

Effect of Communicative Method on Students' Interest in Igbo Letter Writing

Monica Obiageli Omeje

Abstract

This study was carried out to investigate the effect of communicative method on the interest of secondary school students in Igbo letter writing in Nsukka Education Zone of Enugu State. One research question and one null hypothesis were formulated to guide the study. A quasi-experimental study of non-equivalent control group design was adopted. The sample consisted of 174 Senior Secondary Class Two (SSII) students drawn from four secondary schools in Nsukka Local Government Area. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select two schools each from Nsukka urban and rural locations. The sampled schools were randomly assigned to the treatment and control groups. Intact classes were used for the study. The instrument used was a teacher made Igbo Language Interest Inventory (ILII). The ILII has a reliability index of 0.8, using the Kendall's co-efficient of concordance. The data was analysed using analysis of covariance. The treatment lasted for four weeks. Major findings include that communicative teaching method has no significant effect on students' interest in Igbo letter writing. Based on the findings, some recommendations were made, which include that secondary school teachers should be familiar with this method of teaching so that they can adopt it.

Introduction

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, 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".

Since letter writing is very important for testing a student's command of the language, it naturally follows that this aspect 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 letter writing has been shown to be the greatest problem area for students in examinations. The West African Examination Council (WAEC) Chief Examiner's Report of 1997 reads that

... candidates' performance did not reflect the good standard of the questions. They performed far below expectation... many candidates wrote in their different

dialects whereas they were expected to write in the standard Igbo..., this affected the letter writing and essay questions more... (p. 26).

The Chief Examiner's Report of 2005 further corroborated that of 1997 that students' performance in Igbo letter writing is generally poor. The report indicates that ... candidates were not well prepared for the examination..., their weaknesses showed in very poor hand writing; writing on irrelevant aspects of questions with regard to letter writing; 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 understand questions, and lack of interest and seriousness on their part. These shortcomings pose a great problem to the study of Igbo language in general and letter writing in particular.

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 often been cited as a contributory factor to students' poor achievement in Igbo letter writing. The method that is dominantly used by most Igbo teachers in teaching the subject is the lecture method. This method is teacher-centred and makes students passive listeners in the class. Nwadike (1992) noted that students perform poorly in Igbo language because teachers use methods that do not appeal to them. According to him, students many a time perform poorly in Igbo letter writing because they are asked to write about something they do not understand, and in which they have no interest.

Methodology is very vital in any teaching-learning situation. Emphasizing this, Ridgewell (1986) concluded that what a teacher requires when selecting a method of teaching any topic is to look for a method that will best help the students learn the desired understandings and in the process achieve the desired objectives. Such a method will involve active participation of the students in the lesson since their interest will be taken care of. This is particularly true of communicative teaching method (ctm) which aims at equipping learners with the necessary communicative competences. The communicative method emphasizes communication in the target language of the learner. It is learner-oriented and has the striking aim of simultaneously developing in the learner the four linguistic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. In language teaching, the communicative 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 engage in activity-based lessons that involve sharing and interaction through group discussion. Through this way, the learners share and discover new ideas by themselves. In other words, the learners' needs guide how the lesson contents are selected in the use of communicative method, because the aim is to help the learners achieve fluency in the target language which in this case is the standard Igbo.

Standard Igbo is the Igbo that is being taught and studied in schools. It is the standardized form of the language which students are expected to use in writing their

examinations. However, many students do not possess mastery of the standard Igbo and this results in poor performance in the subject. Some researchers have linked students' poor knowledge of the standard Igbo to their lack of interest in the subject (Umo, 2000). This is true because Nwadike (1992) has noted that students often times perform poorly in Igbo written composition because they were asked to write about something in which they have no interest. According to Nicholls (1978), 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 vigour 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. Moreover, Nwadike (1992) emphasized that continuing dependence by Igbo language teachers on traditional methods that do not appeal to students and in which they have no interest in teaching Igbo language has constituted a problem on the process of effective teaching of the subject.

This study therefore sought to determine the effect of communicative teaching method on the interest of students in Igbo letter writing.

The purpose of the study is to determine the facilitative effect of ctm on students' interest in Igbo letter writing. One research question and one null hypothesis guided the study. They are:

- 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?

Ho₁: 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.

This study adopted a quasi-experimental non-equivalent control group design. The study was conducted in Nsukka Education Zone of Enugu State. The population consisted of all the SSII students in the study area. The sample consisted of 174 SSII students drawn from four secondary schools in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State. Stratified random sampling technique was used in selecting the four schools from Nsukka Education Zone. In each sampled school, one class of SSII was randomly selected and assigned to treatment condition. The treatment lasted for four weeks.

The instrument for data collection was a teacher-made Igbo Language Interest Inventory (ILII). The instrument was developed by the researcher and validated by experts in Curriculum and Language Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. ILII was a 20-item interest inventory consisting of 10 positive and 10 negative items. The data was collected using pretest and post-test scores of ILII. The research question was answered using means and standard deviation while the hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance using ANCOVA. The use of ANCOVA was to partial out the initial differences of the research subjects due to sampling, as intact classes were used.

Results

The result obtained is presented as shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Research Question 1

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?

Table 1: Pre/Post-test mean (\bar{X}) interest scores of students taught letter writing in Igbo language.

Group	N	Pretest (\bar{X})	Posttest (\bar{X})	Gain Score
Experimental (Communicative)	84	51.20	54.44	3.24
Control (Convention)	90	51.86	54.68	2.82

Table 2: Analysis of Covariance of students' interest scores by treatment

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig of F
Covariates	2060.512	1	2060.512	303.665	.000
Preinter	2060.512	1	2060.512	303.605	.000
Main effects	12.649	3	4.216	.621	.602
Method	4.086	1	4.086	.602	.439

Table 1 shows the pre/posttest mean interest scores of the control group taught with the conventional method as 51.86 and 54.68 while that of the experimental group are 51.20 for the pretest and 54.44 for the posttest. The control group had a slightly higher mean interest score than the experimental group. But there is a mean gain of 3.24 for the experimental group, and 2.82 for the control group. This implies that the experimental group had a higher gain score of 0.42.

Data in Table 2 shows that communicative teaching method had no significant effect on the interest of students in Igbo letter writing at 0.05 level of significance. This is because the calculated F-value of 0.60 is significant at 0.44, which is beyond 0.05. Based on the non-significant F-value obtained, the researcher accepts the null hypothesis.

Discussion

The results obtained in this study regarding the level of interest in Igbo letter writing as it was affected by the teaching method used showed that the communicative teaching method had no significant effect on the interest of students in Igbo letter writing at 0.05 level of significance. Interest of the learner was considered an important factor in this study because according to Ekeke (1987), if a true behaviour of students is to be approximately obtained in a subject area, interest, as a factor of the affective aspect must be there. Nwadike (1992) observed that students do not perform better in Igbo language because teachers use methods that do not appeal to them. Considering the above statement, one can reasonably say that learners' interest in any subject area depends to a greater extent, on the teaching method. According to Chauhan (1978), gestalt psychologists hold the view that it is the human mind, which is involved in learning. Where a learner's mind has lost interest, the result becomes obviously poor achievement. In this study, even though the F-ratio was not statistically significant, the students' gain score was higher for the experimental group than the control group taught with the lecture method. This shows that the communicative

teaching method has a lot of good qualities that enhance students' interest in Igbo letter writing such as insight, perception, discovery and understanding in learning situations. However, the fact that the F-ratio was not statistically significant might have been due to the duration of the study which is considered short for interest to manifest. Chauhan (1978) stated that the development of interest by students is a slow process considering other factors that play some part such as length of time, effort of the students and pleasure based activities. He concludes that interest takes longer time to manifest fully. This fact is supported by Umo (2000) whose work showed interest as being statistically significant in the teaching of Igbo grammar through the game strategy though with a longer duration of time. The work of Ofordile (1995) using a long period of seven weeks equally showed interest as a statistically significant variable in the teaching of selected social studies units using the binary teaching method. These results show that duration of study to some extent contributes to the manifestation of interest in individuals.

Conclusion / Recommendations

Even though the F-ratio was not statistically significant in this study, the students' gain score was higher for the experimental group than the control group. This shows that the communicative teaching method has a lot of good qualities that enhance students' interest in Igbo language. Therefore, it is recommended that secondary school teachers should be familiar with this method of teaching so that they can adopt it.

Conferences, seminars and workshops should be periodically organized by governments and other relevant professional bodies like SPILC (i.e. Society for the Promotion of Igbo language and Culture) to educate Igbo language teachers on the use of the communicative teaching method in teaching and learning of Igbo language letter writing. In addition, government bodies and Igbo curriculum planners should include and emphasize the use of communicative teaching method in teaching Igbo letter writing in schools.

References

- Afigbo, A. E. (1971). The place of the Igbo language in schools: A historical explanation. In Ogbalu, F. C. & Emenanjo, E. N. (eds), *Igbo Language and Culture*. Ibadan: O.U.P.
- Agwagah, U. N. (1993). Instruction in mathematics reading as a factor in students' achievement and interest in word problem-solving. *Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis*. University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Chauhan, S. S. (1978). *Advanced Educational Psychology*. New Delhi: Viskas.
- Ekeke, O. G. (1987). Development and validation of geography interest inventory for secondary schools. *Unpublished M.Ed. Thesis*. University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Nicholls, S. H. (1978). *Developing a Curriculum: A Practical Guide*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Nwadike, I. U. (1992). *Nka na Usoro Nkuzi Igbo*. Nsukka: Ifunanya Publishers.