

A mom's dilemma over language barrier, Why my kids cannot speak my local African language - by Doris Anukam

It remains a very baffling concept for me to fathom, about why my kids and several other African kids are not able to speak the local African languages, despite the fact that their parents converse in these languages on an almost daily basis.

In my own case, the language is Ibo, mostly spoken by the residents [Igbo tribes] in the eastern part of Nigeria. My husband and I converse on a daily basis in Ibo, but my kids have had the hardest time learning how to speak this language. I really miss having them included at this level of interaction. I think they understand some, but are just not able to speak it. I have tried to feel the pulse of how other kids are doing out there; mostly what I got was the same frustration that I already deal with.



I often wonder what we as parents can do to change this dynamics, considering the fact that the Mexicans here are able to get their kids to speak/understand their local language; what are they doing differently? A friend once told me that the hidden secret is to introduce the local language to the kids as their first language whereby no other language is spoken to them during their early/formative years, since they are most likely to pick up English language automatically when they are of school age and in school. I have not researched the science behind this, but I have seen this theory working in some people that are applying it. I wish somebody had told me about this concept when my kids were a lot younger.

About one year ago, I traveled to Nigeria with my son, even though we stayed roughly 3 weeks, he was able to grasp and speak some common Ibo syllables like "Kachi bo" [good night], "ibola chi" [good morning] and "arimu nma" [I am okay or I am doing well]; as a parent it was very exciting to see him go around in the mornings, greeting everybody with 'ibola chi'. We came back to America armed with this newly found excitement; I now had a vendetta to teach my other kids Ibo language. But, it all fizzled away after a couple of days of trying it out and being overtaken by the hustle and bustle of American living. But, at least I tried.

With a part of me still aching to break down this language barrier, I would love to read from Africans with older kids who have had any success in deciphering this dilemma of mine. For those of you with very young kids who do not want to find themselves in this same predicament, and who wishes to enjoy conversations with their kids later in life in African language; my advice is to start early to inculcate this God given mother tongue into these kids.

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