

The use of WhatsApp as a collaborative E-learning tool for the teaching and learning of Igbo language as a second language

Ugwoke Maureen Nkechinyere

Igbo Department, Yusuf Maitam Sule, Federal University of Education, Kano

Abstract

In today's digital age, WhatsApp has become one of the most widely used social media platforms for educational communication and collaboration. Its instant messaging features, ability to share multimedia content, and ease of access have made it a valuable tool in present day teaching and learning environment. This study tries to explore the utilisation of WhatsApp in the online teaching and learning of Igbo L2, examine the participation and interaction of the students in the WhatsApp teaching and learning environment, its effectiveness to improve Igbo language skills and the obstacles faced by both the teachers and students in the process. This research was conducted at Federal College of Education, Kano. This research uses descriptive qualitative research methods. The subjects used in this study were teachers of NCE 300 Level Igbo L2 1 and 2 that were on teaching practice exercise outside the college. Sampling technique used was purposive sampling. Data collection techniques used in this study was in-depth interviews and document analysis. The study employs connectivism theoretical framework. The result of this research is that WhatsApp is an effective platform to engage students in an online teaching and learning of Igbo. WhatsApp contributed significantly to the development of students' Igbo language skills. There was high level of students' participation and interaction within the WhatsApp learning environment. Based on the findings, the study recommends the integration of WhatsApp into language curricula as a supplementary tool, the training of instructors in mobile-based pedagogy, and the promotion of culturally relevant content to support second language acquisition.

Keywords: WhatsApp, collaborative learning, Igbo as a second language.

Introduction

The Igbo language, one of the three major Nigerian languages, holds a prominent place in the nation's educational system. It is not only used as a language of instruction but also studied at various academic levels, including postgraduate programmes in many Nigerian universities. According to the National Policy on Education (NPE, 1977, 1999, 2004....revised), Igbo is taught as a first language (L1) in native-speaking regions, in primary, post-primary and College of Education levels. However, in regions outside the Igbo-speaking areas, it is learned as a second language (L2) that is, a language acquired outside the learner's immediate linguistic environment for communicative purposes across social, academic, and professional contexts.

Like all subjects, the teaching and learning of the Igbo language require dynamic and appropriate methodologies that can withstand evolving educational demands. The modern era has ushered in numerous teaching approaches, allowing educators to choose methods based on expected outcomes and resource availability. According to Iloene et al. (2013), collaborative learning is one such approach, where learners engage in teamwork to achieve shared educational goals. Eduardo (2015), as well as Ramilevan and Vasclevan (2016), support this view, noting that learners increasingly assume ownership of their learning processes through knowledge sharing, mutual support, and social interaction within small group settings.

In today's digital age, e-learning has become a dominant mode of instruction, leading to innovations such as Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). The use of Web 2.0 tools which include platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Instagram have revolutionised language teaching by enabling learners to interact, collaborate, and engage in authentic communication using mobile technologies. WhatsApp, in particular, has emerged as a widely used collaborative tool for educational purposes. It enables the formation of interest-based groups where participants can share information via text, voice notes, images, video clips, and document files. This platform promotes learner interaction and engagement beyond the classroom, making it a valuable tool for second language acquisition. Several studies (e.g., Shivam & Manoj, 2020; Lain Palopo, 2022; Albogami & Albogami, 2022 & Apple, 2013) have investigated the application of WhatsApp in language teaching, especially in the context of English and other foreign languages. However, few studies have focused on its use in teaching the Igbo language, particularly as a second language.

This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by examining the use of WhatsApp as a collaborative e-learning tool in the teaching and learning of Igbo as a second language.

Literature Review

Collaborative E-learning

E-learning is a computer-based system that allows individuals to learn at any time and from any location. While early versions used CD-ROMs, modern e-learning utilizes the internet to provide access to resources like videos, slideshows, documents, and live classes (Laskaris, 2016). Platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and SMS enhance communication between learners and instructors. A key advancement in this area is collaborative e-learning, where learners engage in shared knowledge construction rather than passively receiving information. This interactive model depends on social participation and digital tools, promoting deeper understanding and critical thinking (Niroj, 2022; Ilknur & Zeki, 2011; Akinyemi, 2016; Owolabi & Adedayo, 2012).

In Nigeria, collaborative e-learning shows strong potential for indigenous language education, especially for Igbo. Iloene et al. (2013) recommend using smartphones, computers, and internet-based tools for collaborative teaching and learning of the Igbo language. Likewise, Nweze and Ugboro (2018) and Udoeye et al. (2014) describe e-learning of Igbo as involving web-based instruction, virtual classrooms, and digital collaboration. Platforms like WhatsApp support second language learners of Igbo by enabling interactive, contextualized, and culturally relevant experiences.

Teaching and Learning Igbo as a Second Language (L2)

Igbo is one of Nigeria's three major indigenous languages officially recognized for study and instruction. According to the National Policy on Education, it is taught as a first language to native speakers and as a second language to non-natives, with a mandate for all Unity Schools to teach Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba. State governments are also expected to enforce this policy within their schools.

The institutional support for Igbo language education was strengthened in 1989 with the creation of the National Commission for Colleges of Education, which mandated its inclusion in teacher training. Additional support came from the NERDC through curriculum projects, and the Federal Ministry of Education established NINLAN in Aba to promote indigenous languages.

Committees of experts were also formed to standardize teaching and ensure effective implementation, in line with the government's goal of national unity through language education.

The WhatsApp and its use in language teaching and learning

WhatsApp is universally a communication tool recently used by all and sundry to interact and communicate with families, friends and colleagues at work (Bouhnik, and Deshen. 2014). It is a smartphone application which allows instant messaging to an individual or groups. It allows sharing of pictures, audio visual files, website and written document files of any volume. WhatsApp gains its popularity due to its ability to accept and share fluent conversation through voice notes or video call at a low rate. It makes audio communication easy and accessible for members of group and individuals concerned. Yavuz(2016) states that developer of WhatsApp has added supportive communication feature for teaching and learning and recommends formation of collaborative study group through WhatsApp platform to motivate learners. Ilobeneke, S. C, et al (2018a) find out that WhatsApp group enhances interaction among learners. Again, it supports intimacy in teaching and learning. Intimacy allows students to open up and ask questions on issues which they may never ask in the classroom.

Empirical Studies

Several empirical studies have demonstrated the potentials of WhatsApp as a valuable tool for language teaching and collaborative learning.

Amin et al. (2021) investigated the integration of WhatsApp into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction among fifth-grade students in Jordan. The findings revealed significant improvements in the speaking skills of the experimental group compared to the control group, highlighting WhatsApp's effectiveness in enhancing oral communication. While the language focus differs, this study aligns with the present research in examining WhatsApp's utility as a language teaching tool.

Similarly, Albogami and Albogami (2022) examined the use of WhatsApp to enhance speaking proficiency among EFL learners. Their study reported increased learner motivation, positive attitudes, reduced anxiety, and overall improvement in speaking performance. Like the current study, their research supports WhatsApp's efficacy as a platform for second language acquisition, though their focus was on English rather than Igbo.

In the Nigerian context, Udenze and Oshionebo (2020) explored the potential of WhatsApp for collaborative learning among undergraduates at the University of Abuja, utilising the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Their findings indicated a significant rise in students' perceptions of WhatsApp's usefulness for academic collaboration. Although not language-specific, the study shares a focus with the present work on collaborative learning through WhatsApp.

Apple (2013) assessed WhatsApp's role in developing reading skills and found that the platform improved learner engagement, reading proficiency, and promoted consistent reading habits. Despite the study's focus on reading and literacy in a general context, it underscores WhatsApp's role in fostering regular language interaction, an important component in second language learning.

Suhaimi et al. (2019) studied the effects of WhatsApp on narrative writing among Grade 6 students in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. The results showed that 75% of the students experienced

improved vocabulary, while gains in grammar were minimal. These findings indicate that WhatsApp can effectively support specific aspects of language learning, such as vocabulary acquisition. However, the study's geographical and linguistic contexts differ from the current research in Nigeria on Igbo as a second language.

Focusing more closely on indigenous language learning, Onuh (2022) investigated the impact of social media, including WhatsApp, on the development of the Igbo language among university students at Imo State University, Nigeria. The study found that students recognized the positive role of social media in language learning. However, it concentrated on first-language (L1) Igbo learners, whereas the current study is focused on second-language (L2) learners of Igbo.

Together, these studies provide a foundation for understanding how WhatsApp facilitates various aspects of language development. While most of the existing research centers on English or general collaborative learning, there is a clear gap in the literature concerning WhatsApp's role in the teaching and learning of Igbo as a second language highlighting the relevance and necessity of the present study.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the theory of Connectivism, developed by Siemens (2004) and Downes (2012), which explains that in the digital age, learning takes place through connections formed with technology and digital networks. It sees knowledge as distributed across these networks, and learning as the ability to build, navigates, and strengthen them. Digital tools such as WhatsApp, social media, blogs, and forums allow learners to access, share, and co-create knowledge in both formal and informal settings. The theory emphasizes collaboration, interaction, and cultural relevance, making it a strong foundation for exploring WhatsApp as a collaborative e-learning tool that supports meaningful and connected learning experiences.

Methodology

This research was conducted at Federal College of Education Kano. The research uses descriptive qualitative research method. . Qualitative research methods are called naturalistic research methods because they are carried out according to natural conditions. Two teachers of NCE 300 level Igbo L2 teaching different courses to students on teaching practice exercise online were studied. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling. Data collection techniques in this study are in-depth interviews and document analysis. The in-depth interview technique is carried out in an unstructured manner. Questions in in-depth interviews are open-ended that allow respondents to provide broad answers. The documents in this study were sourced from the WhatsApp group documents. The teachers created two different whatsapp groups, one for each course. The researcher was permitted to become a member of the two group platforms

Interview

(a).How did you utilize WhatsApp to engage NCE [300](#) level Igbo L2 students online during their teaching practice exercise outside the college?

NCE [300](#) level Igbo L2 teacher 1

WhatsApp was mainly used to share voice notes and text messages to engage Igbo L2 students during teaching practice. Recorded short Igbo phrases and proverbs were posted for students to respond to with their own voice notes for pronunciation practice. Reply feature was used to give

corrections directly under each student's message, and document sharing was used to post vocabulary lists and reading passages. Broadcast feature helped to send reminders individually, while emoji reactions and read receipts allowed monitoring of students' engagement and understanding.

NCE [300](#) level Igbo L2 teacher 2

I used WhatsApp to share PDF documents, images, and videos related to the Igbo language and culture. I posted Igbo stories, grammar notes, and cultural clips for students to discuss and summarize them in the group using Igbo. Group chat feature and @mention function were used to tag students for tasks or feedback. Students' participation was tracked through read receipts while the use of media gallery made learning materials easy to access and review.

(b). What was the level of students' participation and interaction in the WhatsApp learning?

NCE [300](#) level Igbo L2 teacher 1

There was high level of students' participation in the WhatsApp group, especially through the use of voice notes and text responses. Students regularly submitted voice recordings in Igbo, responded to questions, and even corrected each other in the group chat, which encouraged active peer learning. The group created a friendly space where students felt free to ask questions and engage in short conversations. Although a few students had challenges with data or phone access, the overall interaction was steady and lively, with many students showing visible improvement in their confidence and usage of the Igbo language.

NCE [300](#) level Igbo L2 teacher 2

Students' interaction was moderate but gradually improved as the WhatsApp activities continued. While a few students were very active commenting on posts, completing assignments, and engaging in group discussions, others were passive and only responded when prompted. The @mention and reminder messages used encourage participation. The group projects, such as playwriting and summarizing Igbo stories, helped increase teamwork and interaction. Although participation was uneven, those who engaged regularly showed better language skills and a deeper understanding of Igbo expressions

(c). What was the effectiveness of WhatsApp as an online app to improve language skills in the Igbo language learning during online learning?.

NCE [300](#) level Igbo L2 teacher 1

I found WhatsApp to be an effective tool for teaching and learning the Igbo language during the students' teaching practice. I sent voice notes, Igbo texts, and assignments, which students responded to in the group. The platform allowed for interactive discussions and quick feedback, contributing to students' understanding of written Igbo. However, despite the unavailability of strong network and smartphones which affected prompt response from the students, they were so eager to source relevant materials online. The uploading of materials by the students made the teaching and learning more lively.

NCE [300](#) level Igbo L2 teacher 2

WhatsApp is a helpful and timely tool for maintaining teaching and learning activities outside the classroom. It is used to share vocabulary, host voice-based discussions, and give short

quizzes. Students collaborated by correcting one another and working together on assignments. The students' response to audio and video clips in determined aspects of Igbo through voice recording improved their listening and speaking proficiency in the target language. The written assignment too promoted their reading and writing skills in Igbo.

Document analysis

During the teaching practice, the researcher was permitted to be added to the two different WhatsApp group platforms for the online Igbo L2 learning. The researcher made observations from the two different NCE300 level class activities. The summary results of the document analysis carried out were divided into two parts, in terms of teachers and that of student

NCE 300 level Igbo L2 teacher 1

Teacher 1 created a WhatsApp group titled “ỤmụakwụkwọIgbo TP 1” to keep in touch with the students during their teaching practice. He used the platform to share voice notes of Igbo proverbs, pronunciations, and short conversations. Students were encouraged to respond with their own voice recordings, allowing for oral practice and correction. Text messages were also used to explain meanings and provide translations. The teacher maintained consistent interaction, giving feedback on assignments and motivating participation. Weekly tasks, such as translation and vocabulary tests, were assigned within the group.

Students actively engaged with voice-based tasks. Many students submitted Igbo voice recordings to practice pronunciation, proverbs, and dialogue. These voice notes often sparked short discussions among peers, where corrections and suggestions were shared. The students responded well to the teacher's feedback and showed eagerness to improve their spoken Igbo. Some students took initiative to help others by rephrasing corrections in simpler terms. Participation was generally consistent, although a few students expressed occasional difficulty due to poor internet access or limited data. Despite this, most students submitted assignments like vocabulary lists and translation exercises on time.

NCE 300 level Igbo L2 teacher 2

WhatsApp group named “Igbo L2 on TP”, was created, where she mainly shared PDF notes, Igbo story excerpts, cultural videos, and links to online resources. The focus was on reading, writing, and cultural understanding. Students were given tasks such as summarizing Igbo news articles and discussing traditional values. Collaborative activities included group writing of short plays and grammar exercises. The teacher encouraged discussion by asking reflective questions in Igbo, and insisting on the use target language. Some irregular participation was observed, and the teacher had to follow up on inactive members. Despite these, the group served as a resource hub and encouraged students' engagement with authentic Igbo materials. Students interacted more through written responses and document-based tasks. They participated in summarizing Igbo stories, writing dialogues, and responding to cultural questions. Some students shared personal opinions in Igbo, contributing to discussions about language use and traditions. The group projects, such as collaborative playwriting, also encouraged teamwork among students. While a few students were very active and consistent, others were less involved. Some used English instead of Igbo. Group participation improved when multimedia contents, like short cultural videos, were introduced.

Findings and discussion

The findings reveal that both teachers effectively utilized WhatsApp as a platform to engage their students during the off-campus teaching practice. Teacher 1 made extensive use of the

voice note feature to send audio recordings of Igbo proverbs, vocabulary, and conversational sentences. Students were encouraged to respond with their own voice notes, allowing for two-way oral interaction. Additionally, Teacher 2 shared vocabulary lists and mini-assignments via document upload, and gave direct feedback using the reply feature in the chat. Teacher 2, on the other hand, focused more on written engagement. She used WhatsApp to share scanned Igbo texts, grammar notes, and cultural video clips, which students were required to summarize or respond to in Igbo. Document analysis from both WhatsApp groups confirmed that the platform allowed for real-time communication, task delivery, and feedback exchange between the teachers and their students. These activities sustained academic interaction even while the students were physically separated from the school environment.

The study also found that WhatsApp contributed significantly to the development of students' Igbo language skills. Teacher 1 reported that her students' pronunciation and fluency improved over time due to repeated oral exercises through voice notes. She noted that students who were initially shy began to gain confidence by practicing in the privacy of their own space. This approach allowed for repeated listening and speaking, which supported better retention and pronunciation accuracy. Teacher 2 emphasized improvements in students' reading and writing skills. Through regular exposure to written Igbo texts and the requirement to respond in the same language, students developed stronger sentence construction and vocabulary usage. Group assignments, such as writing short Igbo plays or summarizing traditional stories, encouraged collaboration while reinforcing grammar and spelling. Overall, both teachers believed that WhatsApp provided a flexible and familiar environment that supported steady language development, even without face-to-face instruction.

Another key finding relates to the level of student participation and interaction within the WhatsApp learning environment. Teacher 1 reported high levels of participation, noting that students were eager to submit voice notes, complete assignments, and engage in peer correction. She explained that students often responded to each other's posts, asked clarification questions, and supported one another in Igbo, thereby promoting collaborative learning. Teacher 2, however, observed moderate participation in her group. While a few students were actively involved in the discussions and tasks, others were reluctant or inconsistent, often requiring personal reminders and follow-up messages. Despite this variation, both teachers used WhatsApp features such as tagging (@mention) and reply threads to encourage interaction and guide students through learning activities. Document analysis supported these reports, showing evidence of student-to-student dialogue, collaborative assignments, and teacher feedback loops that kept the learning environment active and responsive.

Challenges and Limitations

Despite the benefits, both teachers acknowledged several challenges and limitations associated with using WhatsApp as a collaborative teaching tool. Teacher 1, highlighted issues such as poor network coverage in rural areas, high cost of data for students and the lack of access to smartphones for a few learners. These factors sometimes limited participation or delayed assignment submissions. Teacher 2 pointed out that some students were distracted by other social media apps or personal messages within WhatsApp, which affected their focus and academic discipline. She also noted that managing multiple responses and assignments within a chat group could be overwhelming, particularly in the absence of structured classroom control. Both teachers expressed that the absence of physical interaction made it difficult to assess non-verbal communication, student emotions, and deeper levels of understanding. These limitations reveal

that while WhatsApp is useful, it cannot fully replace the richness of face-to-face classroom engagement, especially in language learning.

Summary

In summary, the use of WhatsApp as a collaborative tool enabled both teachers to maintain academic contact with their students during their teaching practice. WhatsApp was used creatively through features such as voice notes, document sharing, chat replies, and multimedia messaging. These tools supported speaking, writing, reading, and vocabulary development in Igbo. Students' participation was generally positive, although it varied from group to group. Challenges such as internet issues, data cost, distractions, and absence of physical interaction were observed. Nevertheless, the findings affirm that WhatsApp, when effectively managed, can serve as a valuable platform for second language learning in non-traditional learning settings.

Recommendations

The study recommends further research on the impact of WhatsApp on different aspects of the Igbo language learning, such as vocabulary acquisition, grammar skills, and cultural understanding. Educators should consider integrating WhatsApp into language learning curricula to provide students with additional opportunities for practice and interaction outside of the classroom. Professional development programs for teachers should focus on incorporating WhatsApp into language education strategies to enhance students' engagement and motivation in language learning.

References

- Amin A., Ahmed M., & Ayman H. (2021) The Effect of Using WhatsApp on the Jordanian 5th Grade EFL Students' Speaking Skills. *International Journal of Linguistics Macrothink Institute*.
- Akinyemi, A. (2016) Collaborative writing in ESL classrooms: A study of senior secondary schools in Lagos State, Nigeria. *Lagos Journal of Educational Studies*
- Albogami A. and Albogami G. (2022) Exploring the Use of WhatsApp for teaching speaking to English language learners: A Case Study *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)* 2nd Special Issue on Covid-19 Challenges January 2022 Pp.183-201 DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/covid2.12>
- Apple C. (2013) Improving learners' reading skills through instant short messages: a sample study using WhatsApp World CALL 2013 – *CALL: Sustainability and Computer-Assisted Language Learning. Conference proceedings*. University of Ulster, pp.80-84.
- Bouhnik, D. and Deshen, M. (2004) WhatsApp goes to School: Instant messaging between teachers and students. *Journal of Information Technology Education* . Rest <http://www.jite.org/documents/vol1m3>
- Downes, S. (2008). Connectivism and its critics: What connectivism is Not. www.downes.ca/post/53657.
- Eduardo G. C (2015) Engaging Foreign language learners in a Web. 2.0 mediated collaborative learning process. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15446/profile>. v 7n247510.
- Epuchie, D.N. (2008). A review of the implementation of the national policy on education:

problems and solutions. Paper presented at the national association for the promotion of quality education (NAPOK) held on 4th February, 2008.)

Ilobeneke, S. C., Alabi, T. O., Falode, O. C., & Kur, J. T. (2018a). Effectiveness of Facebook and WhatsApp supported instructional platforms on undergraduate students' achievement in educational technology. *Journal of General Studies*, 7(1), 113-120.

Iloene, M., Iloene, G., Mbah B., & Mbah E. (2013) The use of new technologies for the teaching of Igbo language in schools. Challenges and Prospects EUROCALL

Ilknur I. and Zeki K. (2011) Collaborative learning in teaching a second language through the internet. Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education-TOJDE October 2011 ISSN 1302-6488 Volume: 11 Number: 3 Article 3 <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/287088767>

Lain Palopo (2022) The use of WhatsApp application in improving students' listening skill during COVID-19 pandemics at SMK computer Madani Malangke. Thesis submitted to the English Education Study Program of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training Faculty of State Islamic Institute of Palopo for S.Pd Degree in English Education.

Laskaris, J. (2016) Why create an online virtual classroom? WWW.TalentiLms.com/blog/why-create-a-virtual-classroom.

Niroj, D (2022) Understanding and uses of collaborative tools for online courses in Higher education <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362548131> DOI:10.25082/AMLER.2022.02.012

Nweze, M. I & Ugbor, G. N (2018) Challenges of teaching Igbo language in Nigerian universities in 21st century. *Middle East Journal of Scientific Research* 26 (2)

2018. Opportunity for Interpersonal Education and Health Education Care (2018). Vol. 1-2 doi.101 576IIHEC 1000112.

Owolabi, T., & Adedayo, O. A. (2012) Promoting effective teaching of English language in Nigerian schools through collaborative strategies. *African Journal of Educational Research and Development*

Ramilevan, A. K, & Vasilevna G. S (2016) Online collaborative cross cultural learning. Student's perspective. *Journal of Organizational Cultural. Communication and Conflict* Vol. 20

Shivam J. & Manoj K. (2020) Use of WhatsApp: A way to improve English language skills among undergraduates Learners. *Juni Khyat Journal of UGC Care Group I* Vol-10 Issue-11 No.01 November Page | 129

Udenze, S. & Oshionebo, B. (2020). "Investigating 'Whatsapp' for collaborative learning among undergraduates".*Etkileşim*. 5. 24-50.

Udoye, I. Akpamgbõ U. & Asimonye A (2014). Factors that hinders E-Learning among Igbo language teachers. Implications for national consciousness. *Research on Humanities and social sciences* Vol 4. 27. 2014

- Onuh, C. N. (2022) Impact of social media technology in the development of Igbo language Among University Students: A Study of Imo State University Students, *British Journal of English Linguistics*, Vol. 10, Issue 3, pp.12-29.
- Yavuz, F. (2016) Do smart phones spur or deter learning. A WhatsApp Case Study *International Journal of Education and Science* 15(3) 408-415.