Igbo language but it will, to a greater extent contribute in securing the future of the Igbo language. It

records both sounds and actions. When video is employed to teach Igbo language, it compels and generates much greater amount of interest and enjoyment than the mere traditional printed materials. It provides a sensory experience that allows concepts and ideas to actually become an experience and come to life as students are guided through each adventure. Video provides means of interactive instruction and is a very flexible medium, having the ability to stop, start and rewind is absolutely invaluable. Video can be used in a variety of instructional settings in classrooms, in teaching Igbo distant-learning where information is broadcast to the learner who interact with the teacher via video. Once the data is stored, it can be shared and accessed, and the performance becomes live on the computer. Websites can be created and posted on the World Wide Web for everyone to access the data from any part of the world. This sharing can be interactive as students can add comments and ask questions.

5.5 Use of the Igbo movies

When the Igbo movies are used to teach the Igbo language, the students' interests will be sustained and the lesson will be enjoyable. Movie as a motivator makes language learning process entertaining and attention catching. Using it to teach Igbo language exposes the students to natural expression and natural flow of speech. The visuality of movie makes it an invaluable tool in teaching Igbo language, enables the learners to understand more by interpreting the language in a full visual context.

6.0 Recommendations

The world is dynamic as well as human beings. Therefore, these technologies should be integrated in the teaching and learning of the Igbo language to enable the language step up to become relevant in this global age. This work therefore recommends that seminars, workshops and conferences should be organized and carried out at all levels of education where divergent opinions should be properly addressed.

Scholars should not allow their dialects to appear when writing popular works or literature. We should acknowledge the fact that different dialects exist in America, but the standard form is used in popular literature. Yoruba also has much dialectal variations as the Igbo, but only the standard Yoruba is used officially and in popular literature.

Accuracy, consistency and systematicity should be maintained. Elugbe (1991) and Williamson (1984:7) maintain that these are the principles of a good orthography. Igbo language needs to be documented effectively in a systematic way. We need database of word lists, lexicons, annotate signals and linguistic description, symbols dictionaries. These should be stored in electronic archives so that interested users and learners of the language would access them. When documentations are properly done, the fear of the language going into extinction will be arrested.

Igbo language scholars should deem it necessary to make provision for comprehensive Standard Igbo dictionary that will be accessible for teachers and the learners of the language. The government of the South Eastern Nigeria (Igbo land) should fund the teaching and learning of Igbo language by giving grants to our institutions of learning including those in the remote areas. These grants would aid to carry out researches, provide the needed equipments. These equipments would make the teaching of Igbo language very interesting and lively. They would also aid the teacher to acquire new knowledge. The teaching and learning process in this 21st century should not solely depend on the available textbooks since almost any kind of information can be acquire from information technology.

7.0 Conclusion

This paper discussed how to enhance the teaching and learning of Igbo language through Information Communication Technology (ICT). It identified and discussed some of the tools that would be employed in teaching and learning of Igbo language for sustainability to prevent the fear of the language going into extinction. As noted by Bamidele (2006), African culture is witnessing a shift in cultural

paradigm, and if something is not done, the culture is in its way to extinction. An ideal teacher should try to employ some of these tools in teaching in order to make his/her teaching interesting and lively. The paper also proffered some solutions which if properly effected will help in developing and sustaining the language. It will also elevate the language to enviable status that will attract global recognition because the world is changing daily and Igbo language must adapt to the new social circumstances.

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