

**INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL BACKGROUND ON STUDENTS' ACQUISITION OF
STANDARD IGBO LANGUAGE SKILLS IN SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN IGBO-
ETITI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ENUGU STATE**

Eze, Roseline Ifeoma (Ph.D)

eze.roseline@unn.edu.ng

08064008703

Abonyi, Augusta Ngozi (Ph.D)

augusta.abonyi@unn.edu.ng

08030899936

&

Ewelum, Chinyelum Patricia (Ph.D)

Department of Arts Education, Faculty of Education

University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Chinyelumewelum2@gmail.com

08035832673

Abstract

The study aims to investigate the influence of cultural background on acquisition of standard Igbo language skills in Senior Secondary Schools in Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State. Despite concerted efforts to promote the use of the standard Igbo language in the Nigerian educational system, many senior secondary school students in Igbo-speaking areas, such as Igbo-Etiti L GA, continue to struggle with acquiring proficiency in the standard form of the language. The students are deeply embedded in local dialects and traditional expressions that differ significantly from the standardized orthography, vocabulary, and grammar taught in schools. These linguistic differences may hinder effective comprehension, oral fluency, reading, and writing in the standard Igbo language. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to investigate. Guided by two research questions, the study used a descriptive survey research design. The population for the study consisted of 3518 students. A sample size of 288 students were obtained using simple random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a 10 items researcher designed questionnaire titled 'Influence of cultural background on acquisition of Igbo language skills in Senior Secondary Schools (ICBAILS)'. Overall reliability co-efficient of 0.76 was generated using Cronbach Alpha Statistical tool. The findings revealed that cultural influences emerge as a significant challenge in students' Igbo learning processes, indicating the need for diverse teaching strategies which plays a vital role in improving their Igbo language skills. The study recommends that educational stakeholders adopt culturally responsive teaching methods, train teachers to address diverse cultural backgrounds, and include culturally relevant content in the Igbo language curriculum to improve student engagement and learning outcomes.

Keywords: Cultural background, students' acquisition, standard Igbo, language skills

1.0 Introduction

Understanding the acquisition of standard Igbo language skills among senior secondary school students requires a consideration of cultural backgrounds. The Igbo culture, known for its rich heritage and traditions, plays a significant role in shaping the educational experiences and language development of its members. Eze and Umo (2017) support that it is a structured system of communication consisting of sounds, symbols, and grammar used by a community of people. It enables the expression of thoughts, emotions, and ideas. Furthermore, from a cultural perspective, language is seen as a cultural artifact that carries the values, beliefs, and history of its speakers. Kachru (2022) is of the view that Language is a cultural artifact that carries the values, beliefs, and history of its speakers. It is a medium through which cultural identity and social norms are transmitted. Eze and Ogbu (2017) **state that** Language is a fundamental human capability that serves as a means of cultural expression and social interaction. It bridges the gap between individual experiences and collective understanding. **Chen (2019)** states that

language is not merely a tool for communication but a repository of a community's collective memory and heritage. It shapes and is shaped by the cultural practices and values of its speakers.

It acts as a medium through which cultural identity and social norms are transmitted. According to Eze (2015), language is a fundamental human capability that serves as a means of cultural expression and social interaction. It bridges the gap between individual experiences and collective understanding. Ellis (2016) adds that language is not merely a tool for communication but a repository of a community's collective memory and heritage. It shapes and is shaped by the cultural practices and values of its speakers.

The Igbo language, spoken by the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria, is a member of the Niger-Congo language family and is characterized by its tonal nature, with meaning often conveyed through variations in pitch. Igbo language as an embodiment of the Igbo culture, encompassing traditional knowledge, customs, and social norms, plays a crucial role in the preservation and transmission of the Igbo heritage. The Igbo language according to **Byram (2017)** is an embodiment of the Igbo culture, encompassing traditional knowledge, customs, and social norms. It plays a crucial role in the preservation and transmission of the Igbo heritage. The Igbo language is a living expression of the Igbo worldview and values. It is through the Igbo language that traditional stories, proverbs, and songs are passed down from one generation to the next.

In the context of senior secondary school students in Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area, the cultural background significantly impacts their acquisition of Igbo language skills. Cultural practices such as storytelling, traditional songs, and community gatherings provide informal learning platforms that reinforce formal education. These cultural interactions enrich students' vocabulary and grammatical understanding, making them more proficient in the language.

Integrating cultural elements into the curriculum can enhance students' engagement and retention of language skills. However, challenges such as the influence of Western culture and language pose a threat to the preservation of the Igbo language. Eze (2017) noted that the influence of Western culture and language can dilute traditional practices, thereby endangering the survival of the Igbo language. Addressing these challenges requires a collaborative effort from educators, parents, and policymakers. According to Kachru (2022), language is not only a means of communication but also a carrier of cultural heritage and identity. The cultural background of students, including their family traditions, community practices, and societal norms, significantly influences how they learn and use the Igbo language. In Igbo-Etiti, cultural practices such as storytelling, traditional songs, and community gatherings serve as platforms for informal learning. Students are often exposed to the Igbo language through these channels, which reinforces their formal education. Ossai, Eze and Obayi, (2020) highlight that these cultural interactions enrich students' vocabulary and grammatical understanding, making them more proficient in the language.

The educational system in Igbo-Etiti must recognize the importance of cultural context in language instruction. Studies by Patel (2019) at integrating cultural elements into the curriculum can enhance students' engagement and retention of language skills. Educators are encouraged to incorporate culturally relevant materials and teaching methods to bridge the gap between home and school language environments.

The acquisition of standard Igbo language skills among Senior Secondary School students in the Igbo Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State has sparked concerns owing to the evident difficulties in students' performance, notably in the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) results. The recorded percentages of students achieving credit and above in Igbo language over the years have fallen short of the expected benchmarks for admission into tertiary institutions. Consequently, there is a need for an inquiry into possible factors contributing to these academic challenges. The current study therefore takes a critical look at the influence of cultural background on acquisition of standard Igbo language speaking skills in Senior Secondary Schools in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State. This study offers significant contributions by providing insightful perspectives that pass beyond

traditional language education models. It acknowledges the detailed interaction between cultural factors and language proficiency, thereby expanding the understanding of this dynamic relationship. Bandura's theory 1977, emphasizes that individuals learn by observing others, and this is particularly relevant in the context of language acquisition. Students in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area may observe language use within their cultural context, such as in family, community, and social interactions. The cultural background, including linguistic nuances, expressions, and communication styles, can influence how students acquire and use English. Understanding these observational learning processes is essential in comprehending how cultural factors shape language learning. The theory emphasises the significance of role models and the influence of those individuals who are considered as models for behavior. In the context of language acquisition, students may have role models within their cultural context who influence their approach to learning standard Igbo. Whether it is teachers, peers, or community figures, these models can impact language learning behaviors and attitudes. Recognizing and understanding the role of these models within the cultural background is crucial for designing effective language acquisition strategies.

As such, it opens avenues for targeted interventions and curriculum adjustments that can positively impact language learning outcomes, paving the way for more effective and culturally responsive language education practices in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State. This implies that this study creates opportunities for specific interventions and adjustments in curriculum design that have the potential to enhance language learning outcomes. By recognizing the connection between cultural context and language proficiency, tailored approaches can be developed to address the unique linguistic needs and cultural sensitivities of learners in the Igbo Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State. These interventions aim to foster more effective and culturally responsive language education practices, ultimately leading to improved language acquisition and communication skills among learners in the region.

Many studies have been conducted on acquisition of standard Igbo language skills with less emphasis on influence of cultural background on them, therefore this study sorts to investigate the influence of cultural background on acquisition of standard Igbo language skills in Senior Secondary Schools in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

The Igbo language, as a vital medium of instruction and communication especially in the south east Nigeria, plays a central role in various aspects of education, governance, law, media, and international business. However, the observed performance of students in Igbo language, particularly in the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE, 2023, 2024) results, raises significant concerns. According to the Igbo chief examiner's report (2020), the percentages of students scoring credit and above in Igbo language in 2020, 2021, 2022, and were 50%, 52%, 54%, and 55%, respectively, falling short of the standards required for entry into tertiary institutions. This statistical trend highlights a persistent challenge in the acquisition of standard Igbo language skills among students in Senior Secondary Schools in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State.

An investigation of this issue suggests that students' cultural background is a contributing factor to their difficulties in effectively acquiring standard Igbo language skills. The failure in sound transmission, as observed in students' speaking and writing, coupled with challenges in comprehending and expressing ideas in standard Igbo point towards a need for an in-depth investigation into the influence of cultural background on language acquisition. Cultural diversity, motivation, attitude of learners, and individual cultural identity are potential factors interplaying with students' language skills.

On that note, this study aims to provide a detailed investigation of how cultural background influences the acquisition of standard Igbo language skills. The researchers seek to offer insights that extend beyond conventional language education models. The research therefore seeks to identify and understand the specific cultural influences that play a role in how students learn and acquire the Igbo language and evaluate the extent to which existing educational practices consider and incorporate the cultural backgrounds of students in their approach to teaching the Igbo language. Addressing this gap

is crucial for designing interventions and curriculum adjustments that can enhance language learning outcomes and contribute to more effective and culturally responsive language education practices in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State.

2.1 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of cultural background on acquisition of standard Igbo language skills in Senior Secondary Schools in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State. Specifically, the study intends to:

1. **To identify specific cultural factors that influence the acquisition of the Igbo language skills among senior secondary school students in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area,**
2. **To assess the effectiveness of current teaching methods in accommodating diverse cultural backgrounds in the acquisition of Igbo language skills.**

2.2 Research Questions:

1. **What cultural factors significantly influence the acquisition of standard Igbo language skills among senior secondary school students in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area?**
2. **How do current teaching methods in Senior Secondary Schools in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area address the cultural diversity of students in the acquisition of standard Igbo language skills?.**

2.3 Method of Data Collection

The geographical area for this study is Senior Secondary Schools in Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area, Enugu state. It also has fifteen (15) public secondary schools. The headquarter is in Ogbede. The area is chosen because of the students' poor performance in standard Igbo language. Igbo Etiti covers a total area of 325 square kilometers with 12 communities which include Diogbe, Aku, Ohodo, Ukehe, Umuna, Umunko, Ekwegbe, Ozalla, Ochima, Ikolo, Idume, and Ohebe-dim. The local government area is bordered by other communities within Enugu State, such as Udi, Nsukka, and Uzo-Uwani. These neighboring communities share similar cultural and economic characteristics. Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area has a fertile soil and the residents are mostly farmers who engage in cultivation of various crops, including: yam, cassava, maize, and vegetables, which are essential for both local consumption and trade

The study adopted descriptive survey research design and was carried out in Igbo-etiti L.G.A. Descriptive survey research design according to Eze (2022) is that form of research design in which a group of people or items are studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people or items through their responses to questions which is considered to be representatives of the entire group. This study intends to systematically collect, analyze, and describe data from a sample population to understand and identify patterns, trends and relationships thus the design is considered appropriate for the study. The population for the study consisted of 3518 students, source: Post Primary School Management board PPSMB Nsukka zone 2014. A sample size of 288 students was obtained using simple random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a 10 item researcher designed questionnaire titled "Influence of cultural background on acquisition of Igbo language skills in Senior Secondary Schools (ICBAILS)". The questionnaire has two sections, A and B. 'A' elicit information on the personal data of the students while section B is made up of two clusters: However, the instrument is divided into 2 clusters. Cluster one (1) determined the **cultural factors that significantly influence the acquisition of standard Igbo language skills**. Cluster two (2) **current teaching methods in Senior Secondary Schools in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area that address the cultural diversity of students in the acquisition of standard Igbo language skills**. The questionnaire was rated on a modified four (4) point Linkert scale of Strongly Agree (SA) 4Points, Agree (A)3Points, Strongly Disagree (SD)2Points, and Disagree (D)1Point. The validity of the instrument was ensured by three experts, two from the Department of Arts Education (Language Unit) and one from Science Education (Measurement and Evaluation) all in University of Nigeria Nsukka. Cronbach Alpha Statistical method was used to establish the instrument. The instrument yielded a reliability co-efficient of 0.76. The researchers administered the questionnaires directly to the

respondents and collected immediately with the help of the teachers to ensure a hundred percent return. The responded instrument was used for the analysis. Mean and standard deviation was used to analyze the data and answer the research questions. The decision mean is any score from 2.50 and above will be accepted and any score below 2.50 will be rejected.

3.1 Results

Research Question 1

What are the cultural factors that significantly influence the acquisition of standard Igbo language skills among senior secondary school students in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area?

Table 1: Cultural factors that influence the acquisition of standard Igbo language skills among Senior Secondary Schools students in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area.

S/N	Item statement	N	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	S.D	Decision
	Cultural background shapes language proficiency in standard Igbo among senior secondary school students.	120	2.96	.78	Accepted
	Non-verbal communication cues, influenced by culture, play a role in language learning.	115	1.80	.64	Rejected
	Socio-cultural factors such as family background, socio-economic status, cultural norms and values and peer influence affect Students' attitudes and motivation in standard Igbo language acquisition.	120	2.90	.77	Accepted
	Native language interference impacts pronunciation and language use in standard Igbo.	119	2.78	.85	Accepted
5.	Cultural identity influences students' writing styles in standard Igbo essays.	110	1.69	.61	Rejected
	Grand Mean		2.43		Rejected

Table 1 examines the influence of **the cultural factors that significantly influence the acquisition of standard Igbo language skills among senior secondary school students in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area**. The findings reveal that cultural background shapes language proficiency in standard Igbo amongst senior secondary school students, as indicated by a mean score of 2.96 with a standard deviation of 0.78. Similarly, socio-cultural factors such as family background, socio-economic status, cultural norms and values and peer influence, are found to interfere with students' use of standard Igbo, with a mean score of 2.90 and a standard deviation of 0.77. Additionally, native language interference impacts pronunciation and standard Igbo language usage, supported by a mean score of 2.78 and a standard deviation of 0.85. However, non-verbal communication cues, influenced by culture and cultural identity as part of the factors that influences students' writing styles in standard Igbo essays were rejected as significant factors, with mean scores of 1.80 and 1.69, and standard deviations of 0.64 and 0.61, respectively.

Research Question 2

How do current teaching methods in Senior Secondary Schools in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area address the cultural diversity of students in the acquisition of standard Igbo language skills?

Table 2: Current teaching methods in Senior Secondary Schools in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area that address the cultural diversity of students in the acquisition of standard Igbo language skills.

S/N	Item statement	N	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	S.D	Decision
6	Visual teaching helps me in acquiring standard Igbo language skills in senior secondary schools.	119	2.64	.90	Accepted
7	Auditory teaching contributes to my acquisition of standard Igbo language skills in senior secondary schools.	118	2.66	.88	Accepted
8	Reading/Writing teaching plays a role in my acquisition of standard Igbo skills in senior secondary schools.	120	2.90	.83	Accepted
9	Kinesthetic learning aids me in acquiring standard Igbo language skills in senior secondary schools.	118	2.96	.738	Accepted
10.	Multimodal learning enhances my acquisition of standard Igbo language skills in senior secondary schools.	118	2.92	1.07	Accepted
	Grand Mean		2.81		Accepted

Table 2 indicates **current teaching methods in Senior Secondary Schools that address the cultural diversity of students in the acquisition of standard Igbo language skills**; that senior secondary school students find various learning styles effective in acquiring standard Igbo language skills. Visual learning, auditory learning, reading/writing learning, kinesthetic learning, and multimodal learning all received mean scores ranging from 2.64 to 2.96, with standard deviations indicating moderate to low variability. The grand mean of 2.81 suggests an overall acceptance of these learning styles as beneficial for acquiring standard Igbo language skills among the students surveyed. This indicates that students perceive each of these learning approaches as playing a positive role in their language acquisition process within the senior secondary school context.

3.0 Summary of the Findings

- Cultural influences are notable challenge in the students' learning of standard Igbo.
- Learning styles such as visual, auditory, reading/writing, kinesthetic, and multimodal style play a positive role in students' language acquisition processes.
- Classroom dynamics facilitates students' acquisition of standard Igbo language skills.
- There are proposed personal and group strategies that can enhance acquisition of standard Igbo language skills.

3.1 Discussion of Results

This study shows that interference of cultural influences are significant barriers to achieving fluency in standard Igbo. This is evident as students often struggle to transition smoothly between their native language and standard Igbo, leading to disruptions in fluency. Also, non-verbal communication cues, which are common practices among native language speakers and bilingual individuals, further complicate the use of standard Igbo. These practices result in a blend of languages that can confuse students and hinder their ability to use standard Igbo correctly and consistently. Moreover, native language interference also negatively affects pronunciation and the overall use of standard Igbo. Students who are heavily influenced by their mother tongue may have distinct accents or mispronunciations that make their spoken standard Igbo less comprehensible. This influence extends to grammatical structures and usage patterns, which can differ significantly between languages, thereby affecting students' command of standard Igbo.

Interestingly, the analysis reveals that some factors commonly believed to influence standard Igbo learning were not found to be significant. Social factors such as family background, socio-economic status, cultural norms and values and peer influence, did not significantly affect students' Igbo language proficiency. These findings suggest that while cultural influences are critical issue, not all aspects of native language use have a substantial impact on Igbo learning. These insights align with the

observations of Ozor (2018), who highlights that mother tongue interference which is one of cultural influences plays a major role in the learning of Igbo among secondary school students. This interference can manifest in various ways, including pronunciation, syntax, and the tendency to code-switch, all of which complicate the mastery of standard Igbo. The study emphasizes the need for targeted interventions to mitigate these effects, such as increased exposure to Igbo in diverse contexts and specific training to address pronunciation and fluency issues.

4.0 Conclusion of the findings

The findings of the study highlight several critical factors impacting senior secondary school students' acquisition of standard Igbo language skills. Cultural influences emerge as a significant challenge in students' Igbo language learning processes. Classroom dynamics also play a crucial role in facilitating language skill development, emphasizing the importance of a supportive and interactive learning environment. Furthermore, strategies implemented during learning play a vital role in improving their standard Igbo language skills, that is essential for fostering motivation and proficiency in language learning.

4.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Professional development is needed for teachers to equip them with the skills necessary to address and integrate diverse cultural backgrounds into their teaching practices effectively.
2. Curriculum planners should incorporate culturally relevant content into language learning materials to enhance student interest and relevance in Igbo language education.
3. Government agencies should formulate policies that support the inclusion of cultural background thereby impacting standard Igbo language acquisition, to develop comprehensive strategies that address these influences.

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