

# IMMEDIATE ENVIRONMENT LANGUAGE AS A TOOL FOR EFFECTIVE EDUCATION IN IZZI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, EBONYI STATE

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## **Abstract**

Language serves as a vital medium of communication, cultural transmission, and social interaction within any community. Beyond mere communication, it reflects the social realities and cultural heritage of a people. Recognizing this, the Federal Government of Nigeria emphasizes the pivotal role of language in fostering national cohesion, social integration, and cultural preservation. The National Policy on Education underscores the significance of indigenous languages by advocating their use as the first language of instruction in pre-primary, primary, and junior secondary schools across Nigeria. This study examines the role of immediate environment language in education, focusing specifically on Izzi Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. By analyzing how local language influences learning, socialization, and cultural continuity, the study highlights the necessity of incorporating community languages in educational settings. Findings indicate that leveraging immediate environment language enhances comprehension, promotes student engagement, and strengthens cultural identity. The study concludes that educational policies should continue to support the teaching and use of indigenous languages to optimize learning outcomes and preserve cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Language, Education, Indigenous, Culture, Nigeria

## **INTRODUCTION**

Language is viewed by linguists as an arbitrary vocal symbol used systematically and conventionally by a speech community. It is an integral part of man. Language surpasses communication and social conduct. Language therefore is the strongest medium of transmitting culture and social reality. In the light of the above, the Federal Government of Nigeria (2014: 9, 39) avers that Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of social interaction, national cohesion; and preserving of culture. Thus, the National Policy on Education not only places emphasis on the importance of language but also stipulates the teaching of all Nigeria languages as first language of instruction in pre-primary, primary and junior secondary schools in Nigeria as outlined below:

a) Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving cultures. Thus, every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore, in the interest of the national unity, it is expected that every child shall be required to learn one of the three Nigeria languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba,

b) For smooth interaction with our neighbors, it is desirable for every Nigeria to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in primary and secondary schools but non-vocation elective at the senior secondary school.

In section 2: (Early Childhood/Pre-primary Education) sub-section 14(c), the policy stipulates that government should:

Ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community and to this end will:

- a. Develop the orthography of many more Nigerian languages and
- b. Produce text books in Nigerian languages.

In section 4: (Primary Education), sub-section 19(b), in pursuance of the goals of primary education, the government stipulates that:

Curriculum for primary education shall include:

i. Language:

- a) Language of the environment
- b) English
- c) French
- d) Arabic

Similarly, section 5: (Secondary Education) sub-section 22 (d) states that government shall: Develop and promote Nigerian languages, arts and cultures in the context of world's cultural heritage.

In sub-section 24: (Junior Secondary School), the government outlines the core subjects that students offer to include:

- i. English
- ii. French
- iii. Mathematics
- iv. Language of environment to be taught
- v. One major Nigerian language other than that of the environment.

The language of environment shall be taught as L1 where it has orthography and literature, it shall be taught with emphasis on oralcy as L2.

In the senior secondary school, English language and one major Nigeria language should be part of the core subjects to be offered.

On special education, section 10(96) IV, states that special education training should include total communication technique, speech, sign language for the hearing impaired. In providing educational services, section 11 (101) b, stipulates that federal and state governments shall establish educational resource centres whose activities shall be multi-disciplinary. Their functions shall include the enhancement of the study of language.

Specifically, this Language Policy stipulates that the language of the environment shall be taught as L1 where it has orthography and literature; where it does not have, it shall be taught with emphasis on orality as L2. Therefore, government acknowledges the essence of language of environment as a medium of instruction in the early childhood, primary and junior secondary education and enshrines it in the National Language Policy.

According to Onuigbo & Eyisi (2018), language of environment is the first language, native language or mother tongue. This means that first language represents a language in which one has the greatest linguistic and intuitive knowledge resulting from a psychological disposition. It is actually the language one falls back to in a situation of uncertainty. First language or native language is usually significant in the lives of the speakers because it carries the culture and tradition of these speakers. Comprehension is often intensive when all learning experiences are imparted through the application of the language of environment

Language of environment or first language (L1) is usually very significant in the lives of the speakers. According to Abijo (2014), first language or mother tongue of a child helps to give a definite shape to their feelings and thought. This implies that learning in the mother tongue is crucial for improving other critical thinking skills, second language learning and literacy skills.

Studies have shown that cognitive and intellectual development are comparatively faster and more fluent in the mother tongue. The educational success in the mother tongue is higher than someone taught in a language other than their mother tongue. Language is the primary means of keeping our culture alive. Often, the direct translation of one language into another cannot convey the same essence as in the source language. Therefore, the best way to know a culture thoroughly is to understand the language. The language of environment helps us stay connected to our traditional, cultural values and our roots. When a person knows the language of environment or mother tongue well, it is easier for them to learn a new language. If children read in their mother tongue from an early age, they will have more substantial reading and writing skills in other languages.

The possibilities of making money with the help of one's language of immediate environment are enormous in today's economy. Businesses are going the local way, so the importance of language of one's environment has increased exponentially. Knowing one's mother tongue well enables one to communicate with one's local customer if one intends to become an entrepreneur. Knowing your native language well is a matter of self-esteem. It enriches one's confidence and creates awareness in one's mind while also connecting with one's cultural identity. It is against this backdrop that this study is undertaken to ascertain the stipulations of the Nigerian Language Policy and the extent of the use of the language of the immediate environment as language of instruction in junior secondary schools in Izzu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

### **Problem of the Study**

The Language of the child's immediate environment is very essential for learning. If it is applied as a medium of instruction at the basic level of education, it would go a long way in enhancing and aiding understanding of what is taught. This is because at that level of education, children understand what is taught to them more when their local language is applied as a medium of instruction. However, the abysmal performance of some students

in their academic pursuit at junior secondary school level may not be unconnected with the non-proper implementation of the policy of the language of environment being the medium of instruction as it is encapsulated in the National Language Policy. The problem of this study is to investigate the implementation of the use of the language of the learner's immediate environment as means of instruction in junior secondary school level in Izzi Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study was to find out the level of implementation of the language of environment as a medium of instruction in junior secondary schools in Izzi Local Government Area. Specifically, the study will:

1. Find out the use of the language of the environment as the medium of instruction in junior secondary schools in Izzi L.G.A. of Ebonyi State.
2. Find out the challenges faced in the implementation of the language of environment at junior secondary school level in Izzi L.G.A. of Ebonyi State.
3. Find the possible remedies to challenges faced in the implementation of the language of environment at junior secondary school level in Izzi L.G.A. of Ebonyi State.

### **Research questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How is the policy of the use of the language of environment as medium of instruction in the upper basic/junior secondary schools being implemented?
2. What are the challenges faced in the implementation of the language of the environment in Izzi L.G.A. of Ebonyi State?
3. What are the possible remedies to challenges faced in the implementation of the language of the environment in Izzi L.G.A. of Ebonyi State?

### **METHODOLOGY**

A descriptive survey design was used for the study. A survey, according to Nworgu (2015) is the means in which a group of people or items is studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people or items considered to be representative of the entire group. This design was adopted because it enabled the researcher to reach a good number of people within the target population in carrying out the study on the stipulations of the Nigerian Language Policy and the extent of the use of the language of immediate environment as a language of instruction in junior secondary schools in izzi Local Government Area of Ebonyi State.

The area of study was Izzi Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. Izzi local Government Area has an area of 2,264 Sqkm and a population of 272,170 according to 2022 population projection. The area is surrounded by the following local Government Areas; Yala Local Government Area on the East; Abakaliki Local Government Area on the South; Ebonyi Local Government Area on the West and Ohaukwu Local Government Area on the North. It has popular markets such as Iboko and Ogbala among others.

Izzi Local Government Area is made up of five major communities, namely: Igbeagu, Ndieze, Mgbalukwu, Ezzainiyimagu and Agbaja. It has one hundred and fifty nine primary schools and twenty-two public secondary schools in which teaching and learning are carried out (Izzi Local Government Education Authority (ILGEA) (2025). This area of study attracted the researcher's interest due to poor performance of students in using their native language in analyzing their learning contents.

The population of the study comprised all the 978 Junior Secondary School Three (JSS III) students in the 22 secondary schools in Izzi Local Government Area. This category of students was preferred because they have more language capacity to tackle questions on researcher's instrument of data collection.

The sample size comprised of 100 junior secondary school three students drawn from different public secondary schools in Izzi Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. To ensure that the chances of drawing one student was not affected by drawing of another, the researchers used the simple random sampling technique in selecting the 100 participants.

Structured questionnaire entitled "Implementation of the Language of Environment; Challenges (ILEC) was used for data collection. The instrument consisted of 21 items built in 3 clusters, numbered A, B and C. Each cluster contains 7 items. The instrument is a rating four point scale comprising strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD). In each of the sample schools, students were visited in their classrooms. The researchers administered the questionnaire to the respondents themselves and thereafter, collected the questionnaires immediately. This ensured a hundred percent return. The data collected was presented in tables and analyzed using frequency distribution means. A total point was calculated and weighted using the four point rating scale. The mean for each item was obtained by dividing the total score by the number of the respondents.

This is illustrated thus:

$$\frac{\text{Total score (TS)}}{\text{No of respondents}} = \text{mean score (x)}$$

Therefore, the mean score of 2.5 and above was accepted whereas the mean score that was less than 2.5 was not accepted.

## RESULTS

The results of the study are here under presented in tables in accordance with the research questions guiding the study. **Research Question 1:**

### Implementation of the Language of Environment

Table 1: Mean response of the implementation of the language of environment in junior secondary schools.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	N	FX	X	DECISION
1.	Teachers use Izzi as a medium of instruction in junior secondary school.	0	0	11	89	100	111	1.11	Not Accepted
2.	Teacher use Hausa as a medium of instruction in JSS class	0	0	9	91	100	109	1.09	Not Accepted
3.	Teachers use Yoruba as a medium								

**Research Article**

of instruction in JSS class.	0	0	3	97	100	103	1.03	Not Accepted
4. Teachers use English as a medium of instruction in JSS class.	78	18	2	0	100	370	3.7	Accepted
5. Teachers use Igbo as a medium of instruction in JSS class.	13	14	21	52	100	188	1.88	Not Accepted
6. There is punishment for students who speak local dialect or Igbo language in the classroom.	77	21	2	0	100	188	1.88	Not Accepted
7. Teachers who use the language of student's environment as a medium of instruction are seen as incompetent ones.	62	33	2	3	100	354	3.54	Accepted

**Grand mean**

**2.3**

Table 1 showed that the teaching of the language of environment was not being implemented in junior secondary schools in Izzi Local Government. This is shown by the grand mean of 2.3. Items 1, 2, 3 and 5 strongly portrayed that none of Izzi, Hausa, Yoruba, nor official Igbo languages was being used as a medium of instruction with the mean of 1.11, 1.09, 1.03 and 1.88 respectively. But item 4 was accepted for having the mean of 3.7, thereby showing that only English language is used in teaching the students. Items 6 and 7 even prove that there are punishments for those who speak local dialects or official Igbo language in the classroom, while a teacher who uses local language in teaching is considered incompetent with the mean of 3.75 and 3.54 respectively.

**Research question 2:**

**Challenges Faced in the Implementation of the Language of Environment**

**Table 2: Mean response on challenges faced in the Implementation of the Language of Environment.**

**S/N ITEMS SA A D SD N FX X DECISION**

8. Lack of indigenous teachers who have the mastery of students' native language affect the implementation of language of environment.	60	30	5	5	100	345	3.45	Accepted
9. Dearth of instructional materials such as textbooks written in the students' native language affects implementation.	70	30	0	0	100	370	3.70	Accepted
10. Government's inability to develop the orthography of many more Nigerian languages affects the implementation of the language of environment as a medium of instruction in junior secondary schools.	100	390	3.90	Accepted	90	10	0	0
11. Preference of English language over the child' native language by individuals affects the implementation of language of environment.	63	17	10	10	100	333	3.33	Accepted

12.	Multilingual nature of Nigeria affects the use of language of environment as a medium of instruction in junior secondary schools.	80	15	2	3	100	372	3.72	Accepted
13.	First language of the teacher affects the use of the child's native language as a medium of instruction.	58	29	7	6	100	339	3.39	Accepted
14.	Students from different ethnic groups in a class affects the use of language of instruction.	78	18	2	2	100	372	3.72	Accepted

**Grand mean 3.6**

Table 2 reveals that there are a lot of challenges facing the implementation of the language of environment as a subject offered in junior secondary schools. Items 8 - 4 with the mean scores of 3.45, 3.7, 3.9, 3.72, 3.39 and 3.72 attest to this. This shows that lack of indigenous teachers who have the mastery of students' native language, dearth of instructional materials such as textbooks written in students' native language, government inability to develop the orthography of many more Nigerian languages, multilingual nature of Nigeria among others affect the implementation of the language of a child's immediate environment as a medium of instruction in junior secondary schools in Izzi Local Government Area.

**Research question 3:**

**Possible Remedies to the Challenges Faced in the Implementation of the Language of Environment as Enshrined in the National Language Policy**

**Table 3: Mean responses on the possible remedies to the challenges in the implementation of the language of the Environment.**

S/N ITEMS SA A D SD N FX X DECISION

15.	Government should establish educational resource centres whose functions should include the study of Nigerian indigenous languages	80	15	3	2	100	373	3.73	Accepted
16.	Government should produce textbooks in Nigerian languages.	90	10	0	100	390	3.9	Accepted	17. Orthography of many more Nigerian languages should be developed by government.
18.	Teachers in educational institutions who should teach the basic education classes should be professionally trained in the mastery	80	10	5	5	100	365	3.65	Accepted

	of their native language.	60	30	5	5	100	345	3.45
Accepted								
19. Teachers should be employed and where they have							posted to the area	
							command of students' language of	
	environment. 58	22	10	10		100	328	3.28 Accepted
20. Government should develop language to serve as official	a						national	
							language in Nigeria.	
90	100	0	0	100	390	3.9	Accepted	21. Individuals should be enlightened to understand that no language is
inferior or superior to another.	70	10	10	10	100	340	3.4	Accepted
<b>Grand mean</b>							<b>3.61</b>	

From the results shown on table 4, respondents agreed that there are possible remedies to the challenges faced in the implementation of the language of environment as a subject offered in junior secondary schools in Izzi Local Government Area. Items 15 to 21 with the means of 3.73, 3.9, 3.65, 3.45, 3.28, 3.9 and 3.4 respectively portrayed it.

### DISCUSSIONS

From the result of the study on the implementation of the language of immediate environment as a medium of instruction in junior secondary schools, the respondents agreed that no other language is used in teaching in the area of the study except the English language. It was even made clear that using any other language other than English in the classroom is a punishable offence. More so, any teacher who uses native language of students while teaching is considered incompetent. This shows that implementation of language of immediate environment of a child as a medium of instruction or as subject offered in the junior secondary school in Izzi Local Government Area is yet to receive the deserved recognition. This finding agreed with Ngwu, Eneh and Omeh (2022) who revealed that teachers do not use the mother tongue in teaching the junior secondary school students and that this constitutes a serious impediment to the implementation of the language policy.

The challenges faced in the implementation of the language of environment as revealed by the results include: lack of indigenous teachers who have the mastery of students' native languages; dearth of instructional materials such as textbooks written in the students' language of environment; government's inability to develop the orthography of many more Nigerian languages; preference of English language over the child's native language; multilingual nature of Nigeria; first language of the teacher as well as students from different ethnic groups in a class that hamper the implementation of the language of environment as a subject offered in school. The findings

on these challenges fail to underscore the relevance of the language of a child's immediate environment which Chomsky (1969), Vygotsky (1932) and Renita (2023) agreed shows evidence of learning.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings the researchers make the following recommendations:

1. Government should develop orthography of many more Nigerian languages, produce textbooks in Nigerian languages and establish educational resource centres to see to the enhancement of the study of Nigerian indigenous languages and train teachers who should impart these languages. When this is done, the implementation of the national language policy as enunciated in the national policy on education can be achieved.
2. Government should, as a matter of fact develop a national language which should serve as an official language in the country so as to forestall the premium placed on the English language.
3. Individuals should be enlightened to understand that no language is superior or inferior to another. The importance of using the native language of the child to teach them at the early childhood should be made known to both the teachers, parents and individuals. Therefore, everyone should shun the preference of other languages to one's native language.

### **CONCLUSION**

There was an indication that language of immediate environment of a child was not used in teaching them let alone using it as a medium of official communication in schools in Izzi Local Government Area. However, the challenges faced in the implementation of the language policy were revealed to include lack of textbooks, government inability to develop orthography of many more Nigerian languages, individual negligence of using their native language due to ignorance of its worth and among others.

Therefore, possible solutions to these challenges were presented to include production of textbooks written in learner's native language, developing orthographies of many more Nigerian languages by the government, and training of teachers to handle the languages of the immediate environment, among others. The body language of curriculum implementers in Nigeria makes it look real that the English language is superior to indigenous languages. This perception can only change when we give premium to the teaching of our indigenous languages right from the foundation levels of education – the lower and upper basic levels of education.

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