Needs Assessment and Analysis in Learning Material Development for Igbo L$_2$ Learners at the Upper Basic Levels in Ebonyi State

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ABSTRACT: *The study is an action research that undertook a needs analysis and assessment prior to the development of a learning material for Igbo L$_2$ learners at the Upper Basic Level I (JssI). It is helpful to understand learners' needs and get data from them before any learning material could be developed. It is also necessary to know what the learners' objectives are, their needs, interests, expectations, background experiences in order to develop the material that would meet the needs of the learners. This study discusses the importance of knowing learners' needs and to use same as a starting points in designing a learning material for them. The study is a descriptive survey research design that used questionnaires, Oral and written Igbo tests (OWIT) to elicit vital information from the respondents about their age, ethnic group, first language spoken, their level of competence in Igbo language, purposes for learning Igbo, situations for Igbo language use, language skills which learners most wish to develop and finally, the communicative activities they should be able to perform in Igbo language. The above information from the needs analysis and assessment guided the researcher in developing a learning material that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of learners of Igbo as a second Nigerian Language.*

KEY WORDS: needs assessment, material development, Igbo L$_2$ learners, language skills, communicative activities**.**

INTRODUCTION

Needs analysis is a useful tool to understand students' needs and to help the implementation of educational policies. In recent years, language teaching has become more learner-centered, that means everything starts from him/her and everything goes back to him/her.

Material and curriculum developer should identify the characteristics of the learners with or for whom the material will be used.This is where the developer tries to collect vital information about the needs, interests, background experiences, instructional strength and weaknesses of the learner. This information will guide the producer in the selection of learning objectives and precisely defined, selection of the content of the message, the method of presentation, the amount of information to be presented, and the medium or media to carry the message. Nwigwe's (2008) findings show that one of the major problem in acquiring communicative competence by Igbo L_2 learners was as a result of teachers instructing with learning materials not relevant to the needs, interests and aspiration of the Igbo L_2 learners. This study aims to undertake a needs assessment and analysis prior to the development of a learning material for Igbo L_2 learners at the Upper Basic Level of Education.

A Review of Needs Analysis used for Curriculum and Material Development

Needs analysis forms the starting point of the course and material design in communicative language teaching. There is a long history of the analysis of students needs in second language teaching field (Richterich & Chancerel, 2005, Buckingham 2003). All the studies show that needs analysis play an important role in second language teaching. They equally suggest that learners were at the center of the teaching system. Needs analysis can help to awaken the awareness of learners of what they need, the teacher to adapt his teaching accordingly, the producers of teaching materials, to develop their materials to suit learners' needs, and the curriculum planners to plan and adapt learning system.

Belfiore and Burnaby (1999) focus on the use of needs analysis, for syllabus and material design. The book was written primarily to enable teachers meet the challenge of teaching English – as – a second language in the work place. They emphasize the role of teachers in the establishment and implementation of work place language programme. The aim of the book is to provide the English-as – a second language teacher with a basic orientation to the workplace programme.

Seed house (2004) reports on the motivation and psycho- social needs of students, who were not connecting with the main course book. His findings reveal the learners' recognition of their needs and also the source of the learners' problems; he thus designed material as part of the solution. He recommends the use of needs analysis before designing courses and materials.

Bushel and Dyer (2009) assess the English as – a- second language curriculum of the International Christian University, Japan. Findings from the needs analysis reveal the fact that students' perceptions of their language needs were close to those of both their teachers and the programme's goals and objectives, and that content- based global studies were perceived as appropriate to student's immediate academic needs and visions of the future. It was on the basis of the finding from the needs analysis that a task- based curriculum – design model was outlined.

Apanpa (2000) developed a competency – based curriculum for teaching and learning English in women education centers in Nigeria, based on an assessment and analysis of the learners' needs. Opinions and perceptions of learners, instructors, as well as those of experts in the universities validated the proposed competency- based English for specific purposes curriculum for women education centers. The analysis of findings indicate no significant difference in the perceptions of learners, and those of experts, as to the adequacy and appropriateness of the proposed curriculum for target group.

The Place of Needs Analysis and Assessment in Curriculum and Material Development
Needs analysis, according to many curriculum experts, is the first objective derived from the philosophy and the needs of the society. Needs analysis is the basis of training programme and aid development programme. The main purpose of conducting a needs analysis is to produce information which when acted upon makes courses better adapted to students needs and that part of the objective of formal needs identification is to back up one's proposed with quantitative evidence of their importance. klein (1999) added that concrete evidence of particular needs, such as the survey produced, could be directly used as parts of the course validation /approval procedure.

Tudor (2007) perceived needs analysis as a means of producing and teaching effective language course. Thus, he emphasized the importance of needs analysis in language teaching. He further affirmed that once the teacher can identify the learner's needs, he /she is a step nearer to being able to translate these needs and teach an effective course. Tudor, also identified two formal ways of identifying the learner's needs. These are the use of questionnaires and structured interviews.

Wilkins (1998) proclaimed needs analysis as a kind of synthesizing operation that enhances a successful course implementation. Thus, he insisted on the language terms to specify the content purpose, role – set medium, mode, and channel of language teaching. Richterich and Chancerel (1998) perceived needs analysis as useful and crucial to formative evaluation. According to them, needs analysis is useful towards decision making about the aims, objectives, content, and method of learning programmes. Bearing in mind a wide range of needs due to the influence of different social and cultural factors on students' learning, a needs analysis is considered as a prerequisite in any course and material design. According in Knox (1998), a needs assessment enables researchers to justify their assumptions whether or not potential educational needs are sound, to design a programme in terms of topics, text material so as to be responsive to the needs of the participants. This can maximize the likelihood of students' participation, help the learners to insist to learn and apply what they learn.

Richards (1992) deals with this issue from the point of curriculum development. He holds that the data to be collected from learners, teachers and curriculum developers in the planning process will help to identify general and specific language needs and content of a language programme, and provide data to review and evaluate the existing programme. The research to date emphasizes the

significance of a needs analysis for designing a course, writing course materials or course books, and the kind of teaching and learning that takes place (Robinson, 1997). He, therefore recommended that a needs analysis should be carried out during the life of each course because as students become more involved with the course, their attitude and approach may change. This can help both the curriculum developers and teachers to introduce necessary changes, if deemed necessary, so as to promote learners in their progress throughout the programme.

The pedagogical implication of implementing a needs analysis is that it has a significant role in the identification and examination of needs for any educational institution. Thus, an ongoing needs analysis should be a prerequisite for any programme / course design and material development in order to achieve effective instructional outcomes. Beside this, it can help teachers and curriculum developers to gain awareness of the "context variables" (Chaudron, 2005), and to provide appropriate instructional input to foster effective learning. It is against this background that this study undertake a needs analysis/ assessment in learning material development for Igbo L_2 learners at the Upper Basic Level.

Statement of the problems
Almost two decades after the introduction of the curriculum for the teaching and learning of Igbo as a second Language in our secondary schools, it is observed that the curriculum has not been promoting the major objective assigned to it, namely, to inculcate in the students' communicative competence in the Igbo language. Classroom observations by the researchers showed that L_2 Igbo students could not communicate in Igbo even when they were in their final class of the Upper Basic level. They could hardly express themselves in the Igbo language either in written or in spoken form. At best they replied in English when spoken to in Igbo language. Nwigwe (1999) found that this inability of Igbo L_2 students to express themselves in Igbo was as a result of teachers instructing with difficult course material which did not provide opportunities for genuine communication among the students, nor were they relent to the needs, interest and aspirations of Igbo L_2 Learners.

It was apparent that the Igbo L2 curriculum could not be properly implemented until the relevant course materials that are essential for Igbo L_2 Learners have been produced and introduced in our schools. The first step in course material development and production is needs assessment and analysis, thus the need for this study.

Purpose of the study:
The main purpose of this study is to undertake an assessment and analysis of the communicative needs of learners of Igbo prior to the development of a learning material for Igbo L_2 learners at the Upper Basic Level. Specifically, the study sought to;

(1) Find out the categories of learners of Igbo L_2 at the Upper Basic level 1 classes.
　　　(a)　　By Age (b) by Ethnic group (c) by First Language Spoken.

(2) Ascertain the competence level of Igbo L_2 learners at the Upper Basic level 1 classes.
(3) Identify the purposes for which learners would need to use Igbo language.
(4) Examine the situations in which learners will use Igbo language.
(5) Find out the Language Skills learners most wish to develop in Igbo.
(6) Investigate the Communicative Activities learners will perform or be able to perform in Igbo language.

Research Questions:

To undertake the assessment and analysis of learners' needs, the following questions were put forward:

(1)   What categories of learners are found in Igbo L_2 classes at the Upper Basic level?
(a) Age (b) Ethnic group (c) First Language spoken?
(2)   What is the competence level of Igbo L_2 learner at the Upper Basic level 1?
(3)   What are the purposes for which the learners would need to use Igbo language?
(4)   What are the situations in which learners will use the Igbo language?
(5)   What are Language Skills in which learners most wish to develop in Igbo?
(6)   What are Communicative Activities in which the learners will perform or be able to perform in Igbo language?

METHODOLOGY

The study is a descriptive survey research design. This is an action research involving a needs assessment and analysis which gave rise to the development of an Igbo L_2 learning material. Fifty (50) Igbo L_2 students at the Junior sec school level 1 (Jss1) were selected from Wesley Girls' junior school Yaba; Akoka High school and New Estate High School, Mushin, all in Lagos state. The Jss1 (one) students were selected in view of the fact that it is the first level in the junior secondary school level (Jss), any introduction or production of learning materials for this level (Jss) should start from the first level (Jss1). Three research instruments, designed and validated by Nwigwe (2008) were used for the needs assessment and analysis. (a) Learners' Needs Survey Questionnaire (LNSQ), which was designed to get the profiles of Igbo learners as to their age, state of origin, indigenous language, first language spoken, their interest and motivation, language skills they wish to develop, situations they would use Igbo, and communicative activities they enjoy most. (b) Oral and Written Igbo Test 1 (OWIT 1), designed to get information on the linguistic and communicative competence of Igbo L_2 learners, (c) Oral interview, used to get information on students' attitudes and difficulties encountered in Igbo language.

The questionnaires were administered personally by the researcher with the assistance of their class teachers. Explanations were given by the researcher for more clarification in answering the questions. In conducting the oral test, the researcher was equally assisted by the teachers who organized and called the students one after the other to respond to the oral test. The data obtained

from the Learners Needs Survey Questionnaire (LNSQ), were converted into frequencies and percentages for descriptive analysis.

RESULTS

Tables1 (ABC), display the Categories of Igbo L_2 learners by Age, Ethnic group and First Language Spoken.

1A: Category of Igbo L2 learners by Age

S/N	Age	Frequency	Percentage
1	9 years	12	24 %
2	10 years	15	30 %
3	11 years	4	8 %
4	12 years	10	20 %
5	13 years	9	18 %
	Total	**50**	**100 %**

Chart 1 A: Bar Chart Showing Category of Igbo L_2 learners By Age
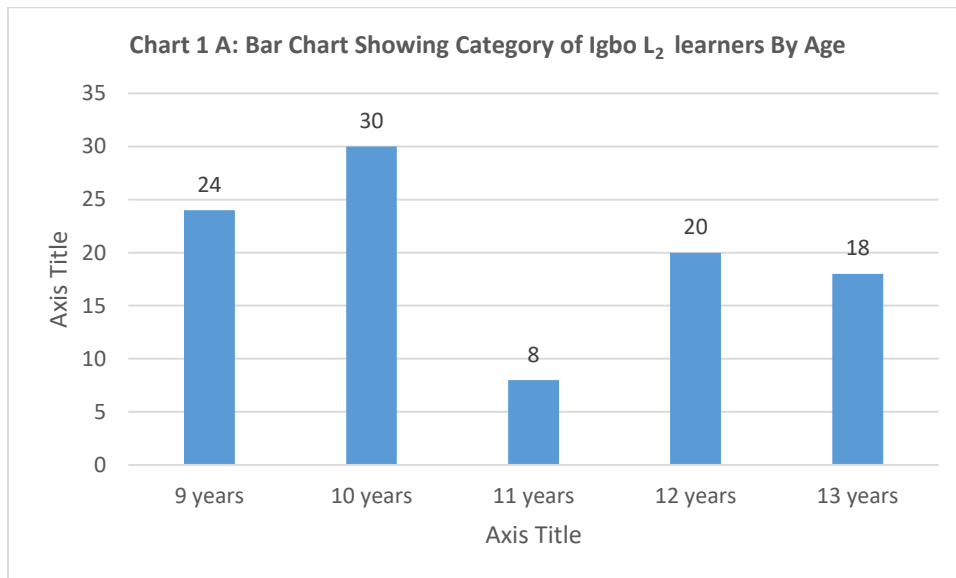
Table 1A given the category of Igbo L_2 learners by age. The finding reveals that Igbo L_2 learners are within the age range of nine years and early teen (9-13 years). Learners who are nine years old recorded 24 % of the total number, ten years old were 30%, eleven years were 08 %, twelve years were 20 % while those that are thirteen years old recorded 18 % of the number of the respondents. The finding shows that Igbo L_2 learners are still within the "critical period" in language learning. The "critical period hypothesis" claims that

human being are most capable of learning language between the ages of two (2) years and early teens (Slobin, 1990; Cook, 2000).

 A variety of explanations have been put forward for the apparent decline in adults learning a language: Physical factors, such as the loss of plasticity in the brain and "lateralization" of the brain; Social Factors, such as the different situations and relationship that children encounter compared to adults; and Cognitive explanations such as the interference with natural learning by the adults' more abstract mode of thinking. This explains why the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1977 Revd, 1998, 2004) in the National policy on Education, introduced the teaching and learning of Nigerian languages as second languages in the junior secondary school level. Students at this age level enjoy learning in an interactive language classroom where they are not seen as subordinate but are given equal opportunity to express themselves and relate to every other person in the class. Teachers should combine dialogue, role play, small group activities, games and songs in an Igbo language classrooms and course materials in order to motivate and make the lessons interesting for the target audience. That was the concern of Igbo L_2 course material.

Table 1B: Category of Igbo L_2 learners by Ethnic group

Ethnic group	Frequency	Percentage
Tiv	3	6 %
Efik	7	14 %
Igala	4	8 %
Yoruba	11	22 %
Igbo	13	26 %
Hausa	3	6 %
Edo	2	4 %
Idoma	2	4 %
Izon	3	6 %
Urhobo	2	4 %
Total	50	100 %

Chart 1 B: Bar chart Showing the Category of Igbo L_2 Learners by Ethnic Group.
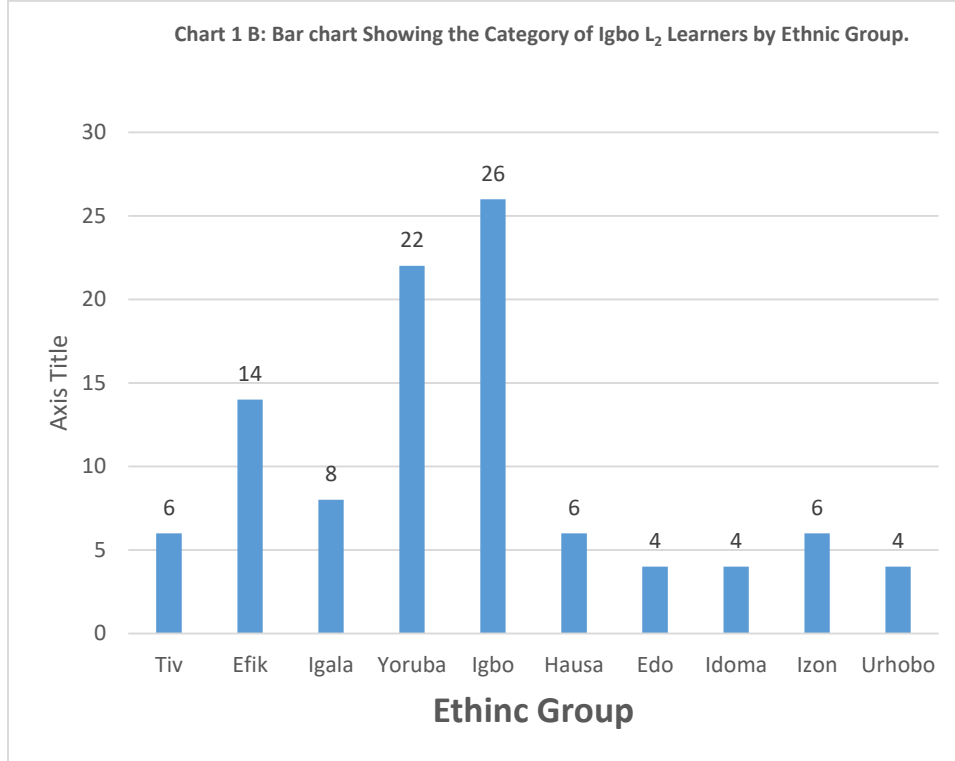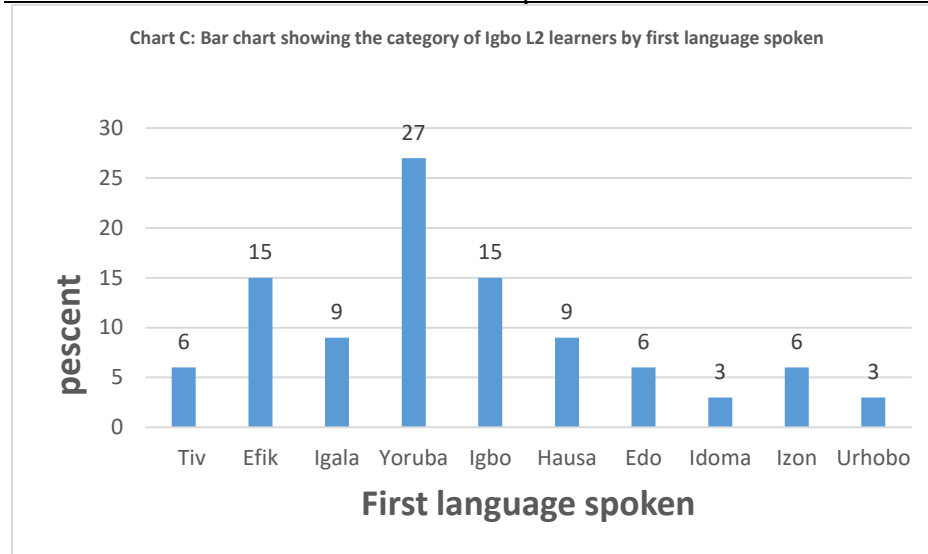
The table and chart revealed that Igbo L_2 learners came from different ethno linguistic groups in Nigeria (Crozier and Blench, 1996)

Table 1 C : Category of Igbo learners by first language spoken.

First language spoken	Frequency	Percentage
Tiv	2	6
Efik	5	15
Igala	3	9
Yoruba	9	27
Igbo	5	15
Hausa	3	9
Edo	2	6
Idoma	1	3
Izon	2	6
Urhobo	1	3
Total	**33**	**100**

Chart C: Bar chart showing the category of Igbo L2 learners by first language spoken

It is evident from the table that some the students cannot speak their first language (mother tongue) The number of students that speak their indigenous language was very minimal. The finding corroborates Ohiri- Aniche (2004) when she observed that many Nigerian children were no longer competent in their indigenous languages. That explains the differences in the number of students in tables 1 A, B, and C above.

Research Question 2: what is the level of competence of Igbo learners in Jss1?
In order to answer this question, the level of competence is divided into three in respect of the learners' performance in the first Oral and written test (OWIT).

0___3 marks =Below Average.
4___ 7 marks = Average
8___ 10 mark= Above Average.

Table 2 : Distribution of Students' Level of Competence in Igbo Language.

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Below Average	38	76%
Average	12	24%
Above Average	____	___%
Total	**50**	**100%**

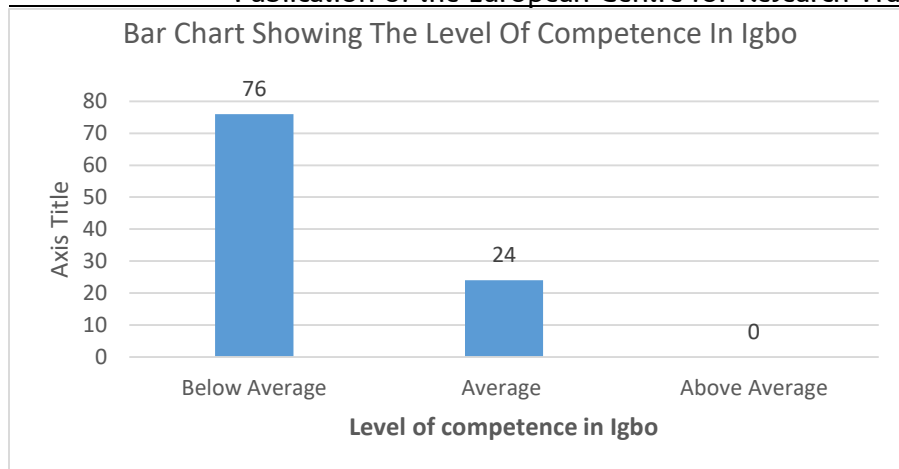**Bar Chart Showing The Level Of Competence In Igbo**

Table 2 gives the distributions of the student's level of competence in Igbo in terms of frequencies and percentages. The table revealed that 76% of the learners were in below average level, while 24% of the learners were found to be in average level. None of the learners were recorded in the above average level. The finding shows that almost all the Igbo learners were in the below average level of competence in Igbo language. The poor performance of the learners was attributed mainly to the traditional Igbo L_1 textbook in use which was developed for the native speakers Igbo. The contents and the methodology of the book were not based on the needs, interests and aspirations of the learners as a second language.

Research Question 3: what are the purposes for which the learners would need to use Igbo language?

Table 3: Purposes for Learning Igbo Language.

S/N	Purposes for learning Igbo	Frequency	Percentage
a	To pass Igbo test and exams	11	23%
B	To talk with my Igbo friend	10	21%
c	To communicate with my Igbo parent and siblings	9	19%
d	To be able to buy from and sell to Igbo native speakers	10	21%
e	To listen to and understand Igbo music, news on radio/ Tv.	8	16%
	Total	48	100%

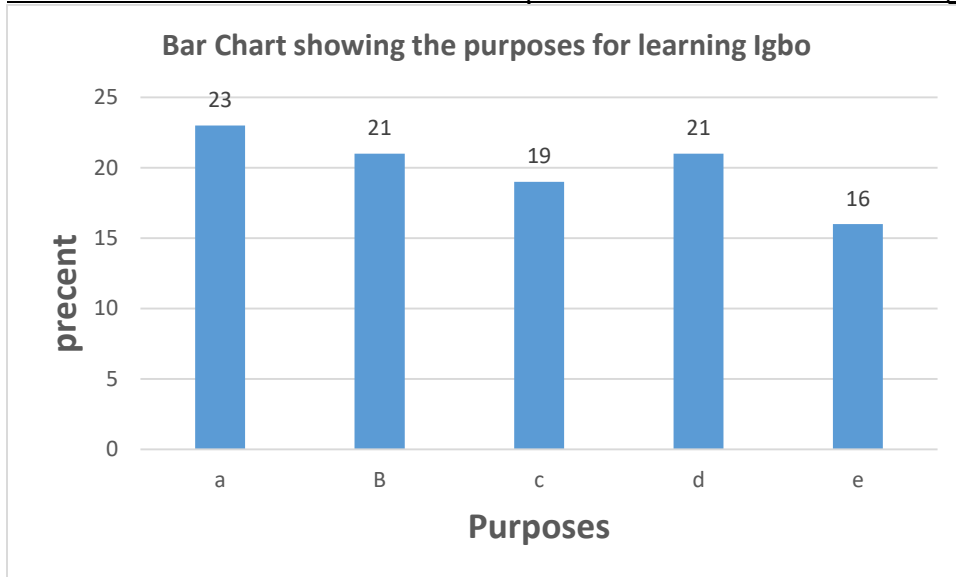**Bar Chart showing the purposes for learning Igbo**

Table 3 gives the distribution of purposes for which Igbo learners would need to use the Igbo language.

Research Question 4: what are the situations in which learners will use the Igbo language?
Table 4: Situations for Igbo language use.

S/N	Situations	Frequency	Percentage
A	Greeting	5	10%
B	Introducing self and others	9	18%
C	Giving and responding to instructions.	10	20%
D	Asking for direction or instruction.	5	10%
E	Identifying items, people in the school, home and hospital	11	22%
F	shopping	10	20%
	Total	50	100%

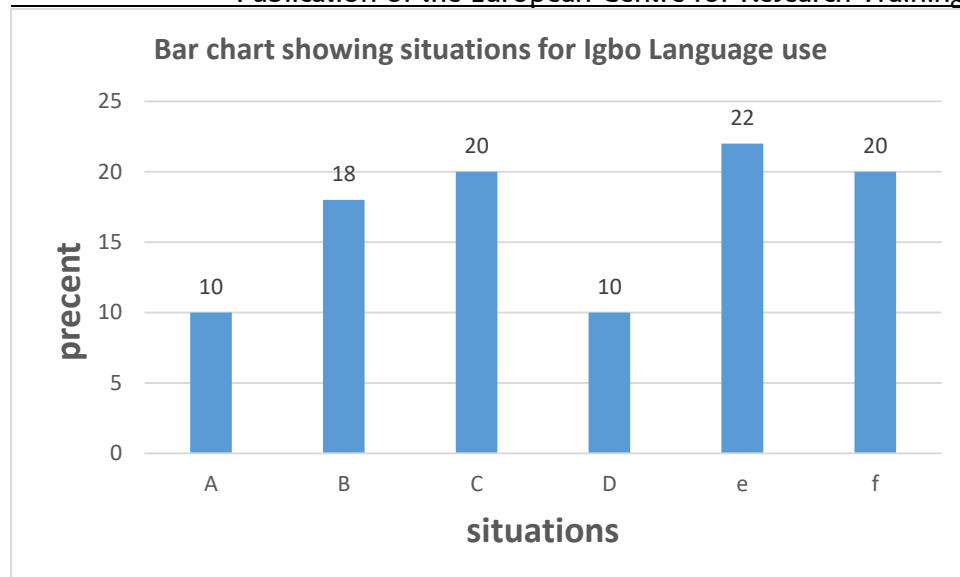**Bar chart showing situations for Igbo Language use**

Table 4 reveals that Igbo learners need Igbo language in their everyday situations, ranging from greetings, introducing self and others, giving and responding to instruction, identifying items in homes, schools and hospitals and shopping.

The finding corroborates Chijioke (2005) when she envisaged that, at the end of the course, learners of Igbo should be able to use Igbo language in any situation such as, in the family, hospital, market, school environment and cultural gathering.

Research Question 5: what are the language skills which learners most wish to develop in Igbo?

Table 5: Language Skills to be Developed.

S/N	Language skills	Frequency	Percent
a	Listening	10	20%
b	Speaking	12	24%
c	Reading	14	28%
d	Writing	8	16%
e	translation	5	12%
	Total	50	100%

Chart 5 showing the language skills learners most which to develop in Igbo.

**Bar chart showing the language skills to be developed**
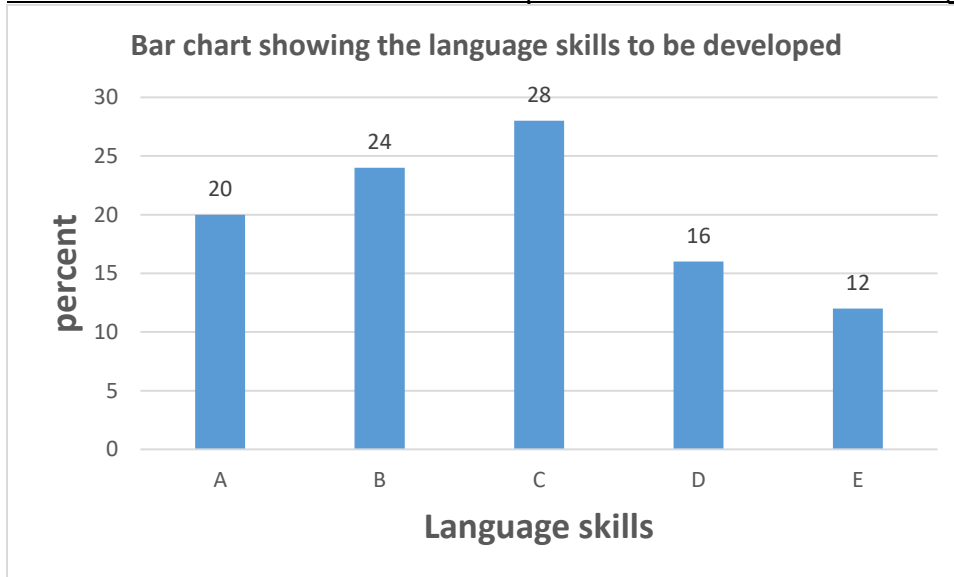
The table shows that Igbo learners wished to develop the four major language skills in Igbo, including translation. This is an integrated skill approach in language teaching and learning. Good and all round communicative competence involves all the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing (Leech and Svartvick, 2006).

Research Question 6: What are the communicative activities which learners will perform or should be able to perform in Igbo language?

Table 6: communicative Activities learners should be to perform in Igbo

S/N	Communicative Activities	Frequency	Percentage %
	Games and competitions	10	22%
	Drama	8	17%
	Song	6	13%
	Story telling	5	11%
	Role play	9	19%
	Picture description	8	17%
	Total	46	100%

Chart 6: Bar Chart showing Communicative Activities
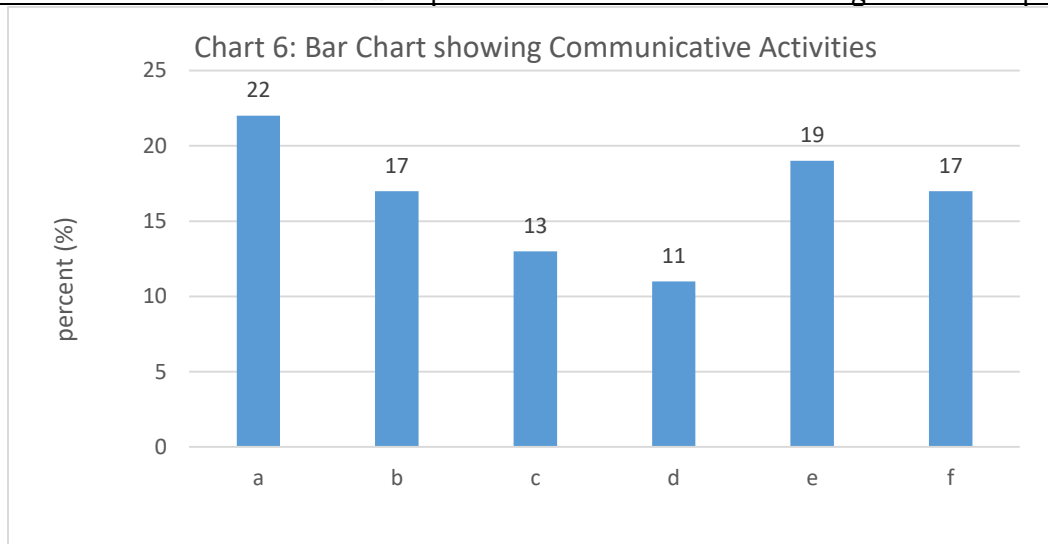
Communicative Activities.

Table 6 gives the distributions of the Communicative Activities Igbo Learners should be able to perform in Igbo. They are; Games and competitions, Drama, Songs, Storytelling, and Role play, and picture description.

Communicative Activities allows students to practise using all of the language they know in situations that resemble real settings. The above activities can be used to develop any of the four major language skills.

Pedagogical Implication

The pedagogical Implication of studying the needs of Igbo learners prior to the development and production of the learning material, was that those needs would be taken into consideration during the developmental stage so as to make the material suitable for the target audience (users). Current theories in second language teaching and learning emphasise the motivation of the learners which can only be assured after a prior needs assessment and analysis of their communicative needs before the development of any language programme or learning material. It should be emphasized that learners are more interested in and strive to achieve whatever they consider relevant to their needs.

The results of the learners' needs analysis and assessment helped in the statement of objectives, selection and presentation of contents (topics), and the amount of information presented in each chapter and unit of the learning material.

Thus, the needs analysis was used to review the existing Igbo L_2 curriculum in terms of appropriateness and effectiveness and to develop the Igbo L_2 learning material.

Diagrammatical Representation of the process

Learner's needs		Material Development
• Biographical data • Basic Needs • Attitude towards Igbo • Interest and Motivation • Level of Competence • Previous Knowledge		Developing an Igbo L2 learning material according to learner's Needs
		Curriculum Development
		Review the existing Igbo L2 curriculum (in terms of appropriateness and effectiveness)
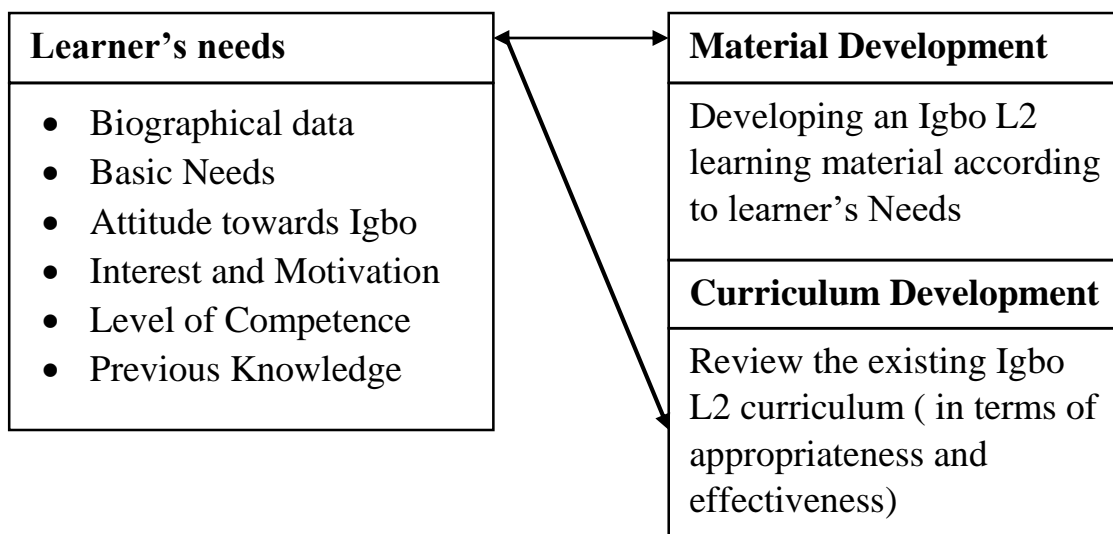
Fig I: Relationship between Igbo L_2 Learners' Needs, Material Development and Curriculum Development (Nwigwe, 2008).

CONCLUSION

Need analysis has a vital role in the process of designing and caring out any course, and as is considered as a crucial component of systematic curriculum development. This means that whenever curriculum is designed to meet needs, the benefits will be felt in subtle and varied ways throughout the whole community.

Recommendations:
With specific regard to the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made;
    1.   Development of any Institutional Material for Second Language Learners of Igbo should be based on their needs, interests and aspirations.
    2.   Development of Learning Material for Igbo L_2 Learners should include topics that of interest and relevant to their needs
    3.   Writing of textbooks or other learning materials for L_2 learners of Igbo should be done only by writers who can appreciate the needs and abilities of the young learners.

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