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**INFLUENCE OF VOWEL ASSIMILATION AND ELISION IN THE SPELLING OF SOME IGBO NAMES**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examined how the spelling of some Igbo names are affected by vowel assimilation and elision. It used names that people answer in Igbo clan, precisely, from the Department of Linguistics, University of Nigeria, Nsukka in the 2020/2021 academic session to carry out the study. This study's main goal was to examine the influence of vowel assimilation and elision on the spelling of some Igbo words. The form of vowel assimilation and elision that are so pronounced in Igbo names served as the basis for the discussion of this study. This study used names of student in Linguistics Department, from year one to three, while the entire students, from year one to four formed the population of this study. This study, due to its nature, adopted a descriptive survey design to achieve the aim upon which this study is set. This study found that either elision or assimilation of Igbo names occurs as a result of quick speech, while articulating some Igbo names. This study also reveals how prevalent vowel elision and regressive, as well as complete assimilations are in Igbo names. This is due to vowel assimilation or elision occurring in the same point.

**Keywords:** Language, Igbo Alphabet, Vowel Assimilation, Vowel Elision.

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

Humans communicate with one another within themselves via language. This suggests that only humans are capable of using language as it ought to be used. Humans use language to communicate with one another, and to impart knowledge in various settings. This is to say that language is how people identify themselves, and where they are from. But, in terms of one's relationship to another, language is too fundamental to human civilization. So, it could be challenging to recognize people and their various cultures without language. Given that language serves as a tool for human communication in a variety of contexts, it is important to note that there are two categories of language, linguistic and para-linguistic. According to the aforementioned, the sort of language or communication that this study is studying is a linguistic form of communication, in which verbal utterances are used to transmit information from one person to another. It is important to remember that only humans can use this kind of language. The use of signs and symbols as a kind of language, as opposed to spoken language, is known as paralinguistic communication. However, it has been noted that there is always a paralinguistic component, which Schandorf (2013) lists as gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, kinesics or body language, and proxemics.

Despite the fact that there are many different methods that people may communicate, it is important to stress that without language, there would be no way for people to relate to one another, and there would always be issues since there would be no common means of transmission. There won't be a solution to resolve the issue that arose while there are disagreements going on. Nonetheless, conflict will inevitably arise between people, and language will always be employed to diffuse or avoid it. This problem may exist between people or between various clans. However, there are different languages of the world. Few out of the many languages are Igbo, English, French, German, Italian, Latin, etc. Researchers estimate that Nigeria has up to 400 separate languages due to its multiethnic nature. This is because, various tribes speak different languages. Three (3) notable languages, Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba, stand out among Nigeria's many other languages, and the Igbo language will be the main topic of this study.

The Igbo language is spoken by people of the black race in Eastern Nigeria. It serves as a means for them to relate to one another, share ideas, and solve problems, including those related to their trade among themselves. It is impossible to say with certainty that Igbo separated from a specific language at a certain time based on its gloto-chronology. Nonetheless, it may be claimed that Igbo, as a daughter language, belongs to the 'Niger kongo' language within the 'kwa' group, and it's a tonal language. Nwike (2021) claims that the language is tonal, and that how it is written and its tonal influence determine how the words are spoken. Nwike (2021) states that the Igbo language has 36 orthographic symbols or writing systems. This is known as S. E. Onwu orthography from 1961. This suggests that it was given his name because he chaired the committee that established the precedents for the Igbo orthography's use as a working tool in Igbo studies. However, there are only twenty-eight (28) consonants in the orthography. The consonants "m" and "n" are nasalized and can be thought of as syllabic nasals. The Igbo language has eight (8) vowel speech sounds. In essence, a vowel is a speech sound that is produced without the mouth or throat ever closing. It follows that vowels are pronounced with an open vocal tract. As a result, when pronouncing vowels, the tongue does not come into contact with the teeth, lips, or roof of the mouth. The terms vowel and consonant are well-known, but when scientifically examine the speech sounds, one discovers that it is difficult to define precisely what they mean, and this is according to Roach (1983). The most prevalent belief is that vowels are sounds in which the passage of air from the larynx to the lips is unhindered. From the foregoing, it can be inferred that a vowel is a sound in phonetics, such as the English "ah!" [a:] or "oh!" [o:] pronounced with an open vocal tract, where "ah!" has the sound "/a/" when spoken with an open mouth, and "oh!" has the sound "/o/" when spoken but close-back. There are weak and strong forms of vowel sounds, according to Roach (1983). The strong syllables are stressed and the weak syllables are unstressed. Unstressed position is possible for all full vowels. An additional illustration of vowel sounds is '(i) see /si:/' and '(I) /sit:/' . In response to this discussion, Roach (1983) noted that there are two types of vowels: long vowels and short vowels. When English is spoken by native speakers, the words have a strong sound. The word "that," for instance, can be pronounced both ways: '/ðæt/' (strong form) and '/ðət/' (weak form). Speaking exclusively in strong forms is possible, it is discovered that some foreigners do so, and they are still understandable to other English speakers (Roach, 1983). On the other hand, the weak forms are syllable sounds that, in connected speeches, become unstressed, and are frequently pronounced as a schwa /ə/. Weak forms are classified as functional words or grammatical words, which is a closed class of words. Their primary job is to act as grammatical cement, binding content words together and preserving the connections

between higher syntactic units like clauses and phrases (Collins, Mees, & 2019). The Igbo language example has vowels and consonants in its orthographic system.

In Igbo language, there are eight (8) vowel sounds, E I O U as a heavy vowel and A I O U as light vowels. Igbo language contains consonants once more. A consonant is a fundamental speech sound that can be articulated with full or partial vocal tract. The word "consonant" can also refer to an alphabetic letter that stands for a consonant sound. The diphthongs CH, GB, GH, GW, KP, KW, NY, NW, and SH make up this consonant in Igbo, whereas the monophthongs B, D, F, G, H, J, K, L, M, N, P, R, S, T, V, and Z make up the Igbo consonant writing system.

In keeping with the foregoing, the Igbo language's consonant is connected to vocal cord closure. This means that an air restriction occurs at the point of articulation whenever Igbo speech sounds are produced. This implies that when trying to make a consonant sound, the organs that will support making that specific speech sound will not be open to take in more air to support making that specific speech sound. Contrarily, this is not true of Igbo vowels. Insofar as the vocal cavity always has a free flow of air, this is through. This is possible because the points of articulation for vowel speech sounds rise to make room for free airflow in all the organs that will be used to create a specific speech sound. It is significant to note from the foregoing that the grammar of Igbo reflects all of the information previously covered. There are various topics one can discuss in Igbo grammar that involves vowels of Igbo language. Based on this, vowel elision and assimilation is just a couple of the many topics that will be discussed in this study.

People are perplexed by the distinction between vowel elision and assimilation. In accordance with this, vowel assimilation refers to a change that takes place when two vowel speech sounds are still present and together in the same word; either the last vowel of the first syllable rises and alters the syllable's vowel sound, or vice versa (Okafor & Ewelukwa, 2012). When this occurs, one of the speech sounds that alters the other will impose its tonality on the speech sounds that it altered, and they will begin to behave in that manner. It can be said, though, that assimilation happens during a rapid speech utterance. A vowel will lose its original state in this situation due to the behaviour and characteristics of the vowel that assimilated it. According to Heiss (1966), the assimilated vowels share characteristics with the dominant vowel. It is noteworthy to state categorically and unequivocally that Igbo assimilation only happens in vowel speech sounds. This, according to Ofomata (2014) can be exemplified as follows, thus; Ama + uche >>> Amuuche, Eze + Ike >>> Eziike, Aka + odo >>> akoodo etc. It is clear from the information above that in Ama + uche, the speech sound "a" ends the first syllable while the speech letter "u" begins the second word. This demonstrates how the speech sound "u" returned and absorbed the sound "a," becoming "Amuuche." More so, same is applied to 'Eze + Ike and Aka + odo' and it becomes 'Eziike and akoodo'. From the foregoing, in order to successfully carry out this study, there is a methodology that guided this study.

This research is a descriptive survey design study. It is descriptive in the sense that it involves no counts or measure in the course of carrying out this qualitative research. The data (names) employed in this study were gotten from the Department of Linguistics, University of Nigeria, Nsukka in the 2020/2021 academic sessions in order to bring clarity to the reason upon which this study banks. In doing this, the researchers purposefully sampled all the students in Linguistics Department, ranging from year one (1) to year four (4). All the students form the

population of this study. In year-one, table one, six names were picked, in year-two, the researchers employed twenty-one names in table two; while in table three, twenty names were used although, year four set of students were not used as they are the outgoing students.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This part of the study looks at different topics of the study in their different senses as used in this study.

### 2.1 Assimilation

Fast speech is a sign of assimilation, and native speakers frequently use it to communicate. Assimilation is typically used to describe the contextual variability of speech sounds, which is thought to result from the interaction between different sounds. Speech sounds are changing as a result of this influence. It is frequently described as a process whereby one sound is replaced by another that occurs nearby, or whereby one sound changes some of its characteristics. It has additionally been described as the adaptation of speech sounds to their surroundings. According to Roach (1983:10),

“Assimilation is when we find a phoneme realized differently as a result of being near some other phoneme belonging to a neighboring word, as opposed to how the phonemes of a word would be realized if the word were pronounced in isolation.”

In light of the aforementioned, there are various forms of assimilation. Assimilation can therefore be defined as the simplification process by which a speech sound is influenced by the surrounding sounds to make them more similar. Assimilation is the alteration of a speech sound to make it more similar to its neighbours. This allows us to categorize assimilation into three types: reciprocal, regressive, and progressive assimilation (Roach, 1983).

#### 2.1.1 Progressive Assimilation

Assimilation occurs when two words are combined, the first of which ends with a single final consonant, which one will call consonant final, and the second of which starts with a single initial consonant, which one will call consonant initial, according to Roach (1983). Progressive assimilation is what happens when a consonant initial alters to resemble a consonant final in some way. However, this type happens when segment A (first) has an impact on segment B in the order of the segments (second). On the basis of this, it can be said that A is an assimilator and B is being assimilated. For instance, "get them" into "gɛt əm" is not pronounced as "gɛt dəm". This is because, the word "get" ends in the alveolar /t/, while the word "them" has the interdental /d/. When these two sounds are combined to form the word "get them," the interdental /d/ is frequently pronounced like the preceding sound, "t," according to Roach (1983:11). Influence is left to right A>>>B.

#### 2.1.2 Regressive Assimilation

A regressive assimilation is most likely to move toward a simpler consonant that causes less airflow obstruction, according to Roach (1983:11). Thus, it is possible to come across instances where a final plosive changes into a fricative or a nasal, but it is highly unlikely that a final fricative or nasal would change into a final plosive. For instance, they are as follows, according to Roach (1983:11):

That side → (dæs said)

Good night → (gʊn nait)

The sound that is assimilated produces a new sound in regressive. When the final sound of the word before it sounds similar to the first word, this is known as regression assimilation. The alveolar /t/ changes to /p/ because the second word, page, starts with a /p/, as in the example of the sound of "that page" becoming "dæt pedʒ". So, when the final consonant affects the first letter, it occurs. However, 'A<<<B' is influenced from right to left.

### 2.1.3 Reciprocal Assimilation

According to Roach (1983:11), reciprocal assimilation takes place when the sequences of segment A<< >>B, segment B and segment A simultaneously influence each other, thereby making the two assimilators. Another way to think of reciprocal is as coalescent assimilation. When a sound encounters "/y/," the coalescent assimilation takes place. For instance, according to Roach (1983:11), "they called you" '(ðei ka:ld ju)' becomes '( ðei ka: ldʒu:)' when the /d/ and /y/ sounds are combined. The two phonemes interacted to create a brand-new sound. Dental sound /d/ meets /y/ and /j/, creating the new sound /d/. On the basis of this, it can be said that there are two types of reciprocal assimilation. They are non-coalescent reciprocal assimilation and coalescent reciprocal assimilation (Roach, 1983).

In light of the aforementioned, a non-coalescent reciprocal assimilation happens when two sounds influence one another in opposite directions. As a result, both sounds receive some future in opposite directions, but they still maintain a high degree of autonomy. According to Roach (1983:11), coalescent reciprocal assimilation is the process by which two segments combine to create a new sound that may be qualitatively different. For instance, it can be felt from the phrase "get you," according to Roach (1983:11). /t/ <<>> /j/ → /tʃ/. In line from the foregoing, it is worthy of note to state that vowel assimilation is visible in Igbo language.

Igbo vowel assimilation is a change in the vowel speech sounds that are present in a word; the assimilated vowel loses its position in the word, and takes the place of the vowel that did the assimilation. According to Nzebunachi (2010), assimilation happens when the last word, (a vowel), combined with another word moves forward to influence the vowel that started the second word (a vowel) used to form a word with the first word, or when the first vowel of the second word moves back to influence, and change the form of the vowel that ends the first word combined with the second word to form a word. There are always two speech sounds, and through their interaction, they change either of their forms (Mbah, 2014). The work of Mbah (2014) added that assimilation involves two variables: the assimilator and the assimilated. According to Mbah (2014), the assimilator changes the other vowel while the assimilated receives the change that is imposed either directly or indirectly as a result of using rapid speech when pronouncing a specific expression. According to Ofomata (2014), when words or phrases are put together, vowel assimilation causes the assimilator's tone to take precedence over the assimilated vowel speech sounds. The sound of the dominant vowel outshines the vowel that is swallowed during the process of inflection and assimilation, which causes one sound to dominate the sound of the next vowel beside it. Based on this, the Igbo language exhibits the following types of assimilation: regressive, progressive, complete, and coalescent assimilation. There is always a change in the assimilated vowel's sound, form, or pattern during the progressive assimilation of Igbo. This occurs when the vowel that ends the first word of the two words that were combined to form one word advances and affects the vowel that started the second word that was combined to form one word. Here, the second word's vowel will lose its structural structure and form and take on the placement and shape of

the vowel that it has assimilated. This change or influence is from left to right 'A>>>B'. For instance, ntu a >>> ntu u, nwa + ibe>>>Nwiibe, oke +osisi>>>okoosisi etc.

According to Ofomata (2014), progressive assimilation takes place when the vowel that ends the final word of the two words that form a word shifts the position, and tone of the vowel that began the second word used to form that word. According to Ofomata (2014), this can be seen in the following examples thus; oge a>>>oge e, egwu a>>>egwu u, and chi a>>>chi e. For him, Igbo speeches frequently exhibit this kind of assimilation. He added that whenever assimilation in Igbo is brought up, this kind of assimilation is always brought up. On the basis of this, he observes that assimilation takes place when a vowel that begins the words of the second words combined to form a word turns back to influence the vowel before it, thereby changing the nature and properties of the vowel. When this occurs, the altered vowel will adopt the pronunciation and characteristics of the vowel that changed it. For instance, according to Ofomata (2014), example can be as follows thus; igwe+okwu >>>igwookwu, anya+ele >>>anyeele, ome+ire>>>omiire etc. Igbo assimilation is occurring in accordance with the previously outlined examples. According to Ofomata (2014), this kind of assimilation takes place in Igbo when the diphthong "ja" or "ie" replaces the phoneme that contains "ya". For instance, according to Ofomata (2014), example is as follows; mkpa+ya>>>mkpja, isi + ya >>> isie, ntị + ya >>> ntja, oche+ya>>>ochie etc. Igbo has reached the point of total assimilation. Ofomata (2014) claims that this is an instance of assimilation in the Igbo that causes confusion. The assimilated vowel still takes on the characteristics of the vowel that swallowed it, even though it occurs in words where one speech sound has swallowed another. For instance, akwa+osa>>>akwoosa, ogba+oso>>>ogbooso, isi + ewu >>> isiewu. Based on the aforementioned discussions, this study supports the idea that assimilation alters the assimilated vowel. When this occurs, it takes on the characteristics of the assimilator. Similar to how vowel assimilation and elision appear to be the same, in that they both discuss vowels; they are actually different. Their areas of emphasis account for the difference. Vowel elision, on the other hand, talks about a vowel leaving a word.

#### 2.1.4 Vowel deletion/elision

According to the aforementioned, vowel deletion is the dropping of a sound in a word that contains a vowel. Because of this, Nzebunachi (2010) stated unequivocally that it occurs when a vowel is not written or used exactly where it should be used. He continued by saying that vowel elision or deletion always results in a reduction in the number of letters needed to create a word. According to Okafor and Ewelukwa (2012), vowel elision happens when one of the two close vowels is dropped during speech and does not reappear during word production, while the vowel that was not dropped is pronounced. Vowel elision is always noticeable in written information for Nkamigbo (2021), whereas assimilation is noticed when speaking.

### 3. INFLUENCE OF VOWEL DELETION AND ASSIMILATION ON THE SPELLING OF SOME IGBO NAMES

This section of the study examines the various ways vowel assimilation and elision affects the spelling of some Igbo names. In order to complete this exercise effectively, the study will only pay attention to the assimilation methods frequently used in Igbo. Processes and various realizations of each word that will be used in this analysis will be displayed and discussed in tables in this section. The procedures a vowel elision will go through is also covered in the table below. However, names that were used in this study were gotten from first year to third year students of Linguistics Department, University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 2020/2021 academic

sessions. The names in table one is from first year class register, while second table is from second year class register, and finally, third year student's names are in table three, and they were gotten from their class register. Following are some names used for examples:

### 3.1 Influence of complete assimilation in the spelling of some Igbo names

These names, according to first year Department of Linguistic students class register in the 2020/2021 academic sessions are as follows:

**Table one: Complete assimilation in some Igbo names**

SN	Processing word	Word	Complete assimilation
1	Ede + orie	Edeorie	Edoorie
2	Ikwa + emu	Ikwaemu	Ikweemu
3	Oke + osisi	Okeosisi	Okoosisi
4	Akwa + ọsa	Akwaọsa	Akwọọsa
5	Ọgba + ọsọ	Qgbaọsọ	Ọgbọọsọ
6	Egbe + igwe	Egbeigwe	Egbiigwe
7	Ọsụ + Ọfịa	Ọsụọfịa	Ọsọọfịa

The table above makes it clear how a specific vowel speech sound swallowed the vowel that was right next to it, changing the form and sound of the swallowed vowel to match the swallowed vowel. Actually, some Igbo students are always perplexed by this kind of assimilation. Complete assimilation, however, alters the assimilated vowel sound just like any other assimilation. When assimilation occurs, there will be meaning losses in the names in the table, so it is clear from the table's influence on some Igbo names that neither progressive nor regressive or coalescent assimilation could happen on the words. Therefore, in the above assimilation, for example, Ikwa + emu for Ikweemu, one will find that there is no change in the meaning rather, the produced sound of the name will change. Similar to this, Ọsụ + Ọfịa will become Ọsọọfịa and as a result, the names in table one (1) do not exhibit change of meaning due to assimilation. However, it can be seen that all the names in the above table is to clearly explain well and to broaden ones understanding of vowel assimilation. So, if clearly pronounced the names above one after the other, it can be discovered that it is same set vowel speech sound that started the name that ends it. This is to say that it aligns with vowel harmony of Igbo language. They swallow the next vowel that follows it, and allows the vowel to take its form and nature in the name it occurred.

### 3.2 Influence of regressive assimilation in the spelling of some Igbo names

These names, according to second year Department of Linguistic students class register in the 2020/2021 academic sessions are as follows

**Table two: Regressive assimilation and some Igbo names**

SN	Processing words	Words	Regressive assimilation
1	Ada + ego	Adaego	Adeego
2	Aka + olisa	Akaolisa	Akoolisa
3	Ada + ego	Adaego	Adeego
4	Aka + olisa	Akaolisa	Akoolisa
5	Ama + obi	Amaobi	Amoobi
6	Ama + oge	Amaoge	Amooge
7	Eze + udo	Ezeudo	Ezuudo
8	Eze + ugwu	Ezeugwu	Ezuugwu
9	Ife + ọma	Ifeoma	Ifooma
10	Jide + ọfọ	Jideofọ	Jidoofọ
11	Mgbe + afọ	Mgbeafọ	Mgbaafọ
12	Nke + iru	Nkeiru	Nkiiru
13	Nwa + eze	Nwaeze	Nweeze
14	Nwa + ike	Nwaike	Nwiike
15	Nwa + oye	Nwaoye	Nwooye
16	Ọfọ + egbu	Ọfọegbu	Ọfeegbu
17	Oke + afọ	Okeafọ	Okaafọ
18	Oke + orie	Okeorie	Okoorie
19	Olisa + emeka	Olisaemeka	Oliseemeka
20	Ude + ọji	Udeoji	Udooji
21	Ụzọ + amaka	Ụzọamaka	Ụzaamaka

The table above demonstrates how certain Igbo names' spellings changed as a result of regressive assimilation. In the table above, A<<<B can be used to illustrate this kind of assimilation. As seen in the table above, the vowel that began the second word reversed direction, swallowed the vowel at the end of the first word, and assumed the shape of the vowel

that assimilated it. For instance, the vowel "e" turned back to swallow the vowel "a" in the phrase "Ada + ego." The alteration makes the vowel "a" into an "e," sound, creating the name "Adeego." This assimilation happened as a result of the speaker's rapid speech.

### 3.3 Analysis of how vowel elision/deletion affects spelling of some Igbo names

These names, according to third year Linguistic students class register in the 2020/2021 academic sessions are as follows:

**Table three: Vowel elision/deletion on spelling of some Igbo names**

SN	Processing words	Words	Vowel elision/deletion
1	Ada + akụ	Adaakụ	Adaku
2	Ada + eze	Adaeze	Adeze
3	Ada + ọra	Adaọra	Adọra
4	Ama + obi	Amaobi	Amobi
5	Ama + uche	Amauche	Amuche
6	Di + ike	Diike	Dike
7	Eze + ebube	Ezeebube	Ezebube
8	Nke + iru	Nkeiru	Nkiru
9	Nwa + anị	Nwaanị	Nwanị
10	Nwa + ike	Nwaike	Nwike
11	Nwa + ụka	Nwaụka	Nwụka
12	Ọfia + ọnụ	Ọfiaọnụ	Ọfịọnụ
13	Ọfọ + egbu	Ọfọegbu	Ọfegbu
14	Oke + orie	Okeorie	Okorie
15	Olisa + emeka	Olisaemeka	Olisemeka
16	Ụka + amaka	Ụkaamaka	Ụkamaka
17	Ụzọ+ ọma	Ụzọọma	Ụzọma
18	Aka + olisa	Akaolisa	Akolisa
19	Ada + obi	Adaobi	Adobi
20	Oke + eke	Okeeke	Okeke

The table above illustrates how vowel elision occur in the spelling of some Igbo words used for this study. It is evident that some of the words used in the aforementioned table do occasionally lose their vowels. This deletion is thought to have occurred due to a fast speech utterance. To put it another way, fast speaking causes vowel deletion because, it affects how a speech sound exits a word. The aforementioned information reveals that vowel deletion occurs on vowels that end the first segment of words and are followed by vowels. The aforementioned also shows that vowel deletion has some characteristics of a regressive assimilation. For instance, 'eze + ebube' will become 'ezeebube' when combined. In this case, the vowel that ended the word "eze" was completely removed, and its place was taken by the vowel that began the word "ebube." As a result, when trying to pronounce "Ezeebube" quickly, the word that will be heard is "Ezebube." This is due to a dropped speech sound, a vowel, caused by a fast speech utterance, which left the spelling incomplete. Although not all Igbo names are affected because one writes what is pronounced in Igbo, it is clear that this kind of situation affects how Igbo names are spelled.

#### 4. SUMMARY

Vowel assimilation and elision is used to determine what happens to vowels that exists together in Igbo words. This study discovered that complete and regressive types of vowel assimilation have an influence on the spelling of some Igbo names. This is based on how vowel assimilation affects the spelling of some Igbo names. It is clear from the names used for this study that no assimilation, whether progressive or coalescent, have been identified as endangering the meaning implication of specific Igbo names. They both had no impact whatsoever on how Igbo words were spoken. The study found that vowel elision, complete and regressive assimilation have the biggest influence on the spelling of some Igbo words. It was also found that vowel elision behaves similarly to vowel assimilation. Finally, researchers used in this work agreed that assimilations in Igbo are progressive, regressive, coalescent, and complete assimilation based on this justification.

#### 4.1 Conclusion

Although the role of either vowel assimilation or elision between two vowels situated together is crucial, the only effect is that it results in the word's lack of all required letters. This study suggests that, in order to expand the scope of this field of study, academics in the area should encourage research on this or related topics.

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