

INFLUENCE OF LEARNING ENGLISH ON IDENTITY SWITCH AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN OWERRI ZONE, IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigated the influence of learning English on identity switch among senior secondary school students in Owerri zone, Imo State Nigeria. Data for the study were collected by means of a structured and pre-tested questionnaire based on Likert 5-point ratings. The data were analyzed by using Mann-Whitney method of estimating mean scores. Results showed that students are more elated using English in their communications than Igbo, their first language (L1). Findings showed that the influence of English on the cultural identity of the respondents is such that many feel uncomfortable in the midst of their compatriots who do not speak English. Finally, the study demonstrated that Students learning English in Owerri zone switch their identities to suit the target language. The study recommended that productive bilingualism can serve as an educational objective, where teachers may simultaneously cultivate learners' intrinsic interest, and positive attitudes and beliefs associated with the target language and culture on one hand, and the native language (Igbo) and culture on the other hand.*

KEYWORDS: identity, second language, learning, culture, ethnicity

INTRODUCTION

Learning an additional language, its associated experiences and backgrounds on the part of the learners are as intriguing as language itself. The processes required have been conceptualized in various ways since the establishment of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), the field of Applied Linguistics and Sociolinguistic studies. This is expected because possession of language is a cherished asset. According to Denham & Lobeck (2013:2), "Language is what makes us human and we all seem to be naturally curious about it". In view of this, Amadi & Agena (2015:35) opined that "Language is man's major vehicle for self expression and a mark of his personal and group identity". They further asserted that: "It is man's integral component and sometimes, a product of culture". This indicates that the language of a person can affect his culture and identity in different ways.

Cakir (2006:158) opines that to communicate internationally involves communicating interculturally as well, which probably leads us to encounter factors of cultural differences. Furthermore, he asserts that language is a social and cultural phenomenon and its understanding involves not only knowledge of grammar rules, phonology and lexis but also certain features and characteristics of the target culture. According to Cakir (2006:158):

The use of language in general is related to social and cultural values, language is considered to be a social and cultural phenomenon. Since every culture has its own cultural norms for conversation and these norms differ from one culture to another, some of the norms can be completely different and conflict with other cultures/norms. Consequently, communication problems may arise among speakers who do not know or share the norms of other culture. To solve the communication problems in the target language in the EFL classrooms, the learners need to learn the target culture within the syllabus, and the teachers should be sensitive to the learner's fragility so as not to cause them to lose their motivation.

As Cakir, (2006:158) noted; "in some cases, learning about the target culture is taken as a threat to the native values and the importance of linguistically relevant information is neglected". This assertion falls in line with the researcher's line of thought about language and culture as an indivisible unit. The learning of a language is by implication, the acquisition of that language's culture, which definitely affects the learners identity in one way or the other; positively or negatively.

In the opinion of Selinker (1972:12), "Second language learning is a gradual process that involves a progression from the learner's total being towards the attainment of an entirely different culture, identity and language". This progression takes some conscious steps on the part of the learner; as he struggles to adjust not just in the target language use, but also in incorporating its culture and identity during usage.

Regardless of the purposes for learning a second language, learners usually form different identities while learning the target language. This suggests that identity formation is a process and takes its toll on the learner as he/she tries to overcome the difficulties of understanding the target language. In the words of, Wenger (2000: 239)

An identity is not an abstract idea or a label, such as title, an ethnic category, or a personality trait. It is a lived experience of belonging (or not belonging). A strong identity involves deep connections with others through shared histories and experiences, reciprocity, affection and mutual commitments.

The above assertion indicates that learning and understanding a second language expose the learner to a construction of new identities with various dimensions and complexities. Since the functions of language rests on purposeful communication, and since learning and understanding a new language involves how to use words, interpret rules and gain knowledge (about a language) in order to communicate effectively with users of that same language, when a second language learner uses the target language to communicate, it is necessary that he should be accepted and approved by the speakers of that language. This 'acceptance' means so much to the learner as it enhances his confidence, performance and massages his self-esteem. This understanding of language use sees language not only as a body of knowledge to be learnt but also as a social practice (Kramsch, 2002:19).

Understanding therefore, the nature of the relationship between language, culture and identity formation of the learner, is central in facilitating the process of learning a second language. Elmes (2013:1), opines that:

With first language acquisition; learners are immersed in their own culture, connections between language and culture may not come to bear. But for foreign or second language learners, where true cultural intricacies and understanding are situated well beyond the textbook, an understanding of language assumes a different form.

In accordance with this, Spackman (2009:2) suggests that "learning a second language requires the learner to absorb the culture of the second language as well". Thus, the learning of a new language must be linked with the learning of that language culture as well. Based on the understanding above, language is viewed as an entity that cannot be separated from the identity of the users. Language here embodies all an individual does to put meaning across to others. It complements and completes humans. In the process of learning a Second Language, identity switch cannot be ruled out; because identity itself is not a stable variable and could switch based on situations and times (Onuh, 2019:97).

This research therefore, was focused on the influence of learning English as a Second Language on identity switch among Senior Secondary School Students in Owerri Zone, Imo State, Nigeria.

LITERATURE/THEORITICAL UNDERPINNING

Denhem & Lobeck (2013:354) opine that there is clearly a link between language, culture and how humans perceive the world. They went further to ascertain that many linguists, philosophers and anthropologists have often wondered how language influences culture or how culture influences language. In other words, the question of which determines the other poses a puzzle among linguists. According to them also, the claim by Whorf based on his study of several languages, that "the language of a culture provides a window into how the members of that

culture think” is indicative of the fact that language share an inextricable relationship with culture, such that each complements the other.

According to Denhem & Lobeck (Ibid: 354) “the general idea that language and culture influence each other is called “linguistic relatively”. They exemplified this idea by comparing the use of sexist language in some cultures to determine a perception of the members of such cultures. They suggest that using a gender neutral language or terms “militate against sexism in culture”.

This idea tallies with the researcher’s idea of language use in relation to culture especially in Nigeria where this work is based.

As a multi-language country, Nigeria has a wide range of indigenous languages at its doorstep. Each of these indigenous languages represents one ethnic group or another. Nigeria therefore uses the English language at the second language capacity and as a national language. The prominence given to the English language based on its global stance, economic value and status symbol, places it at a prestigious and a most sort after language. English Language therefore, is seen as an identity marker in Nigeria. With this realization, identity switch is popularized among Nigerians (especially among the young people of the Igbo race, making up the South-East Nigeria). Here, it is believed that people switch identities each time they switch languages. This switch is easily felt in the mode of dressing, composure and manner of interaction. English language use among the Igbo people is a social and identity marker. People put their identities as those belonging to the elitist class (literates) when they use English language to communicate. It serves as a medium for class stratification and as a social class determiner.

To this end, Lee (2008) succinctly declares that “Multiple identities seem to be fostered through ownership of multiple languages; allowing participants to switch and mask their identities depending on the changing contexts”.

Li (2007:259) discusses the relationship between language and identity by discerning the issues why bilingual writers decide to write in their second languages. Issues such as “writer as a migrant”, “double belonging, betrayed”, “awkward betweenness”, and reconciliation of languages and identities were harnessed. In his work, Li argues that bilingual writers are better described as “souls in exile” in the sense that such writers engage in “painstaking struggles in order to reach reconciliation between their first and second languages and to create an enriched self in writing”. Li (2007:260) suggests that those bilingual writers who have to write in foreign languages (not one that they were raised in) who try to recount their life experiences in the stories they create using a foreign language and who are mostly immigrants and refugees pass through so much in the process of identity construction’. Li states:

I am particularly interested in bilingual writers whom I refer to as souls in exile in this article, and who in most cases, are immigrants

and refugees. To this group of writers, being bilingual means more than merely being able to speak two languages. In their attempts to navigate between languages and social contexts associated with these languages, they have raised important questions regarding identity construction for bilingual beings.

Accordingly, his argument as in above, posits the fact that “being a soul in exile is the reality which many bilinguals have to live with as a result of their state of being, although their ultimate goal may be to become a global soul; in other words to be empowered by both languages and to be able to claim multiple identities”. To this end his argument bothers on the fact that an individual being bred in two different cultures and using two languages most often feel the “doubleness of identities” when they write (Li, 2007:266). This feeling affects their sense of belonging, which is complicated by the incessant and reverse doublings. Consequently, a feeling of uncertainty, (belonging and not belonging) usually caves in and the pain of losing one’s mother tongue is enormously felt.

Language is, thus, seen as a tool for expressing culture; a people’s culture can be inferred from their language. It is perhaps safe to argue that any ethnic group in Nigeria for instance could be easily identified through the language they speak. Language, therefore, is culture bound and could also form an identity marker of speech communities.

Nigeria is a linguistically diverse region with different ethnic groupings. Different scholars put the number of indigenous languages in Nigeria at between 250 and 450. Most of these languages are not mutually intelligible, especially in the South-South region where every kilometer means a difference in language. In this regard, anyone who cannot use English as a medium of communication is looked upon as an illiterate. As such, everyone strives to speak English; or at least a variety that one can lay hands on. Most private and even government schools do not allow their students to speak their local languages while in school and even the teachers in some private schools are prohibited from speaking indigenous languages while in school as well. With this, English language is promoted in almost every sphere of life. In Nigeria today, the English language is the official language.

Umunnakwe (1999:54) commenting on the use of English in Nigeria, attributed its popularity to the multi-lingual situation as obtained in the country. She opines that:

There are about four hundred (400) and more languages spoken by the Nigerian people. The problem of which language to choose among many and the objective criteria for this choice have made it difficult for any of the local languages to emerge as an acceptable alternative of English.

As Cakir, (2006:158) noted; “in some cases, learning about the target culture is taken as a threat to the native values and the importance of linguistically relevant information is neglected”. This assertion falls in line with the researcher’s line of thought about language and culture as an indivisible unit. The learning of a language is by implication, the acquisition of that language’s culture, which definitely affects the learners identity in one way or the other; positively or negatively. And to this, Cakir (Ibid) emphasized that it is indeed possible that learners can feel alienation in the process of learning a foreign language, from people in their home culture, the target culture and from themselves. He therefore suggests that teachers need to be sensitive to the fragility of learners by using techniques that promote cultural understanding.

In the views of Spackman (2009) culture is experienced through language because language is inseparable from culture. And because of this, learning a second language requires learning the linguistic aspects of the target culture. Thus, he posits that “second language acquisition is second culture acquisition”. To a large extent, this assertion is correct if we consider the fact that learning a second language is mostly a social function of language in use, especially in the spoken aspect, even if the learner is studying outside the target language culture. With the case of English in Nigeria as a whole and in Imo State as in particular, the learners study the target language (English) in formal settings (schools), students are taught using the language they are not overtly competent in and this results to inadequately of usage in communication; especially at the early stage.

Spackman concluded by discussing Brown’s Optimal Distance Model in which Brown cited acculturation, rather than age as being the major factor defining the critical period. According to this Model, Brown (1980, 2007) suggested that second language learners are optimally suited to learn the second language when certain conditions of acculturation are met. The impact of the optimal period is specifically felt when learners are in their third stage of acculturation. At this stage, learners see themselves as outside of both their native culture and their second culture. Interestingly, it is suspected that this assertion is the case in Imo State where Igbo learners of English are in jeopardy, at the risk of losing their cultural heritage and identity. The use of Igbo language is gradually fading away amongst these learners; while they tenaciously cling to the English language in which they are not competent either.

A second language or a foreign language is not the learner’s first encounter with language. It is assumed that a second language learner (SL₂) has acquired a mother tongue (MT) native language or first language (L₁). Second language or the learning of a target language refers to a learned language after the acquisition of the native language.

A second language learner therefore seeks acceptance into the language use and also approval from the natives. This suggests also that, learning a second language involves learning its culture and identity.

The observations about the global stance towards the English language and the benefits of learning it are strongly reflected in the participants used in this study. When a person, in a bid to learn successfully, surrenders greater parts of his own indigenous language and culture which are part of his socio-cultural identity, there is a conflict between both cultures, and this conflict usually leaves the learner in an identity struggle; neither belonging here nor there. This is because there is a misplaced language priority which has made mastery of a second language difficult for second language learners.

In accordance to this, Eka (2000:33) posits that culture is “the totality of a people’s way of life, handed down from generation to generation”. He argues further, that the understanding of a culture and its people are enhanced by the knowledge of their language which is a viable tool for communication and which strengthens a people’s culture with the passage of time. With this, he further posits that culture depends on language for its sustenance from one generation to another; as the extinction of a language could suggest also, the extinction of that language’s culture.

METHODOLOGY

Study Area

The study was carried out in Owerri zone, Imo State, Nigeria. Imo State is located in the South-East zone of Nigeria. The native language of the people of Imo state is Igbo. The State lies between latitudes 5°40’ N and 6°08’ N of the equator and longitude 6°14’ E and 7°02’ E of the Greenwich Meridian.

The state has three senatorial zones (Owerri, Okigwe and Orlu). These divisions are for political and administrative purposes only.

Study Design

The study was a descriptive, cross-sectional questionnaire-based survey study. To achieve the research goal of investigating the extent to which the learning of English as a Second Language has influence identity switch among Secondary School Students in Owerri Zone, Imo State, Nigeria.

Sampling technique

This research based its study on the hypothesis that Learning of English as a second language does not affect the cultural identity of senior secondary school students in Owerri zone, Imo State.

This study made use of five hundred and forty (540) randomly selected respondents who are, senior secondary (SS) students in Owerri zone area of Imo State, and whose ages are between 13-16 years old. All the respondents have the Igbo language as their first language (L₁). The criteria for selecting respondents from senior secondary is the fact that the senior secondary level

is made up of mostly teenagers, a critical age at which they begin to develop their psyche on issues of identity. According to Meece & Daniels (2008:68), the formation and development of self-identity and language at an adolescent age are confirmed.

Study data collection instrument

Data for the study were collected by means of a structured and pre-tested questionnaire developed by the researcher and pre-tested using two (2) Secondary School Students that are non-study schools in Imo state, Nigeria. The questionnaire was written in English language and contained a brief introduction explaining the purpose of the study.

Data collection

Quantitative data were obtained from a questionnaire completed by some senior secondary school students in Owerri zone, using the Likert five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree (SD); 5 = strongly agree (SA)). Fifty (50) questionnaires were distributed to each of the following secondary schools ; Logara High School, Ngor- Okpala, St. Patrick Secondary School, Ogbe Ahiara, Ahiazu Mbaise, Emmanuel College, Owerri Municipal, Comprehensive Secondary School, Obinze, Community Secondary School, Mbieri Mbaitoli, Amakohia Secondary School, Ikeduru, Ohaji High School, Mgbirichi, Ohaji/Egbema, Obazu Girls' Secondary School, Owerri Girls' Secondary School, Holy Ghost College, Owerri, and Girls' Secondary School, Akwakuma. Out of the 550 questionnaires distributed, 540 were returned by the respondents. The nature of the questions revolved around why the students were learning English, what it meant to them, what were the motivation mechanisms that they used to learn a second language, does learning of English there way of life, culture and identity.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by using Mann-Whitney method of estimating mean scores.

Mean score (\bar{x}) = $(n \times 1) + (n \times 2) + (n \times 3) + (n \times 4) + (n \times 5)/N$.

Where; n = number of respondents that selected a given response.

1,2,3,4,5 = Likert 5-point ratings.

N = overall total respondents.

Percentages were generated by using the formula;

$$\text{Percentage (\%)} = \frac{\text{Number of respondents}}{\text{Total respondents}} \times \frac{100}{1}$$

Onuh and Igwemma (2007)

The mean score of 2.5 was used as a decision point for the research questions to either reject (R) or accept (A) the opinions when below or above 2.5, respectively.

RESULTS /FINDINGS

Results of the analysis carried out on the data generated from the 540 returned questionnaires are presented in the Table 1.

Table 1: Number of respondents in the 5-point Likert scale on the Attitude of sampled Secondary School Students to learning English as a second language.

Question Items	Response					Total (N)	\bar{x}	%/ Decision
	SD 1	D 2	UN 3	A 4	SA 5			
1).I feel comfortable when using English than Igbo	10 (1.85)	2 (0.37)	25 (4.62)	243 (45.0)	260 (48.14)	540	4.37	Agreed (99.98)
2).I feel uncomfortable when I hear Igbo people speaking to others in English	230 (42.59)	238 (44.07)	33 (6.11)	20 (3.70)	19 (3.51)	540	1.81	Disagreed (99.98)
3).I feel uneasy when speaking English	260 (48.14)	210 (38.88)	42 (7.77)	16 (2.96)	12 (2.22)	540	1.72	Disagreed (99.97)
4).When using English, I do not feel that I am an Igbo-Nigerian any more	6 (1.11)	12 (2.22)	65 (12.03)	237 (43.88)	220 (40.74)	540	3.95	Agreed (99.98)
5).If I use English, my status is raised in the society	7 (1.29)	3 (0.55)	50 (9.25)	235 (43.51)	245 (45.37)	540	4.30	Agreed (99.97)
6).The command of English is very helpful in understanding foreigners and their cultures	5 (0.92)	11 (2.03)	32 (5.92)	235 (43.51)	257 (47.59)	540	4.34	Agreed (99.97)
7).English is a symbol of an educated person	5 (0.92)	13 (2.40)	51 (9.44)	233 (43.14)	238 (44.07)	540	4.27	Agreed (99.97)
8).I wish I could speak fluent and accurate English	10 (1.85)	2 (0.37)	30 (5.55)	243 (45.0)	255 (47.22)	540	4.35	Agreed (99.99)

Source: Study Data (2018). Values in brackets are percentages (%). 1=Strongly Disagree (SA), 2=Disagree (D), 3=Unsure (UN), 4=Agreed (A), 5=Strongly Agreed (SA)

DISCUSSION

The Table 1 above presented the scores of respondents to the question items that dwell on the attitude of the English learners towards the language. It was observed that 260 (48.14%) of the total respondents strongly-agreed to the question item 1; *'I feel comfortable when using English than Igbo'*. Similarly, 243 (45.0%) of the total respondents agreed to the question in item 1. But, 2 (0.37%) and 10 (1.85%) of the total respondents, respectively, disagreed and strongly-disagreed, while 25 (4.62%) of the total respondents were unsure with the question item 1.

However, the mean score of 4.37 recorded in the question item 1 indicates that majority of the students were in agreement with the question item 1.

This showed that the students are more comfortable when they are using English to make their expression than using Igbo language. This attitude towards English is similar to when English learners are motivated on the basis of feeling accomplished when they can speak the language fluently. The comfortable attitude of people who use English against Igbo language is based on superiority complex, just to escape from the stigma of being regarded as a 'local person' or an un-educated person, if he/she uses Igbo language in the public.

It is a simple fact that any person who develops this type of attitude will not be interested in imbibing the socio-cultural identities and values of his/her first language (Igbo). The influence of English learning on the socio-cultural identity of Igbos of Nigeria is such that some people even feel uncomfortable when they are in the mist of those who do not speak English. This is evidenced from the response gotten from the question item 2; *'I feel uncomfortable when I hear Igbo people speaking to others in English'*. It is expected that respondents will agree to this assertion, at least to show their love for their first language (Igbo).

However, results as presented in the Table 1 showed that 238 (44.07%), and 230 (42.59%) of the total respondents, respectively, disagreed and strongly-disagreed to the question item 2. Only 20 (3.70%), and 19 (3.51%) of the total respondents, respectively, agreed and strongly-agreed to the question item 2, while 33 (6.11%) of the total respondents were indifferent. The mean score of 1.81 recorded in the question item 2 is a strong indication that majority of the students will be unable to pay attention to any speaker that does not address them in English language.

Similar to the above observation is when the respondents were asked to give their opinion on the question item 3; *I feel uneasy when speaking English'*. Results presented in the Table 1 showed that 210 (38.88%), and 260 (48.14%) of the total respondents, respectively, disagreed and strongly-disagreed with the question in item 3, while only 16 (2.96%), and 12 (2.22%) of the total respondents, respectively, agreed and strongly-agreed. Number of respondents that were indifferent to the question item 3 represent 42 (7.77%). The mean score recorded in the question item 3 is 1.72 (Table 1). This observation indicates that students feel proud being associated with the class of people who use English as their first language. This attitude suggests that English learners can do anything, including rejecting their first language and its socio-cultural values, in order to acquire proficiency in the use of English language. Ellis (2008), claims that one of the ways social settings can influence L₂ acquisition is through affecting learners' attitudes. Learners take different attitudes towards "the target language, target-language speakers, the target-language culture, the social value of learning the L₂, particular uses of the target language, and themselves as members of their own culture" (p. 287).

Responding to the question item 4; '*When using English, I do not feel that I am an Igbo-Nigerian anymore*', it was observed that 237 (43.88%), and 220 (40.74%) of the total respondents, respectively, agreed and strongly-agreed to it. The number of respondents that disagreed to the question item 4 represents 12 (2.22%) of the total respondents, while 6 (1.11%) strongly disagreed with it. On the other hand, 65 (12.03%) of the total respondents were unsure about the question item 4. The mean score of 3.95 recorded in the question item 4 indicates that majority of the students feel that using English language perhaps makes them an English person, and no more a Nigerian, let alone an Igbo person. This observation is manifested in majority of Igbo people who would want to change their voices or intonation when speaking English.

This is all a way of mimicking the identity of the English to the detriment of the learners' first language and its socio-cultural values. Sequel to the above observation is the response that accompanied the question item 5; '*If I use English, my status is raised in the society*'. From the Table 1 above, it was noticed that 235 (43.51%), and 245 (45.37%) of the total respondents, respectively, agreed and strongly-agreed to the assertion that their status is raised in the society when they use English language in their communications. However, only 3 (0.55%), and 7 (1.29%) of the total respondents, respectively, disagreed and strongly-disagreed to the assertion, while 50 (9.25%) of the respondents were unsure with the assertion. The mean score of 4.34 recorded in this question item 5 significantly explains the assumed self accomplishment of the students who learn English language, when they are able to make their expressions freely in English language. Looking at the number of respondents who agreed or strongly-agreed to the question item 5, it indicates that students feel elevated among their colleagues if they can fluently express themselves in English.

This is evidenced by the appointment of school officers like school senior prefect, class prefect, library prefect etc, by the school authorities, for the smooth running the school programmes. These appointments are usually given to students who can address their fellow students very fluently in English language. The favoured appointees usually see themselves as the best among equals in English, and would always strive to maintain that status, even if it means banning the use of native language as means of communication between students in their school.

The negative influence such attitude of adopting English as language of communication against Igbo can be imagined. Students who studied under such an environment will find it difficult to get used to the socio-cultural values of their first language. Gardner (1979, cited in Skehan 1993) suggests that expectations regarding bilingualism, combined with attitudes towards the target language and its culture, form the basis of an individual's attitude towards language learning.

The attitude of learners towards English is also premised on their belief in the question item 6 that; '*The command of English is very helpful in understanding foreigner and their culture*'. The Table 1 presented the opinions of the respondents which showed that 235 (43.51%), and 257 (47.59%) of the respondents agreed and strongly-agreed, respectively, to the assertion. But 11

(2.03%), and 5 (0.92%) of the total respondents disagreed and strongly-disagreed, respectively, to the assertion, while only 32 (5.92%) of the respondents were unsure about the assertion. With the mean score of 4.34 recorded in the question item 6, it is an indication that students' attitude towards English is to acquire it, so as to be able to understand and communicate boldly to foreigners.

This attitude is made possible because of the level of technological advancements in the world, where one has the privilege of communicating with other people, including foreigners, in far away areas from his/her native home. Since such conversations are rarely done in the native language (Igbo), especially with foreigners, the tendency of the user of English as a second language imitating the identity of the second language is high.

The question item 7 that; '*English is a symbol of an educated person*' was evaluated among the attitudes toward English. Opinions of the respondents as presented in the Table 1 above showed that 233 (43.14%), and 238 (44.07%) of the total respondents, respectively, agreed and strongly-agreed to the assertion. However, 13 (2.40%), and 5 (0.92%) of the total respondents disagreed and strongly-disagreed, respectively, to the assertion, while 51 (9.44%) of the respondents were unsure with it. The mean score of 4.27 recorded in the question item 7 is clear indication that majority of the respondents (students) feel highly that once you can use and command English language fluently, automatically you are qualified as an educated person. To this effect, English learners will endeavour to acquire the language with its attendant identity and cultural features. This attitude is usually manifested whenever students are being addressed in Igbo (the native language), where they erroneously assume that the person addressing them in the native language is not educated. Even in village gatherings, any person who uses big vocabularies before his/her native people is usually assumed to be an educated person against any person who may choose to speak to them in the native language. The danger in this is its negative influence on the socio-cultural identity of the English learners. The people who want to mimic the English man in his way of using his own native language (English) will end up switching to the second language identity and culture, so as to continue to remain relevance among their colleagues as people who interact with the English man.

Following the above observation is the question item 8 dealing on; '*I wish I could speak fluent and accurate English*'. Opinions of the respondents presented in the Table 1 showed that 243 (45.0%), and 255 (47.22%) of the total respondents agreed and strongly-agreed, respectively, to the assertion, while 2 (0.37%), and 10 (1.85%) of the total respondents disagreed and strongly-disagreed, respectively, to the assertion. But only 30 (5.55%) of the respondents were unsure with the assertion. The question item 8 recorded a mean score of 4.35 (Table 1). This observation indicates that majority of the students wish to be fluent and have good accurate command of English language. This is as a result of the notion already built in the students that, ability to use English in the society is a mark of personality symbol and a measure of how educated one is. With this attitude, students will always make more efforts to acquire English language than they

will give to learning their first language and its values. According to William, (1994: 77); “the learning of a foreign language involves far more than simply learning skills, or a system of rules, or a grammar; it involves an alteration in self-image, the adoption of new social and cultural behaviors and ways of being, and therefore has a significant impact on the social nature of the learner”.

IMPLICATION TO RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

This research advocates that parents and Igbo society should de-emphasize the struggle and zeal for English language use, especially among teenagers and even toddlers who could barely distinguish the sounds of their own mother tongue. In as much as the English language is a world class language, with all its advantages dangling in our faces, the Igbo should recall that our own mother tongue should not be allowed to go into extinction. It is disheartening that most of our young ones cannot communicate in or understand Igbo language even when they live here in Imo State. What then could such group of children understand about Igbo cultural background; and what kind of identity formation could they operate in, having noted also that to build a strong personality and identity in one’s culture, one has to operate in the language of that culture? Based on this, the following recommendations are made;

1. Productive bilingualism can serve as an educational objective. To this, teachers may simultaneously cultivate learners’ intrinsic interest, and positive attitudes and beliefs associated with the target language and culture on the one hand, and the native language (Igbo) and culture on the other. A proper integration of the two will lead to productive changes.
2. Learners’ immediate, short-term interests such as elevating their status through learning English language should be carefully monitored and channeled to their long-term goals so as to avoid possible negative effect on learners’ identity changes.

CONCLUSION

The learning of English as a second language by secondary School Students in Owerri Zone, Imo State has seriously affected their attitude towards their cultural identity as Igbo people. This is expressed by their resentment in Igbo values and cultures which include Igbo language, as revealed by the current study. This behavior is expected as learners of foreign language because, according to Chee (2003:47), learners’ identities impact “the need, the desire and the opportunities to receive input and practice the target language (TL)”. This suggestion is fully observed in this study as it has been exposed that Students learning English as Second Language in Imo State switch their identities to succumb to pressures from the society to learn the target language.

Future Research

The current study was limited to Secondary School Students in Owerri Zone of Imo State, Nigeria. It is necessary that this research should be extended to other zones in Imo State, and extension to other States that make up the Igbo nation (South-East) of Nigeria. Findings from the studies will serve as data for making educational curriculum policy.

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