INTEGRATION OF BLENDED LEARNING INTO IGBO LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract *Nigerian la*
nguages have suffered a great setback due to apathy on the part of the students and the method of teaching on the part of the teachers. This paper is advocating for the integration of blended l earning (BL) into Igbo language teaching and learning to arouse the interest of the learners an d to save the language from going into extinction. Although the language of most homes remain s Igbo, there is a marked shift to English with regard to language spoken with friends and schoo lmates. The blended learning approach serves as an effective interface between web-based and face-to-face teaching and learning of language skills. The blended approach will increase the learner's active involvement and engagement in the whole process of learning language. This p aper examines the integration of blended learning into Igbo language teaching and learning and its opportunities and challenges. It also discusses the inclusion of technology in language t eaching and learning. The paper recommends incorporating BL into the curriculum as an effici ent teaching strategy for easy teaching and learning of the Igbo language.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Igbo, Integration, Teaching, and L
earning.

Introduction

Languag
e learning begins at birth and continues throughout life. Children learn language with family me mbers and friends. They acquire the language that is being used around them as long as they are regularly interacting with speakers of those languages. The use of language, especially indigeno us languages, is crucial for cultural preservation. In his view, Galadanci (2025) submits that it f osters emotional connection to learning, promotes self-esteem, and facilitates the internalizatio n of cultural values and social norms. This is why the National Policy on Education clearly stipu lates that the language of the immediate environment should be used as the medium of instructi on from early childhood through primary three (3). Students learn language as they communicat e through thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Language learning is the process through which humans learn to utilize language to execute cognitive and social activities (Odumuh, 2021). It is the vehicle for implementing a specific society's curriculum in the classroom context. Languag e teaching and learning, according to Benhadj (2021), has become simpler, faster, and more fun than previously, due to the vast array of ICT-enabled facilities such as films, audiobooks, intera ctive whiteboards, educational apps, and so on. As web-based technologies have been incorpor ated into the teaching and learning process, blended learning has drawn more and more attentio n, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, which disrupted the global economy, education, and lifestyles. Its impact on the academic world was devastating, particularly in deve loping countries like Nigeria. The idea and application of blended learning are highlighted by th e use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in education.

Concept of Blended Learning

T
he educational approach known as blended learning, or hybrid learning, deliberately blends trad itional in-person instruction with online learning materials and opportunities for interaction. Ac cording to Graham (2013), it is the combination of virtual and in-person instruction. The formal word developed in the late 1990s, but its origins can be traced back to Sir Isaac Pitman's corresp ondence courses in the 1840s. From the early days of computer-based training in the 1960s and

1970s to the emergence of the internet and Learning Management Systems (LMS) in the 1990s and 2000s, there has been a substantial impact of technical breakthroughs.

Tawil (2018) describes blended learning as the combination of face-to-face teaching and computer-assisted learning in one learning environment. It is also envisioned as a structured educational program in which students study in part through online instruction and information delivery, giving them control over elements like pace, location, scheduling, and path. Blended learning, combining traditional classroom instruction with online resources, offers a promising approach to enhance Igbo language teaching and learning. The implementation of blended learning in education can facilitate the generation of captivating, customized, and inclusive learning environments, thereby enhancing student accomplishments and fostering the conservation and propagation of the Igbo language. Furthermore, a portion of their education takes place in a physically supervised environment away from home. In Anochirionye's (2023) assertion, the incorporation of blended learning into Igbo language teaching signifies a transformation in linguistic instruction, offering a multifaceted, adaptable, and student-focused pedagogical landscape. The blended learning approach serves as an effective interface between web-based and face-to-face teaching and learning of language skills. Ahmad (2021) asserts that a learner can learn language skills effectively by interacting with the dynamic instructors in a face-to-face environment and by repeatedly using online audio-video learning resources at his convenient time. The blended learning approach increases learners' active involvement and engagement in the whole process of learning language skills. The effectiveness of blended learning is highly dependent on closer cooperation between the administration, teachers, and IT staff—all of whom are essential to creating a supportive language learning environment. Another fundamental variable regarding blended learning efficiency is the students' computer literacy skills, according to Hong and Samimy (2010). They assert that, based on their study, students with high computer skills proficiency were positive about computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and motivated about blended learning. It is always necessary for students to possess basic computer skills prior to being initiated in a blended learning course. Accordingly, language teachers must make sure that technology and internet resources are completely included in the classroom (Anochirionye, 2023). The reason behind this is because technology has made in-person courses more engaging. Blended learning continues to evolve with advancements in technology, with a growing emphasis on digital learning perspectives within the field.

Inclusion of technology into language teaching and learning. To enhance language teaching and learning, the following WebCT tools can be included in the teaching and learning of language:

- Google Classroom: With the development of contemporary technology and online word processors such as Google Docs, teachers can now evaluate students' work and make the required revisions in real time. This suggests that it is possible to oversee the students' work and update their Igbo writing in real time. One of Google Classroom's main functions, according to Goodnews (2021), is that it gives students a single point of access to discussion threads and assigned work, enabling them to work together remotely on the same projects at the same time.

- The Content module: lessons are provided to pupils by the subject module. If the student clicks on the page name to view the table of contents, it remains visible while being minimized on the left. Links to pertinent exercises and resources may be included on each lesson page. It provides instant access to a vocabulary, quiz, self-assessments, index, mail, chat, and conversation. It provides various video snippets that support the course content (Safira, Wirza, Kristanti & Shadrina, 2024).

- Communication Tools: WebCT provides both synchronous and asynchronous commun ication tools. When learning a language, communication between the instructor and th e students is crucial. The ability to communicate is the primary goal of language acquis ition, according to Onuoha and Nwana (2025). Discussion boards and chat are two com munication tools that can be used to help accomplish this goal. These resources encour age students to use the target language more freely and enhance their written communic ation skills.
- *Multimedia Tools*: multimedia tools include materials such as video lessons, animated d ialogues, podcasts etc. It is useful in teaching listening and speaking skills, it improves p ronunciation, and exposes learners to authentic language use (Galadanci, 2025).
- Calendar: the teacher can post announcements about the students' online activities on t he calendar, which serves as a conduit between the two parties. By completing the exer cises and self-assessments in the WebCT virtual learning environment, they can pick up new vocabulary. The teacher's role in this setting will be that of a facilitator as they bro wse the internet and talk with their peers about their thoughts on the subject.
- Artificial Intelligence: Chatbots, virtual assistants, and language models are examples o f AI-powered tools that can offer instant translation, individualized learning experience s, and language practice. Additionally, they can help create educational resources and materials in Igbo. For instance, AI chatbots can practice conversation with learners whi le offering real-time feedback and individualized instruction. Additionally, it can make it simpler for learners to comprehend and communicate by facilitating translation betwe en Igbo and other languages (Nwankwegu, 2021).

Integrating Blended learning into Igbo Class: opportunities and Challenges

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2012 class ified the Igbo language as one of the endangered languages that may go extinct in the near futur e if something is not done to rescue the language. Many factors have been blamed for the gradua l death of the language. Udoye (2019) mentions, among other things, the unacceptability of the l anguage by the younger generation. This is mainly because many Igbo parents preferred their c hildren to have mastery of the English language at the earliest possible opportunity, instead of the Igbo language. The author observes that students cultivate the nonchalant attitude towards t he learning of the Igbo language, especially at the secondary school level. It is therefore necessa ry to promote Igbo teaching by integrating technology, which has profoundly impacted the you nger generations, influencing how they learn, communicate, and interact with the world. Blende d learning, when integrated into an Igbo language class, can significantly enhance student enga gement and learning outcomes by combining the strengths of face-to-face and online learning methods. This approach leverages technology to provide personalized learning experiences, acc ess to diverse resources, and opportunities for interactive practice, ultimately boosting motivati on and making the Igbo language more accessible and enjoyable. In the digital age, Nwankwegu (2021) opines that technology offers unprecedented opportunities for the develop ment and preservation of endangered languages, including Igbo. The author further opines that digital technology can facilitate the creation and dissemination of language resources, making t hem more accessible to a wider audience. It is possible to create a vibrant and sustainable ecosy stem for the Igbo language and ensure its continued relevance and vitality in the modern world by harnessing the power of digital technology.

Opportunities of BL in Igbo Language Teaching and Learning Blended l earning forms a new style of learning that is rich with advantages that can help students to better learning practices if managed properly. The following are some of the opportunities of BL in Ig bo class: **Enhanced Accessibility**: By en abling students to study Igbo regardless of time or place constraints, Alaoma (2021) opines that

online tools and platforms can promote diversity and inclusivity. With their internet-connected gadgets, students may access a vast array of educational materials while remaining comfortable and secure in their homes or classrooms. **Expanded Learning Resources**: BL provides acce ss to a wealth of digital resources, including online textbooks, interactive exercises, audio recor dings, and videos, enriching the learning experience and making the process more interactive a nd engaging for students. **Increased Student Motivation**: Blended learning can increas e student motivation and foster a more pleasant learning environment by introducing interactive and engaging aspects. This will foster a deeper understanding of Igbo language and culture. The y are given the chance to review the content that they find most challenging. Students have addit ional time to catch up on the classes they may have missed.

Personalized Learning: Blended learning enables educators to tailor the learning experience to individual student needs and preferences. Teachers can now personalize lessons t o fit each student's unique needs, strengths, and learning styles. This personalization can lead to deeper understanding and improved learning outcomes (Akintunde, 2020).

Challenges Unless successfully planned and executed, blended learning could have challenges, especially in techni cal resources or tools with which the blended learning experience is delivered here in Nigeria. T he following are challenges of blended learning:

1. **Infrastructure and Technology**

Limited Internet Access: The major issue is the lack of Igbo-specific digital resources and tool s, such as language learning apps, online courses, and Igbo content on platforms like Wikipedia (Asogwa and Asogwa 2014). This makes it difficult for Igbo speakers and learners to engage wi th the language in the digital realm. Many students lack r eliable internet access and the necessary hardware, like computers, tablets, etc., in their classroo m. That is why incorporating this learning strategy depends on technological feasibility; withou t it, this strategy is unachievable. **Power Supply Issues:** Erratic or insuf ficient power supply is a major hurdle, impacting the ability to use technology effectively, espec ially in rural areas. **Device Availability:** Many potential learners may not have access to the necessary devices, such as smartphones, tablets, or computers, which are esse ntial for utilizing digital language learning tools.

Technical Literacy: Igbo language instructors do not utilize the proper technology resources when instructing the language, nor do they apply tactics that will s park pupils' enthusiasm in studying it (Nwana, 2023). This, according to Nwankwegu (2021), is because most teachers are not knowledgeable enough in the field of technology. Some individu als, especially older generations, may find it challenging to navigate and use digital platforms ef fectively.

2. **Inadequate Training:** Since blended learning presumes that teachers and students are quite proficient with computers, training is crucial. Anyone who lacks sufficient computer abilities is likely to find BL models difficult to use. It is also possible that educators who have never taught online lack the abilities needed to do so successfully. That is to say, inadequate training of teach ers and students can affect blended learning negatively.

Recommendations T o effectively integrate blended learning into language teaching, the following steps can be taken

1. Incorporate blended learning into the Igbo language curriculum: Curriculum designers should create a curriculum that carefully balances in-person and online learning activitie s to meet learning goals. In addition to encouraging a deeper comprehension of the Igbo

language, this method leverages digital resources and tools to make learning more acces sible, interactive, and student-centered.

2. Develop digital resources: Igbo language experts should create interactive multimedia p ackages, online exercises, and audio-visual materials to enhance the teaching and learni ng of the Igbo language, especially for repetitive practice. Eze (2023) posits that efforts have been made to introduce reforms in the education system by way of introducing IC T-based education. The Igbo language should not be left out. They should develop simul ations that allow students to practice language skills in realistic contexts.
3. Digital literacy training: Igbo language teachers should be equipped with the necessary ICT skills and provide ongoing professional development to effectively integrate techno logy into teaching and learning. Proprietors of schools, on the other hand, should ensure that learners have the required computer skills before introducing blended learning in th e classroom (Oyelami, 2008).
4. Provide digital gadgets: Ensure all students have access to technology, including compu ters, tablets, and internet connectivity. The government should provide the appropriate t echnological gadgets to schools or implement initiatives to provide low-cost or subsidiz ed devices specifically for educational and language learning purposes to enhance the te aching and learning of the Igbo language. They should also establish community interne t centers with subsidized or free access for educational purposes.
5. Incorporate blended learning models: Educators should consider using flipped classroo m models, where students learn theoretical materials online and then engage in practical activities during class time.
6. Focus on cultural content: integrate Igbo culture and heritage into the curriculum to crea te a meaningful and relevant learning experience.

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