

NATURE AND NURTURE IN THE IGBO LANGUAGE

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Abstract: The study investigates the nature and nurture on senior secondary school students in learning the Igbo language, Aba education zone. Expost-facto research design was adopted. The target population for the study comprised of all senior secondary school student. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 8 schools and 30 students were selected from each of the schools which gave a total of 240 respondent used for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire titled: “Nature, Nurture and Learning of Igbo Language Questionnaire (NNLILQ)”. Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out by an expert in test, measurement, and evaluation in order to ensure that the instrument has the accuracy, appropriateness, and completeness for the study under consideration. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.87, and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. The researcher subjected the data generated for this study to appropriate statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics meant to answer the research questions and simple regression analysis meant to test the hypothesis. The test for significance was done at 0.05 alpha levels. From the data analysis the results reveals that there is significant influence of nature and nurture on senior secondary school students as regards learning the Igbo language. The study concludes that genetics plays a role in language development, and some children may be predisposed to certain language abilities or difficulties. However, the environment in which a child grows up and the experience they have also play a significant role in language development. The study recommends that parents and the people around the children should interact with them in Igbo language during early development.

Keywords: Nature, Nurture, Senior Secondary School Students, learning, Igbo language.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

The acquisition of any language is a complex process which is influenced by various factors, including both nature and nurture. Nature refers to the innate biological predispositions and genetic factors that contribute negatively or positively to language learning, while nurture refers to the environmental and socio-cultural influences on language acquisition. Understanding the interplay between these factors is crucial for enhancing language learning outcomes, particularly in the context of learning Igbo, one of the indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of nature and nurture on learning Igbo language among senior secondary school students in the Aba Education Zone. The Igbo language holds significant cultural and historical values for the Igbo community, and its preservation and promotion are essential for maintaining the cultural heritage and identity. However, with the increasing influence of global languages and cultural shifts, and atavism there is a growing concern about the declining proficiency in Igbo language among younger generations.

The guideline of Federal Government of Nigeria in National Policy on Education (NPE) 2004, P... states that Igbo language should be used as a medium of instruction in nursery to first three years in primary schools, and as a subject in secondary schools. Government at different tiers should ensure that the laws prohibiting the speaking of Igbo language in our schools are abolished especially in Igbo land. This mars the objectives of National Language Policy in making the Igbo language one of the three major languages acceptable in Nigeria.

By exploring the impact of nature and nurture on Igbo language learning, this research aims at providing valuable insights into the factors that contribute to effective language acquisition and informs educational practices in the Aba Education Zone. The findings of this study will not only contribute to the existing body of knowledge on language acquisition, but also, have practical implications for curriculum development, instructional strategies, and policy decisions in promoting Igbo language education.

This study will employ a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews in collecting data from senior secondary school students in the Aba Education Zone. The data will be analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques and thematic analysis to identify patterns, relationships, and themes related to the effect of nature and nurture on Igbo language learning.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform language education policies and interventions that support the preservation and revitalization of Igbo language among the younger generation. With the knowledge of the role of genetic factors, environmental influences, and socio-cultural contexts in language acquisition, educators and policymakers can develop effective strategies to foster language proficiency and cultural preservation.

It is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to the wider discourse on language acquisition, specifically in the context of Igbo language education. By shedding light on the effects of nature and nurture, this research will provide valuable insights into the factors influencing language learning outcomes and guide future efforts to promote and sustain Igbo language proficiency among Senior Secondary School students in the Aba Education Zone.

The Igbo language is one of the major indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria, predominantly by the Igbo ethnic group. It holds significant cultural and historical importance, serving as a means of communication and expression of the Igbo people's identity, traditions, and values. However, the rapid globalization and the increasing hegemonic dominance of English and other international languages have posed challenges to the preservation and promotion of Igbo language proficiency among younger generations.

The National Policy on Education in Nigeria, as outlined in 2004, emphasizes the importance of using Igbo language as a medium of instruction in the early years of education, specifically from nursery to the first three years of primary school. Additionally, Igbo language is designated as a subject to be taught in secondary schools. This policy recognizes the significance of preserving indigenous languages and fostering cultural identity through education.

Despite the policy guidelines, there is a growing concern about the declining proficiency in Igbo language among Senior Secondary School students in the Aba Education Zone. Factors such as societal influences, urbanization, and the perception that English is more prestigious and advantageous have contributed to a shift towards the use of English as the dominant language of communication and instruction, even within the Igbo community.

To address this issue effectively, it is essential to understand the complex dynamics of language acquisition and the role of both nature and nurture in learning the Igbo language. The interplay between innate predispositions and environmental influences shapes language learning outcomes, and exploring these factors can provide valuable insights into effective strategies for promoting Igbo language proficiency.

By conducting a comprehensive study on the effect of nature and nurture in learning Igbo language among Senior Secondary School (SSS) students in the Aba Education Zone, this research aims to bridge the gap in knowledge and contribute to efforts aimed at revitalizing and promoting Igbo language education. Understanding the factors that influence language acquisition will inform educational practices, curriculum development, and policy decisions in order to create an environment conducive to effective language learning and cultural preservation.

By examining the current state of Igbo language proficiency, identifying the challenges faced by students, and investigating the influence of both innate and environmental factors, this study seeks to provide statistical/emperical recommendations for enhancing Igbo language education. Ultimately, the goal is to empower future generations with the necessary language skills to preserve their cultural heritage and contribute to the overall development of the Igbo community.

1.2 Statement of problem

Despite the prevalence of the Igbo language in Nigeria, there is a concern about the inadequate development of the language among Secondary School students especially in Aba education zone. It is unclear whether this is due to nature, nurture, or a combination of both. Aba which is a big commercial city in Abia State is predominant with Igbo speaking people. About 90% of people dwelling in Aba use Igbo language as their first or indigenous language. But today many secondary school students are finding it difficult to use Igbo language effectively both in oral and written form. Equally, the students also perceive, their teachers have no interest and respect for the subject (Igbo language). Ohiri-Anichie (2010) maintained that prohibition of speaking of Igbo language in many schools has made many students to neglect Igbo language. Many of them see Igbo language as a subject for the socially unacceptable students. Likewise, Ejiofor (2010) asserted that students' poor perception towards Igbo language arises from the restriction of their parents and prohibition of speaking Igbo language in their various homes and schools.

Although some secondary school students can speak the oral language, they lack writing and grammatical skills. And one may ask, what could be the problem? This study is to investigate the extent to which nature and nurture influence the development of Igbo language among secondary school students and to determine which factors have a greater impact on the Igbo language development of the students in Aba education zone.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this work is to assess the effect of nature and nurture on senior secondary school students in learning the Igbo Language Aba Education Zone. Specifically, the work is carried out:

1. To find out the effect of nature on senior secondary school students in learning the Igbo Language in Aba Education Zone.
2. To examine the effect of nurture on senior secondary school students in learning the Igbo Language in Aba Education Zone.

1.4 Research question

1. What is the effect of nature on senior secondary school students in learning the Igbo Language in Aba Education Zone?
2. What is the effect of nurture on senior secondary school students in learning the Igbo Language in Aba Education Zone?

1.5 Hypothesis

1. There is no significant effect of nature on senior secondary school students in learning the Igbo Language in Aba Education Zone.
3. There is no significant effect of nurture on senior secondary school students in learning the Igbo Language in Aba Education Zone.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual definition

Concept of quality of language instruction:

This refers to the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process in imparting knowledge of the Igbo Language. It encompasses factors such as the qualifications and experiences of teachers, teaching methods, curriculum design, and assessment. In the context of Secondary School Students in Aba, quality of language instruction would refer to how well the teachers are able to facilitate the learning of Igbo Language among the students within the classroom environment. The importance of classroom setting in the study of languages cannot be over emphasized. What one learns is influenced by the environment. Ngwoke (1995) describes the physical environment of education to include space, time, classroom, chairs, seating arrangement, playground, school plant, etc. Language environment is a powerful factor in language development. Both nature and nurture have great influence on personality traits like intelligence. Exposure to the language outside school could come from interactions with family members, friends, and community members who speak the language. In this context, the exposure of secondary school students in Aba to the language within and outside School would refer to how often students have the opportunity to speak and hear the language in their schools, homes and communities.

Concept of status of parents or guardians of the students

In the context of secondary school students in Aba, status of the parents would refer to factors such as their level of education, occupation, income and social standing.

These factors can have an impact on the resources and opportunities available to students, as well as their motivation and ability to learn the Igbo Language.

Concept of cultural factors

This refers to the significance of cultural values, beliefs, and practices in shaping language attitudes and behaviours. In the context of secondary school students in Aba, importance of cultural factors would refer to the role that Igbo culture plays in the students' lives, and how this influences their motivation and ability to learn the language. Emenanjo (2017), argues that the development of the Igbo language is influenced by both nature and nurture factors. Emenanjo emphasizes the importance of cultural factors such as the values placed on language by the Igbo people/ promoting language development, he argues that the Igbo Language is a vital part of Igbo culture, and that the promotion of the language is essential for the preservation of Igbo culture.

Concept of natural inclination towards language: (Language Disposition)

This refers to the individual differences in language learning aptitude and motivation that are influenced by factors such as cognitive abilities, personality traits, and previous language learning experiences. In the context of secondary school students in Aba, natural inclination toward learning language would refer to the students' innate ability and motivation to learn the Igbo language, regardless of the external factors.

Okeke and Ezeugwu (2018), define nature factors as the genetic or biological factors that influence language development in children. According to this study these factors include genetic predispositions to language learning, brain development, and cognitive abilities. This study argued that children who have a predisposition to language learning may learn the Igbo language more easily than those who do not.

Nurture factors, on the other hand, refer to the environmental or social factors that influence language development. According to Okeke and Ezeugwu, (2018) these factors include the socio-economic status of the family, the quality of education and availability of language resources. The study that children from families with higher socio-economic status may have access to better education and language resources, which may enhance their language development.

Emenanjo (2017), argued that the development of the Igbo language is influenced by both nature and nurture factors, such as the value placed on language by the Igbo people, in promoting language development. The study argues that the Igbo language is a vital part of Igbo Culture, and that the promotion of the language is essential for the preservation of Igbo culture.

According to Noam Chomsky, children are born with a language acquisition device (LAD), A specialized, purposeful, Language – only evolutionary learning device that is hardwired in children's brains, which enables them to acquire language and use grammar, "Native theories support this concept and argued that if the native language is not learned before this age, it cannot be learned in a natural way, and cannot reach a fully functional state.

According to Chomsky's theory, these children are born with genes inherited from their parents' mothers and fathers, which two different language mechanisms in their language acquisition device (LAD).

In summary, the effects of nature and nurture on Igbo Language development in Aba Education Zone are complaint factors such as socio-economic status, education and language resources are also important. Moreover, Cultural factors, such as the value placed on language by the Igbo people, may also influence language development.

Effective instruction:

Effective instruction is a fundamental component of language learning. Teachers play a crucial role in providing structured and engaging language instruction that caters for the needs of students. Implementing pedagogical strategies that focus on the four language skills - listening, speaking, reading, and writing - can enhance students' overall language proficiency. Interactive activities, role-plays, group discussions, and authentic materials can be incorporated to promote active participation and meaningful language use. Moreover, differentiated instruction can address individual learning styles and levels, enabling students to progress at their own pace.

Exposure to Igbo spoken environment:

Exposure to spoken Igbo is essential for developing language proficiency. Students should have opportunities to listen to and engage in conversations in the target language. In the context of Aba Education Zone, efforts can be made to integrate Igbo language and culture into the curriculum, ensuring that students are exposed to authentic and relevant language use. Encouraging interactions with Igbo-speaking family members, organizing language exchange programs, and incorporating technology-mediated resources can augment exposure to spoken Igbo both within and beyond the classroom. By immersing students in natural language contexts, their ability to comprehend and communicate in Igbo can be enhanced.

Cultural integration:

Cultural integration is a key aspect of language learning as it provides students with a deeper understanding and appreciation of the language. In the case of Igbo language learning, cultural integration involves exposing students to the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people. This can be achieved through cultural activities, festivals, music, dance, drama, and literature. Integrating cultural elements into language instruction helps students make meaningful connections between language and culture, fostering a sense of identity and pride in their linguistic abilities. Cultural integration also encourages students to use the language in authentic and culturally appropriate ways, promoting a more holistic language learning experience.

Supportive learning environment

Creating a supportive learning environment is crucial for students' language development. This environment should be characterized by positive reinforcement, recognition of achievements, and a safe space for students to practice and make mistakes without fear of judgment. Teachers can provide constructive feedback, encourage peer collaboration, and establish a classroom atmosphere that values diversity and encourages multicultural interactions. Additionally, resources such as language learning materials, reference books, multimedia resources, and language learning software can be made readily available to students, which will facilitate independent learning and providing additional support outside the classroom.

The acquisition of language, such as Igbo, among Senior Secondary School students in Aba education zone, is influenced by a combination of genetic factors (nature) and environmental factors (nurture). Recognizing the significance of these aspects, a comprehensive approach that encompasses effective instruction, exposure to spoken Igbo, cultural integration, and a supportive learning environment is vital for optimizing language learning outcomes. This article aims at exploring the importance of this comprehensive approach in facilitating the acquisition and development of Igbo language skills among Senior Secondary School students.

2.2 Theoretical studies**Social learning theory**

According to behaviorist theories of language acquisition, such as the theory of by B.F. Skinner, children learn language through observation, imitation, and reinforcement from their environment. This perspective suggests that language acquisition is primarily a result of external factors and stimulus-response mechanisms.

Behaviorists argue that children acquire language by observing and imitating the linguistic behaviors of those around them, particularly their caregivers. They believe that children learn to produce language by imitating the sounds, words, and sentence structures they hear in their environment. Reinforcement, in the form of positive feedback and rewards, plays a crucial role in shaping and reinforcing correct language usage.

Skinner's theory of operant conditioning posited that language acquisition is driven by the principles of stimulus, response, and reinforcement. According to this theory, when a child produces a correct utterance or sentence, they receive positive reinforcement in the form of praise, attention, or other rewards. This positive reinforcement strengthens the association between the linguistic behavior and the desirable outcome, leading to increased language production and proficiency.

Behaviorist theories of language acquisition emphasize the role of environmental factors in shaping language learning outcomes. They suggest that children acquire language through repeated exposure to linguistic input and through the reinforcement of correct language usage. These theories downplay the influence of innate factors and focus on the external mechanisms of learning.

While behaviorist theories provide valuable insights into the learning processes involved in language acquisition, they have been criticized for oversimplifying the complexities of language learning. Contemporary theories, such as interactionist and socio-cultural perspectives, emphasize the interactive and social nature of language acquisition, highlighting the role of

innate cognitive processes, social interactions, and internal mental representations. In the case of Igbo language development among Secondary School Students in Aba zone, social Learning theory suggests that factors such as exposure to the Igbo language in the home and community, the quality of Igbo language instruction in schools, and the attitudes of peers and adults towards the language can all have a significant impact on language development.

Cognitive development theory I:

This theory propounds that language development is closely linked to cognitive development, and that children's language abilities are shaped by their cognitive abilities, such as memory, attention, and problem-solving skills. According to this theory, children's language development may be influenced by both genetic and environmental factors, cognitive development theory suggests that factors such as the quality of Igbo language instruction, the complexity of the language input, and students' overall cognitive abilities may all play significant roles in language development.

2.3 Empirical study

"The Nature – Nurture Debate in Language Acquisition; evidence from Igbo Language" by Chinyere, Aniche and Uju. This study investigated the role of nature and nurture in the acquisition of Igbo Language by comparing the language development of children with language impairment. The results showed that both nature and nurture play important roles in the acquisition of Igbo Language.

A study of parents in Imo State by Ifeyinwa J. Okafor examined the role of parents in the acquisition of Igbo language by their children. The results showed that parents who spoke Igbo to their children from birth had children who were more proficient in Igbo language than those who did not.

"The effect of Nature – nurture on the Development of Igbo Language among children in Aba, Nigeria" by Chinyere F. Omeire, which was published in the European Journal of Education studies in 2019. The study investigated the influence of nature and nurture on the development of Igbo language among children in Aba. The study found that both nature and nurture have significant effects on the development of the language, with environmental factors playing a more crucial role.

"In the Nature and nurture of Igbo Language Acquisition by Okechukwu P. Mbah and Ngozi M. Ezenwa, which was published in the international Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research in 2018., the study examined the role of nature (genetic/inheritance) and nurture/environmental factors) in the acquisition of Igbo language among children in Aba. The study found that while genetic factors play a significant role in language acquisition, environmental factors such as exposure to the language and cultural practices also play greater and important role.

Drawing upon a mixed-methods research design, the study examines the interplay between genetic factors (nature) and environmental factors (nurture) in relation to students' language proficiency and development.

3. METHODOLOGY

Expost-facto research design was adopted for the study conducted in Aba Educational Zone. The target population for the study comprised of all senior secondary school student. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 8 schools and 30 students were selected from each of the schools which gave a total of 240 respondents used for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire titled "Nature, Nurture and Learning of Igbo Language Questionnaire (NNLILQ)". Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out by an expert in test, measurement, and evaluation in order to ensure that the instrument has the accuracy, appropriateness, and completeness for the study under consideration. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.87, and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. The researcher subjected the data generated for this study to appropriate statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics meant to answer the research questions and simple regression analysis meant to test the hypothesis. The test for significance was done at 0.05 alpha levels.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Hypothesis one

The null hypothesis states that there is no significant effect of nature on senior secondary school students in learning the Igbo Language Aba Education Zone.

In order to test the hypothesis regression was used to analyze the data, (see table 1).

Table 1: Regression of the effect of nature on senior secondary school students in learning the Igbo Language Aba Education Zone

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. error of the Estimate	R Square Change
1	0.885a	0.784	0.783	0.60712	0.784

***Significant at 0.05 level; df =238; N =240; critical r-value = 0.139**

The table shows that the calculated R-value 0.885 was greater than the critical R-value of 0.139 at 0.5 alpha level with 238 degree of freedom. The R-square value of 0.784 predicts 78% of the effect of nature on senior secondary school students in learning the Igbo Language Aba Education Zone. This rate of percentage is highly positive and therefore means that there is significant effect of nature on senior secondary school students in learning the Igbo Language Aba Education Zone. The result agrees with the findings of Emenanjo (2017), which stated that the development of the Igbo language is influenced by both nature and nurture factors, such as the value placed on language by the Igbo people, in promoting language development.

Hypothesis two

The null hypothesis states that there is no significant effect of nurture on senior secondary school students in learning the Igbo Language Aba Education Zone. In order to test the hypothesis regression was used to analyze the data, (see table 2).

Table 2: Regression of effect of nurture on senior secondary school students in learning the Igbo Language Aba Education Zone

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. error of the Estimate	R Square Change
1	0.923a	0.852	0.851	0.50202	0.852

***Significant at 0.05 level; df =238; N =240; critical r-value = 0.139**

The table shows that the calculated R-value 0.923 was greater than the critical R-value of 0.139 at 0.5 alpha level with 238 degree of freedom. The R-square value of 0.852 predicts 85% of the effect of nurture on senior secondary school students in learning the Igbo Language Aba Education Zone. This rate of percentage is highly positive and therefore means that there is significant effect of nurture on senior secondary school students in learning the Igbo Language Aba Education Zone. The result agrees with the opinion of Okechukwu P. Mbah and Ngozi M. Ezenwa which examined the role of nature (genetic/inheritance) and nurture/environmental factors) in the acquisition of Igbo language among children in Aba. The study found that while genetic factors play a significant role in language acquisition, environmental factors such as exposure to the language and cultural practices also play greater and important role.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Nature and Nurture are two key factors that influence language development in children. Nature refers to the genetic factors that influence a child's language development, while nurture refers to the environmental factors such as family, culture and education. In the case of Igbo language development in Aba education zone, both nature and nurture play important roles.

Research suggests that genetics may play a role in language development, and some children may be predisposed to certain language abilities or difficulties. However, the environment in which a child grows up and the experience they have also play a significant role in language development.

In the case of Aba education zone, the cultural and educational environment can have a significant impact on the development of Igbo language skills. Children who grow up in an environment where Igbo language is spoken regularly and where there is a strong emphasis on Igbo language learn better. Therefore, both nature and nurture play a major role in children's Igbo language development which means that both innate genes and acquired environment play significant roles in Igbo language development among Secondary School Students.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Parents and the people around the children should interact with them linguistically in Igbo language during early development.
2. It is also recommended that efforts should be made to promote the use of the Igbo language in Aba education zone.
3. There should be introduction of programs that encourage the use of Igbo language in schools, and at home, as well as through the promotion of Igbo cultural activities that emphasize language learning.
4. Government and Non Governmental Organisations should make efforts should not hesitate in supporting parents and caregivers in their efforts to promote Igbo language development in their children. This can include, providing access to resources such as books, videos, language classes and encouraging parents to speak.

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