

Igbo Language Needs Analysis of Non-Igbo University of Nigeria Post-Graduate Students: Implication for Curriculum Design

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Abstract

This study adopted the theoretical framework of Needs Analysis to investigate the Igbo language needs of non-Igbo University of Nigeria Post-Graduate (PG) students. Four research questions guided the study and descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population of this study consist of all the post-graduate students who are non-Igbo speakers at the University of Nigeria from 2009/2010 to 2012/2013 sessions. Purposive sampling method was used to select 76 students who are resident at the Post-Graduate Hall. The instrument for data collection was a four (4) point Likert-type rating scale in four clusters. Descriptive statistics was used in data analysis. The findings of the study showed the various aspects of Igbo language learners need to be equipped with for effective communication. The study therefore concluded that as Nigeria has adopted education as a tool for national development, it has become imperative that the Igbo language needs of non-Igbo University of Nigeria post-graduate students be articulated in designing an effective curriculum. Recommendations were also proffered.

Keywords: Igbo language, Language needs, Needs Analysis, Communicative language needs, Social language needs, Commercial language needs, Curriculum design, University of Nigeria Post-Graduate Students.

1.0 Introduction

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation with varied culture and languages. Nigeria has up to 250 ethnic groups with about 450 distinct languages (National Population Commission (NPC)). Uguru (2008) on the multiplicity of the Nigerian nation, observes that Nigeria is made of many linguistic groups totalling between four and five hundred with three language groups (Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa) standing out amongst them. Agbedo (2007) also note that Nigeria has 150 million people who speak an estimate of 400 languages. Given this disposition of Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (NPE) adopted education as a tool for the inculcation of national unity (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2004). Language learning for effective communication between different ethnic groups therefore becomes imperative. Not just because of the need for mobility of labour within the country, but also for the high rate of migration of students from one region to another.

Furthermore, as people move from one region to another, there are almost as many need to learn the host community's language at will as there are instances where one need them for survival. The communicative need of language learners is therefore a major preoccupation of Needs Analysis (NA). Needs Analysis is a process of finding out the needs for which a learner or groups of learners require a language and arranging the needs according to priorities. Information on the ways in which learners prefer to learn are obtained through needs analysis. NA is one of the applied linguistics teaching tools that also include Contrastive Analysis (CA), Error Analysis (EA), and Discourse Analysis (DA). According to Oputa (2011), NA is the first and most important step in any training process. Thus, NA generally leads curriculum designers and language teachers to take specific actions on what to do and how to do it in the context of learner-centred instruction. Hence, the communicative goals of language learning are to a great extent enshrined in the aims of NA. Given this, NA as a tool is used to analyze the language needs of the learners in such that the learning objectives can be explicitly identified and selected.

Such analysis can facilitate a better understanding of the specific language learning needs of the University of Nigeria (UNN) Post Graduate students who are non-Igbo language speakers. This is because NA can effectively be used to investigate the language needs of Second Language (L2), Alternate Language (AL) or Foreign Language (FL) learners. It also provides relevant data for the curriculum designer to develop effective language teaching materials for communicative competence in specific areas of language use. This would in turn guide language teaching. Furthermore, NA is communication oriented in its approach to language teaching because it attempts to investigate and discover the needs of the language learners. In other words, it attempts to discover the purpose for which the learners are learning the language and in which areas or field they would use the Target Language (TL) they wish to learn. It also addresses the language needs of learners for different purposes. This helps the language teacher to situate his teaching appropriately and also assists teaching aids/resources personnel to develop their materials according to the needs of the language learners. Given this characteristic of Needs Analysis, one can for example talk about the concept of English for Specific Purposes

(ESP) and also apply its principles for Igbo for Specific Purposes (ISP). Needs Analysis is also in line with functionalism. The functionalist approach to language teaching is that of communicative competence such that learners could attain mastery of the use of the language in practical or real life situations.

Long ago, efforts have been directed towards communicative competence in language use and not just linguistic or grammatical competence. Yule (1996) asserts that revision of L2 learning experience can best be described as communicative approaches. They are partially a reaction against the artificiality of 'pattern-practice' and also against the belief that consciously learning the grammar of a language will necessarily result in an ability to use the language. NA is in line with the Notional syllabus well elucidated in Wilkins (1976). The Notional Syllabus of Wilkins (1976) is very central to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Notional syllabus encourages the plan of the content of language teaching in line with actual use of language in communication, hence, its use in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Bell (1981) observes that ESP is influenced by the functional view of language as well as group needs for communication. Iloene (2007) therefore asserts that the curriculum designer must as necessity determine which aspects of a language are most needed by the language learners.

Needs Analysis is therefore, adopted in language learning researches and as an applied linguistics tool for language teaching. It is useful to applied linguists for obtaining input data in language learning curriculum. Ossai (2011) further argues against the idea of teaching L2 learners with 'pattern-practice' and conscious learning of the grammar of TL which he believes do not consider the relevance of exposing learners to the extra linguistic patterns. Pattern-practice may also not expose the learners to the real experiences outside the classroom situation. In line with this, Nwigwe (2010) observes that a major factor militating against Igbo language learners attaining communicative competence is the use of improper learner resource/materials not relevant to their needs and interests. These are inherent in pattern-practice approach to language learning which has for long been the major approach to Igbo language teaching and learning. There is therefore, the need to design a functional curriculum for teaching Nigerian indigenous languages like Igbo language as Alternate Languages (AL).

2.0 Problem of the Study

University of Nigeria and few other first generation Universities in Nigeria have been designated flagships for high skilled manpower training through graduate education programmes. This is in line with the government's adoption of education as a tool for national development and as a tool for the inculcation of national unity (FRN, 2004). This also complements the institution's vision of transformation in order to become a world class university. Admission of students from different ethnic groups and regions thus, becomes inherent in the administration's strategies to give the university a national view in achieving its scholarship objectives. Given this situation, there is no gainsaying the fact that the non-Igbo speakers admitted for scholarship in her different disciplines would best be successful in their academic and social achievement to the extent they can communicate and interact effectively in the host Igbo community.

Furthermore, language as a vital means of communication and a device for thinking is a medium of enablement for human existence. Hence, language plays a major role in human communication, thoughts, feelings and wishes. Oputa (2011) opines that man cannot function without the language of his environment. For this reason, Igbo language teaching needs to be presented in an authentic context to equip University of Nigeria Post Graduate students who are non-Igbo language speakers with the particular context in which Igbo language is used. NA can be used as a theoretical framework and as an analytical tool to achieve this. Despite this need, pattern-practice approach to language learning has for long been the major approach to Igbo language teaching and learning. There are also scarce empirical guide known to the researchers on Igbo language needs analysis which can be used in teaching non-Igbo speakers effectively as an alternate language. Therefore, the problem of this study posed as a question is; what are the Igbo language needs of non-Igbo University of Nigeria post-graduate students?

For that reason, the purpose of this study is to find out those aspects of the Igbo language that non-Igbo speakers at the University of Nigeria need to learn to communicate effectively. Specifically, this study sort to determine the:

1. language needs of UNN PG students' non-Igbo speakers for effective communication
2. social language needs of UNN PG students' non-Igbo speakers as alternate language at UNN
3. commercial language needs of UNN PG students' non-Igbo language speakers as alternate language at UNN
4. areas of weakness of UNN PG students' non Igbo speakers' in using Igbo language as alternate language

It is hoped that the findings of this study will enable the curriculum designer to see to what extent the existing Igbo language programme of instruction are in line with the learners' real need. Hence, the findings of this study will be of immense benefit to the curriculum planners and language instructors. Moreover, the

multilingual nature of Nigeria linguistic terrain places Igbo language as a strategic alternate language to acquire for effective communication in the south eastern Nigeria and elsewhere- given that Igbo language is one of the three major languages in Nigeria (Uguru, 2008). Additionally, since the National Policy on Education NPE gives much attention to the indigenous languages as a tool for the inculcation of national unity and national consciousness, application of the findings of this study will help in effective teaching of Igbo language to non-Igbo speakers to accomplish the objective.

Furthermore, the findings of this study will serve as an empirical guide to language teachers in emphasizing areas of priority in teaching second and alternate languages. Such reliable information can be used to improve and strengthen language teaching curriculum. It will also help in diagnosing the areas of weakness and strength of language learners. Such diagnoses can be used to improve teaching and learning. The result of this study will as well assist the curriculum planner/designer to focus on those specific needs of the non-Igbo speakers that facilitate their effective communication among themselves (since they have different L_1) and between them and the locals. There is no gainsaying the fact that this study will contribute to the scarce empirical literature on Igbo language needs analysis as most available are largely opinionated. The theoretical knowledge of this study is also considered significant because it will strengthen previous empirical findings by providing information that can be used in explaining language teaching pedagogy.

3.0 Methodology of the Study

This study adopted descriptive survey research design. Descriptive survey design intend chiefly at collecting data and systematically describing the features of a given population. According to Nworgu (2006), descriptive survey design aims at collecting data on, and describing in a systematic manner, the characteristics, features or facts about a given population. The descriptive survey research design is appropriate for this study since it permits an analysis and description of the language needs of students as accounted by them. The rationale for choosing this design is that it would guide the researchers to identify the characteristics of the population under study with respect to their Igbo language need which would enable the researchers to gather reliable data for the study.

This study was carried out at the University of Nigeria. University of Nigeria is the first indigenous University in Nigeria which was established in 1961 by the then Eastern Regional Government. UNN admits Nigerian and international students for post-graduate studies in 14 faculties in the two campuses in Enugu state (Nsukka and Enugu campuses). Enugu state is one of the five states in Eastern Nigeria which include Abia, Ebonyi, Anambra and Imo states. Igbo language is the mother tongue of these states. There are many other Igbo speaking groups in other states in Nigeria like in Delta and Rivers states. With a population of 16,381,729 in these five states (National Population Commission (NPC), 2011), the Igbo speaking people of Nigeria becomes one of the three major ethnic group in Nigeria besides the Hausa and Yoruba speaking ethnic groups. UNN was chosen for this study because its admission data in the past few years indicates a significant increase in the number of non-Igbo speaking students from other states of the federation. There is no gainsaying the fact that this will nevertheless go a long way in complementing their educational attainment in the region.

The population of this study consists of all the post-graduate students at the University of Nigeria from 2009/2010 to 2012/2013 sessions that Igbo language is not his or her first language. There are many non-Igbo PG students running either Postgraduate diploma, masters or Ph.D program in the Nsukka and Enugu campuses of the University of Nigeria. Only PG students who are resident at the Post graduate Hall at the Nsukka campus were purposively sampled. Hence, a total of 76 PG students constituted the sample size for the study.

The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled: Needs Analysis Questionnaire (NAQ). The 28-item instrument was designed by the researchers to elicit data from the respondents on their Igbo language needs for effective communication. The instrument is divided into two sections; section A is demographic while section B is a four (4) point Likert type rating scale in four clusters, each cluster addressing a research question. To ascertain the validity of the instrument, it was given to three experts, two in Linguistics and one in Measurement and Evaluation, all in University of Nigeria, Nsukka. They were requested to examine the instrument to ensure that the NAQ relates to the purpose of the study and the research methodology. Their comments and corrections helped in the final development of the instrument.

To ensure the reliability of the instrument, a trial testing was conducted using 20 non-Igbo speaking undergraduate students at the University of Nigeria. Cronbach Alpha method of reliability estimate was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. A reliability coefficient value of 0.71 was obtained. This was considered satisfactory by the researchers to establish the consistency of the instrument. The Cronbach Alpha method was used because it measures the internal consistency of the items and allows instrument to be administered once on the respondents.

In the conduct of the study, the 28 item validated NAQ was administered directly by the researchers to the sampled 76 students at the Post-Graduate hall of the Nsukka campus of the University of Nigeria. Where the

respondents are unable to complete the questionnaire and return same immediately, the researchers called back to collect the completed questionnaire. The four research questions were analyzed using means and standard deviations. Each research questions real limit of numbers was used to determine the decision level as follows: 3.50 and above was considered Very Often (VO); 2.50-3.49 is Often (O); 1.50-2.49 is Sometimes (S) while 0.00-1.59 is Never (N). Consequently, for each of the items, a mean response of 2.5 and above was set as bench mark inmaking decision on the aspect of Igbo language needs of UNN PG students' non-Igbo speakers whichneed to be emphasized in the curriculum design.

3.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

3.1 Research Questions One:

What are the Language needs of UNN PG students' non-Igbo speakers for effective communication?

Table 1: The mean ratings and standard deviations of UNN PG their language needs. Source: Ahamefula and Okoye (2012).Field Analysis Result.

S/N	As a student, my Igbo language needs include:	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
1.	Speaking skills	3.1053	.96026	Needed
2.	Communicative ability	2.9605	.85543	Needed
3.	Listening skills	3.1974	.84884	Needed
4.	Reading skills	2.3289	1.03779	Not Needed
5.	Writing skills	2.0526	.99190	Not Needed
6.	Cultural values	2.6184	.93762	Needed
7.	Cultural norms	2.5658	.89942	Needed
8.	Knowledge of idiomatic expression	2.3816	.93762	Not Needed
9.	Medical/health terms	2.3158	1.07344	Not Needed

3.2 Interpretation of Findings

Table 1above shows the mean ratings and standard deviations of the language needs of UNN PG students non-Igbo speakers for effective communication. Judging from the high mean responses for five language needs for effective communication, UNN PG s students' non-Igbo speakers need help in the areas of speaking skill, communicative ability, listening skills, cultural values and cultural norms. This suggests to the curriculum designer to emphasize these areas in developing the curriculum that could be effective in teaching non-Igbo speakers. It also shows that thenon-Igbo speakers under study do not needreading and writing skills, knowledge of idiomatic expression and medical/health terms.

3.3 Research Question Two:

What are the Social language needs of UNN PG students' non-Igbo speakers as alternate language at UNN?

Table 2: The mean ratings and standard deviations of UNN PGstudents social language needs.

Source: Ahamefula and Okoye (2012).Field Analysis Result.

S/N	As a student, my Social language needs include:	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
10.	Greeting expressions	3.5526	.71916	Needed
11.	Welcoming guests	3.2105	.80525	Needed
12.	Friendship expressions	3.2368	.83056	Needed
13.	Communicative knowledge in Igbo social events	2.5658	.82196	Needed
14.	Sports/Recreational terms	2.3289	.90019	Not Needed
15.	Complaint language	2.2763	.97432	Not Needed
16.	Abusive/curse language/swear words	1.7237	.98791	Not Needed
17.	Condolences	2.4342	.88447	Not Needed

3.4 Interpretation of Findings

Table 2 indicates that the non-Igbo speakersneed social language used in greeting expressions, welcoming guests, friendship expressions and communicative knowledge in Igbo social events. Based on the high mean responses of non-Igbo speakers on these social language needs, emphases should be on these areas in designing a curriculum that can integrate these non-Igbo speakers socially. The table also show that their social language need do not include sports/recreational terms, complaint language, abusive/curse language/swear words and condolences.

3.5 Research Question Three:

What are the commercial language needs of UNN PG students' non-Igbo language speakers as alternate language at UNN?

Table 3: The mean ratings and standard deviations of UNN PG students commercial language needs.
 Source: Ahamefula and Okoye (2012).Field Analysis Result.

S/N	As a student, my commercial language needs include:	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
18.	Monetary terms	3.1447	.89000	Needed
19.	Knowledge of seller buyer conversation	3.2368	.79780	Needed
20.	Bargaining terms	3.1579	.92452	Needed
21.	Negotiation terms	3.0526	.96464	Needed
22.	Market initiation terms	3.0263	.92338	Needed
23.	Market days	2.6842	1.12203	Needed

3.6 Interpretation of Findings

Table 3 indicates that the non-Igbo speakers have commercial language needs in all the areas itemized. These are in the areas monetary terms, knowledge of seller buyer conversation, bargaining terms, negotiation terms, market initiation terms and knowledge of market days. The reason for this may not be far from the fact that transactions between them and the locals are inevitable. Furthermore, knowledge of these commercial language terms can position the non-Igbo speakers better in business transactions and may help them bargain better. The curriculum designer should therefore concentrate on these aspects of Igbo language that can empower the non-speakers to negotiate better in transactions.

3.7 Research Question Four:

What are the areas of weakness in Igbo language of UNN non-Igbo speakers?

Table 4: The mean ratings and standard deviations of UNN PG on areas of weaknesses in Igbo language.
 Source: Ahamefula and Okoye (2012).Field Analysis Result.

S/N	My weakness in Igbo language stems from the areas of:	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
24.	Knowledge of dialectal differences	3.1842	.97585	Weak
25.	Proverbs and idiomatic expression	3.0263	.99296	Weak
26.	Cultural norms of Igbo language	2.7763	1.01454	Weak
27.	Peculiarities of different communicative events	2.8947	.94628	Weak
28.	Tone patterns	3.0395	.95834	Weak

3.8 Interpretation of Findings

Table 4 above shows that UNN non-Igbo speaker's weakness in Igbo language stem from all the itemised areas. These are knowledge of dialectal differences, proverbs and idiomatic expression, cultural norms of Igbo language, peculiarities of different communicative events and tone patterns. This suggests to the curriculum designer to start with diagnosis of the communicative ability of the language learner. This according to Oputa (2011) is the first and most important step in any training process

4.0 Conclusion

Learners need to be equipped with daily expressions that can enable them to effectively participate in the interactions with native speakers. Hence, Needs Analysis involves the gathering of information to find out how much learners already know and what they still need to learn. This study therefore analyzed the Igbo language needs of non-Igbo University of Nigeria post-graduate students: implication for curriculum design. The researchers adopted the theoretical framework of Needs Analysis (one of the tools in Applied Linguistics for Second Language Teaching research) in determining the priority language needs of the Non-Igbo PG students of the University of Nigeria when learning the Igbo language. The study conclude that, as Nigeria has adopted education as a tool for national unity, development, it has become imperative that the Igbo language needs of non-Igbo University of Nigeria Post-Graduate students be articulated in designing an effective curriculum.

5.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proffered:

- Students (language learners) should be involved in all phases of language teaching curriculum development. This will afford them the opportunity of making useful inputs in effective curriculum especially at the design stage.
- In designing a curriculum that could be effective for teaching non Igbo UNN PG students, emphases should be on these felt language needs as observed by this study.

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