

## **The Role of Igbo Language in National Development**

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**ABSTRACT:** Language is often said to be a means of communication between individuals who share a common code. The codes that individuals share are in the form of symbols. These symbols can be oral or written. And a race whose language cannot be used for literary and serious purposes has no real identity, the race is decadent. The most conclusive conquest of a people is the conquest through language. The most essential asset of a people is not in their affluence and technological advancement. Neither is it in the number of eminent sons and daughters they own. The most essential asset is their own language- their mother tongue. No people under normal circumstances would want their mother tongue to die, for it is after all the language that makes them an ethnic entity or nation. Without a language of its own, a nation becomes merged and lost in the foreign group whose language it is forced to speak. But with its own language, a nation identifies itself and ensures its perpetuation. This paper is set out to investigate the roles Igbo language plays in National Development. This predicates that the sustainability of National Development cannot be achieved if the indigenous language of the said nation is neglected.

**KEYWORDS:** language, national development, mother-tongue, sustainability.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

In every society, there are usually one or more languages which are used for the purpose of communication by human beings which form the linguistic group(s) of that society. Sometimes, these languages which co-exist with either different or the same status may be indigenous or foreign (Prezi 2013). Although, there are different classes of languages spoken in Nigeria, such as exogenous, indigenous and national languages. An exogenous language is one that is used as an official institutionalized language but has no speech community in the political entity using it officially. An indigenous language is a language that is native to a region and spoken by indigenous people often reduced to the status of a minority language while a national language is a language which has some connection de facto or de jure with people and perhaps by extension the territory they occupy. But for the purpose of our study, we shall concentrate on Igbo language which is one of the indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria.

Igbo language is one of the three main dominant languages recognized by the Federal Government of Nigeria as an official language. Others are Hausa and Yoruba including English language which is the Lingua Franca.

Igbo language is spoken by the Igbo people living in the eastern part of Nigeria. It is most spoken by the people from these states; Anambra, Imo, Enugu, Abia and Ebonyi states and some parts in Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta states. Igbo language belongs to 'kwa' group of Niger-Congo. Like other languages, Igbo language is not static and so desirable changes could be made in the light of knowledge and experience in this era of globalization.

Language is a distinctively human system of communication based on oral and written symbols. It is the vehicle through which people's culture is transmitted. It is an extremely important aspect of a community. It is an index of identity which serves as a repository of people's culture, industry and exploits.

Language is a tool of insurgence and that strong weapon of identity. Language permeates every aspect of life and harmony and disharmony in life derives from proper use or misuse of language. That is why language matters above every other thing. Languages differentiate the Homo sapiens from other animals (Olaoye (2013). Mother tongue is an indispensable cultural legacy with which all forms of human interactions are carried out (Solanke 2006) as quoted by Nwadike (2004) in consonance with Solanke asserts that it is the key to the heart of the people, if we lose the key, we lose the people. If we treasure the key and keep it safe, it will unlock the door of wealth and affluence Olaoye.

Nwadike (2002) quoting Adiele A. says that “A race whose language cannot be used for literary and serious purposes has no real identity; the race is decadent. The most conclusive conquest of people is the conquest through language”.

Language is also a gift and natural endowment from God to man to serve several purposes as Onuigbo puts it “Language remains a unique human gift and every speech community exploits its resources to characterize what Hall calls “incremental innovations” for peace and for war Onuigbo (2013) “Language as Action in Our Political Culture”

Language is not only a good indicator of social change but also an important cause of it. It is the fundamental factor in social, cultural, political and economic evolution more so since the origin of it coincides with that of the society and since a system of linguistic communication is a necessary condition for the existence of a human group.

Language has been identified as a conduit for transmission of culture, idea, thought, etc. from one generation to another. It is disheartening that after almost 54 years of Nigeria’s independence English language is still the language of education, governance, commerce, judiciary, etc. in Nigeria and as such has hindered equal participation of the entire citizenry in governance, access to information and full involvement in government policies and programs.

The speakers should explore and exploit their welfare and state of affairs in relation to their value system, world view, social norms and institution, all of which expression in their language since language is a vehicle for the transmission and propagation of such ideas and culture. But it is disheartening to see that Igbo have abandoned their language in place of foreign language. For instance aspirations for African language use arise principally for dissatisfaction with the current state and use and development of such language, which is a direct result of years of neglect and domination by European official languages during the colonial period. In most of Sub-Sahara Africa today which Nigeria is one of them, African languages occupy a subsidiary position, used in informal situations, adult literacy, and dissemination of information at local or regional levels, as teaching medium at the primary level of education. Departures from this norm are rare and may be found in only a few countries such as Tanzania, Ethiopia, Somalia, Lesotho, and Rwanda, where a major African language is recognized as an official language or used in a wide range of official and semi-official functions.

Thus far, and in spite of years of attempt to promote the wider use and development of African languages, the erstwhile colonial languages such as English, French, and Portuguese are still dominant in Africa. The same problem is applicable in the use of Igbo in Nigeria. The colonial language ‘English’ has taken over the position of Igbo language in Nigeria today as Ogbonna (1988) harps on the negative impact which the English language exerts on indigenous Nigerian languages especially Igbo language and the attendant problems this constitute to the material and development of society.

Mazuri suggests that African languages are needed for mass mobilization, information dissemination; health education, self-reliance, and reduction of the incidence of brain drain, for all these constitute an essential background of democracy. According to him,

“The economic foundation of democracy, therefore, seems, to favor the choice, development, and promotion of one or more indigenous African widely understood by the people”. But we must go beyond this kind of narrow conception of development, which limits it to economic only and adopt a wide and more appropriate concept of development, which is people-oriented, it becomes obvious that Igbo language will have to feature more prominently still in the development process.

### **National Development**

National development can be regarded as a situation whereby people harness the resources at their disposal in order to have meaningful life. This development ranges from growth in education (intellectual growth), politics, economy, science and technology. In the educational process the mother tongue (Igbo) is the pillar through which man has to plan, instruct and evaluate programs. This development of individuals in respect of their aspiration in the society means development of a nation individuals develop educationally, socially, economically, politically and culturally through their interaction with the government agencies that disseminate ideas and policies through various media in the languages that individual best understand.

The importance of language to national development is best deduced from the intelligible importance of education to national development. Education equips, facilitates, or prepares the human resources, which eventually act on natural resources to produce goods for the satisfaction of human needs. Education or training means to impart knowledge and skills on, to awaken the curiosity, as well as develop the intellectual capacity, of an individual. Recognizing this fact, Unachukwu et al (2003) highlight:

Education is the tool that propels development- -human, spiritual, cultural, social, economic and industrial. An uneducated society is doomed to perpetual backwardness, retrogressing general and material decay, while an educated society is a salvager of its own future.

This goes to strengthen what Olaoye said, that qualitative education in any nation is not a luxury, but imperative to national development. In order to achieve national cohesion and unity, Nigeria recognizes the importance of mother tongue education hence she states in her National Policy on Education (NPE) (1981)

Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother tongue or the immediate community and at a later stage, English. In selecting two Nigerian languages, students should study the language of their own area in addition to any of the three main Nigerian languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, subject to the availability of teachers.

Mother tongue is the language in which the child first learns to love and respect the mental heritage of his people and culture. Olaoye (2013:2) quoting Olaoye 2009 asserts that the indigenous language- mother tongue performs the following functions in child development.

**Instrumental function:** mother tongue is used by the child for getting things done. He uses mother tongue to navigate to maturity.

**Interactional function:** The child uses his mother tongue to interact with his parents, siblings, neighbors, peer-groups, classmates and the people he meets. He uses Igbo language to carry out speech act illocution, such as persuading, requesting, dissuading, apologizing, commanding, directing, warring, teasing or mocking and even abusing and praising. Even adults also use these speech behaviors to achieve international objectives.

**Regulating function:** Mother tongue is used for controlling people's behavior, through the following ways:

Prohibition for instance, the child or even the adult says "don't take my pen", "don't forget me". For adults we have "don't urinate here", "don't give bribe", "don't engage in examination malpractice" etc. all these statements are to instill moral discipline or to mould people's behaviors. Mother tongue is being used as law enforcement agency.

Threat of reprisal: When children do what is wrong mother tongue is used as a threat of reprisal for instance, "I will punish you if you do that again", "I will stop you from following your sister if you don't behave well".

Disapproval of behavior as in "that is bad", "that is not done here".

Emotional blackmail: We can use mother tongue to black mail someone like "Eh! You will kill your mum like that", "you will give your father hypertension" (Olaoye (2002).

When the child interacts with speakers of his MT, he learns more about the rules of speaking or socio-linguistic norms in the speech community, including of course the sanctions which go with the breach of the rules of speaking. He grows in native wisdom, knowledge and understanding. He learns societal ethos such as reciprocal respects for each others' opinions, humility, patience and other social values. He also imbibes positive moral attitude which makes him become a well-behaved, highly responsible, well-adjusted and disciplined citizen who shuns social vices like laziness, greed, avarice, corruption and other social vices. He thus becomes a man with high morality who can contribute positively to national development.

All these regulatory statements help the child and even the adults to develop a sense of responsibility and refinement in behavior.

**Child rearing function:** Igbo language is a powerful weapon or instrument for child-rearing practices. Through precepts, rules of speaking, the use of body language, socio linguistic etiquette, the children are initiated into their parent's speech community. Through indigenous songs, folktales, stories, proverbs, adages, literature, children learn age-old wisdom, adult conversational skills, moral lessons, how to engage in dialogue and constructive criticism. Bakare (2000) asserts that MT has the capacity to develop children's curiosity, manipulative ability, flexibility, initiative, industry, manual dexterity and mechanical comprehension, all leading to self-confidence, resourcefulness creative reasoning and all-round development.

Indigenous Languages, Literature, Culture and National Development A tripartite relationship between or among indigenous languages, literature and culture has been well established and documented Olaoye and Isyaku (2004). According to them, there is no literature without language. Culture and language too are inseparable and the trios are intricately interwoven. They play vital role in man's education and national development as will be seen in this section of the paper. Literature in Igbo or other indigenous languages is an art which entertains and instructs. It warns people of danger and instructs by opening people's eyes to a wide range of experiences and a deeper understanding of these experiences. According to Fatokun (1992) literature presents situations, interactions and oppositions. It suggests a wide range of value and attitudes. To understand a people and their culture one may have to turn to their oral and written narratives, their drama and poetry. A good

piece of literature can be regarded as an authentic mirror image of its society and time. Through satire, proverbs and symbolism, literary artists communicate ideas, thoughts and feelings about social ills in the society which they criticize with prussic diction. Proverbs, for instance, are a lesson in prudence, generosity, patience and wisdom which are indispensable to the guidance of mankind and the stability of society. Literary artists use Igbo language or other indigenous languages to ridicule or condemn anti-social behaviors such as corruption, assassination, political thuggery, religious intolerance, oppressive rule or dictatorship, any form of human degradation and undemocratic practices. Through historical literature our knowledge of the society is widened. According to Asade (2002) we learn from historical literature about seemingly immortal despots and their ignoble and sorrowful end, and that their mysterious death was engendered by the avalanche of atrocities and carnage they had masterminded and executed. This knowledge helps people in charting new and humanistic sociopolitical and economic course, which leads to a new world order. This is the contribution of literature to national development. Culture is defined as the particular systems of art, thought and custom of a society. It is the whole way of life of a people, the social heritage that the individual acquires as a member of his group. It is the entire attitude, perception and specific traits of civilization that confer to a people and its place in the universe. These traits are speech norms, etiquette, ideologies, ethics, stereotypes, artifacts, technologies, intellectual production. Indigenous language is thus an indelible mark of a people's identity. According to Fani-kayode (2006) the core values of our people must be the pivot for national reforms. He enjoins that our traditional values should be embedded in honesty, transparency, respect for institutions, constituted authorities and the sanctity of human person and life. These core values are reflected in the people's identity, cultures, traditions and systems, most times encapsulated in their languages. A child that grows up guided by the positive values of the society will possess a healthy and progressive mind in adulthood (Opega (2004). Therefore, the teaching and learning of indigenous languages, literature and culture will afford the learner an understanding of the problems of the society, and indeed, Nigeria. We cannot, therefore, overemphasize the importance of a society's indigenous languages, literature and culture as three interrelated sociolinguistic variables from whose milk the youth must drink in order to develop a healthy soul in a healthy body.

Indigenous Languages, Civic Responsibility and Democracy. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides that citizens have among others the following: allegiance to the constitution, respect for its ideals and institutions as well as the National Flag, Anthem, Pledge and respects for properly constituted authorities. Other duties include protection and preserving public property, shunning fighting, official corruption and squander mania, contributing to the good name and defense of the country. Citizens have the right to vote and be voted for, freedom of movement, speech, association, and the right to human dignity, personal liberty and fair hearing. - It is only through civic education that citizens can know their rights and civic duties, and indigenous language is the instrument for political, social and cultural education. - Government's policies and programs are often couched in English language technical terms beyond the understanding of the teeming illiterate populace. Government uses terms like privatization, commercialization, deregulation, federal character, economic melt-down, geo-political zones, zero allocation, federation account, monetization policy, nascent democracy, national re-branding, attitudinal change, option A-4, gubernatorial candidates. Translating government's pronouncements, policies, the National Anthem, Pledge and programs into Igbo or any other Nigerian languages will make more meaning to the illiterate masses, and will bring about political awareness, which in turn will encourage participatory democracy which will reduce political apathy, and open citizens' eyes to their rights and privileges, thus reducing the chances of voter intimidation and rigging. The end result will be national development.

In the process of education, language is the medium of instruction. The effectiveness of the educational program or a training program depends, to a large extent, on whether or not effective communication has taken place between the teacher and the learner. The knowledge, skills and value necessary for a person to become an effective agent of change are provided through education by an appropriate language medium. Therefore, the role of language in the process of national development is extremely very important. On this note the Renaissance philosopher Francis Bacon made this postulation that "knowledge is Power" (Omeregbe (2003). The universe or nature has to be conquered and dominated and the weapon with which nature can be conquered and dominated is knowledge.

Knowledge itself is communicated through language. Therefore, language is a vital tool in the struggle to gain dominion over nature. In fact, the importance of language to national development cannot be over-emphasized since it is with language that the entirety of reality can be explained Agbanusi (2014).

### **3. Current State of Igbo Language in Nigeria**

It is necessary at this point to identify the current state of indigenous languages in Nigeria in order to evaluate the worth, value and role of this resource in national development. Nigeria is a multilingual and multi-cultural nation with about 400 indigenous languages. These languages are very diverse linguistically, unequal in

size and status, and are at different stages or levels of development. The orthographies of many of them have not yet been designed or developed.

This means that many of them are yet to be committed into writing. The Nigerian linguistic situation can be variously described and classified as follows:

Three (3) foreign or exoglossic languages: English, French and Arabic. Awonusi (1990) calls these three exoglossic languages top level languages that are used for national and international communication. They are also regarded as world languages, with English and French being regarded as languages of colonization.

Igbo language is surrounded by very large languages: Hausa, Yoruba, and Pidgin. The three major languages in Nigerai (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) are called “Decamillionaires” and they serve as regional Lingua Franca. Pidgin functions as a restricted Lingua Franca. There are other nine (9) large languages: Edo, Effik, Ebira, Fulfulde, Idoma, Igala, Kanuri, Nupe and Tiv. These Nine languages described as network (Radio) languages are called Millionaire languages, and are used in the Nigeria mass media. Twenty (20) medium-sized languages, many of which are called minority languages. About 350 small size languages are also called minority languages. Having described the Nigeria linguistic situation where Igbo language saw itself is finding difficult to survive. Let us now discuss the role of Igbo language (mother tongues, MT) as a catalyst in educational development which is an important index of national development.

Qualitative education in any nation is not a luxury, but an imperative to national development. In order to achieve national cohesion and unity Nigeria recognizes the importance of mother tongue education hence she states in her National Policy on Education (NPE) that the language of instruction in the primary school should be initially in the child’s mother tongue or the language of the immediate community. Indigenous language is the most important tool with which society is organized. It is hardly possible to talk of national development without including the languages with which the people formulate their thoughts, ideas and needs.

Multilingual education is capable of eradicating illiteracy. It provides political awareness and sociopolitical stability. Government’s program and policies reach the grassroots with the use of indigenous languages. National unity depends largely on mutual understanding of each others’ language and culture, including interests. This is why Nigeria considers it to be in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major Nigerian languages other than his own MT. Unity means strength or power, and it is language that unifies people. Indigenous languages therefore confer power on a nation.

### **Factors that militate against the growth of Igbo**

The first among many factors is lack of adequate interest in Igbo language by the owners of the language due to their general ignorance of the great potential that it offers.

The native speakers of Igbo do not show adequate interest in it. The native speakers of Yoruba and Hausa languages show much interest in their languages. They accommodate the English language as a lingua franca which it is designed to be. In spite of the English they also speak their native languages with pride and do not feel ashamed to speak it or to identify with it anywhere. They ensure that their children learn to speak, read and write it. Hence, very educated and highly-placed Yoruba and Hausa speak their native languages fluently.

However, the story of the Igbo people and their language is different; experience makes it seem that the English language means more to the Igbo people than just a lingua franca. It is as if the people have decided to replace their native language with English. This phenomenon is seen in the fact that most Igbo people cannot write or read the Igbo language properly. Many cannot even speak it well, let alone be able to write well (Agbanusi (2014).

Worse still, some Igbo youths don’t pray in Igbo language, if you ask an Igbo youth to pray he will pray in English. The reason for this lack of adequate interest in Igbo language by the Igbo people is traceable to the ignorance of the great importance of the language to the Igbo race and the entire nation, but also that of the great danger its decline or extinction portends to the Igbo cultural identity.

The second reason for the decline of Igbo is the misinterpretation or misunderstanding, or to be sure the non-application of the National Policy on Education (NPE) as it concerns the medium of instruction at the primary level of education in Nigeria.

Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother tongue or the immediate community and at a later stage, English. In selecting two Nigerian languages, students should study the language of their own area in addition to any of the three main Nigerian languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, subject to the availability of teachers.

Nevertheless, in contrast with the above dictate, in many primary schools even in Nursery and Kindergarten level, English is used as the major language of instruction. The situation is worsened by the fact that in many Igbo-based primary schools, not only that pupil are denied the right of being taught in their mother

tongue, they are even punished for daring to speak it during school period. This attitude sends the wrong signal to a child about his or her mother-tongue, and immensely diminishes interest in it.

The last but not the least is the iconoclastic attitude of most people gave rise to the emergence of an unreasonable fashion of encouraging early learning and speaking of English by their children without a corresponding encouragement in the learning and speaking of the Igbo language (Ezeani 2005).

### **Role of Igbo Language in National Development**

#### **Commercial Nature:**

The Igbo language is particularly crucial to national development because of the commercial nature of the South-eastern part of the country which harbors the native speakers of the Igbo language. People who do not possess the necessary knowledge are not likely to advance in social and economic spheres.

Communication is most in a language with which the person is at home. It was in appreciation of this fact the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) called on every European citizen to learn how to speak, read and write his or her native languages Ezeani as quoted by Agbanusi. This should be a lesson for Nigerians. It implies that even those without formal education, can imbibe a skill or knowledge better in their respective indigenous languages than English. This issue should be of particular interest to Igbo people, considering the fact that the South-eastern part of Nigeria which is the geographical base of the Igbo language embodies some of the largest markets in the whole of Africa.

Because of this obvious reason an improvement in the learning and speaking of the Igbo language, both among the Igbo and the non-Igbo will ensure efficiency in communication and consequently lead to the enhancement of the economic growth of the nation. If the language is developed international standards and made an international language, there is no doubt that it will attract foreign investor- companies which will find it easier and more effective, leading to greater productivity.

Furthermore, Igbo language provides great potential in the areas of social order, religion and politics. With an improvement in the study and learning of the language, Nigerians of other ethnic extraction, some of who complain that the Igbo language is complex, will be better guided in learning it. This will certainly enhance the spirit of brotherhood among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria and ultimately heighten the level of social order, religious tolerance and political stability in the nation.

#### **Cultural identity:**

Language is an essential means through which people communicate during interaction with one another. Kilgour (1999) asserts that apart from being a means of communication, language forges friendships, cultural ties and economic relationships. Kilgour quoting Edward Sapir, also notes that language is not only a vehicle for the expression of thought, perceptions, sentiments and values characteristic of a community but also represents a fundamental expression of social identity. Because of all these roles that languages perform, there is no society without one or more languages. These languages are the carriers of culture in any society where they are found. To buttress the issue of the role of language in culture, Obahiagbon (2010) while citing Edward notes that language serve as cultural identity to a group of people. On the use of indigenous language (Igbo) in schools, Prezi (2013) quoting Olarewaju, Simpson, and Sofunke identifies five reasons for the use of indigenous languages in our schools to include national consciousness and pride, cultural dynamism, psychological equilibrium, pedagogical efficacy and mass communication.

#### **Enculturation:**

The most important role of the Igbo language in any society is enculturation of its citizens within the culture of its society so far, even though English is the official language of Nigerians, it is doubtful whether any Nigerian yet acquires it as a mother tongue. It is trite to observe that even though some Nigerian elites attempt to speak the English language to their children; this version of English is certainly not English as we know it. The English that most Nigerians teach their children are mainly literal translations of their mother tongues (Mbah (2012).

#### **Language as mark of identity:**

Language is a mark of identity for any ethno linguistic **group**, Igbo language is not an exception to this view. Igbo people are identified by their language. Whenever a language user speaks his language, we will be able to identify his linguistic group and by so doing we equally identify a person to be a Nigerian. It is in cognizance of the role of language that made Eva Enghohu as quoted in Nwadike (2012) to conclude this way, "language is the key to the heart of the people. If we lose the key, we lose the people...." A close look at Enghohu's statement will make one to understand that any ethno linguistic group that loses their language automatically loses their identity as a people.

In the southwestern and Delta regions of Nigeria, Igbo has official language status. There it is used for government notices. In the states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo, Igbo is the main language of trade and commerce. Igbo is used in mass media communication (radio and television) in the southern Delta region of Nigeria as well.

It is easier to identify or designate a language than to define one. Ultimately, language is in the ear of the hearer. Identification with a language is, fundamentally, an affirmation of cultural solidarity with its speakers.

These are the laudable National positions on language, Igbo language will have failed if she had no functional and latent contributions to promote Nigerian unity.

## **II. RECOMMENDATION**

Ignorance is the mother of this lack of interest which is the crux of the problem of the Igbo language. As soon as the Igbo begin to show adequate interest in the Igbo language, the non-Igbo will follow suit. When this happens, Igbo language will have been placed on the threshold of a new existence where its immense potential as a language of commerce will be realized.

Igbo elites should use every available forum or opportunity to educate the Igbo masses on what is at stake. This will be part of the efforts towards resuscitating and repositioning the language. They should be made to understand that language is a crucial index of culture and that it is culture that gives a people their identity as a people.

Every Igbo should learn to write, read and speak Igbo language properly using idioms and wise-sayings which add beauty to the language.

Schools and media houses that are Igbo-based should be in the vanguard for the resuscitation and propagation of the Igbo language. They should help to formulate suitable Igbo words for some English vocabularies that do not have Igbo translations.

The vision of Federal Government of Nigeria is to become one of the top 20 global economies by the year 2020, through the implementation of her 7- point- agenda crafted from the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals. Education for All (EFA) is one of the goals Nigeria desires to achieve by the year 2020. Education is believed to be a tool for the promotion of peace, integration and unity. Then language education can be used as a roadmap to national development and democratic greatness because there is co-relation between language and youth empowerment, socio-political and economic order, technological advancement, democracy and national rebranding. I therefore recommend that in order to actualize this vision, 20:2020 among other things the Federal Government of Nigeria should invest more on multilingual, multicultural and mother tongue (Igbo) education if her vision is to become a reality and not a dream.

Governments have multiple roles to play. With regard to education they should ensure that Igbo is properly taught in our schools and that appropriate texts, materials and equipment are available and adequate. With their control of various media, governments are also in a position to promote Igbo language and literature through targeted programs at various levels. Some symbolic yet practical actions are also called for.

In Education sector, the authority concerned should ensure that the misinterpretation of the National Policy on Education as regards the medium of instruction at the primary school level is correct.

The stake holders in all the Igbo states should insist that all primary schools in Igbo land revert to the NPE dictate that the medium of instruction in primary schools should be Igbo language then at a later stage English.

Houses of Assembly in all Igbo States should use Legislation to stop the practice of pupils being punished for speaking Igbo during school period. Thus Governments in Igbo land can formally give Igbo equal status in the conduct of government business, through transactions and publications. The state assemblies and local governments should also do the same and designate at least one day in the week as Igbo language day. A similar arrangement is operational in some Yoruba states Ukwu (2009)

The findings of the Political Bureau (1987) section 53 of the defunct 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which also state thus:

Government shall promote the learning of indigenous languages.

The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English and in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made thereof. The business of a House of Assembly shall be conducted in English but the House may in addition to English conduct the business of the House in one or more other languages spoken in the state as the House may by resolution approve.

There should be Scholarship awards to the interested Igbo, and even non-Igbo people desirous to study Igbo language in the University or any higher institution.

Serious efforts should be made to make the Igbo language lucrative. This is necessary because it is of common experience that, in human affairs, incentives attract greater stimuli than mere exhortations. As soon as the monetary value of the Igbo language is increased, the zeal to speak or study it in school will rise tremendously.

### III. CONCLUSION

The development and the growth of the society cannot be separated from language which link the people together. It is worth mentioning that the language of any society makes for understanding and co-operation. It is through this that people live together peacefully and harmoniously. The speakers of the same language see themselves as brothers and sisters, since they have common norms and values.

Ibiowotisi (1996:9) stresses that teaching and learning indigenous languages in Nigerian schools will enhance national unity and growth of the nation. He further stressed that the ability to speak these languages fluently by Nigerians will enable them to live anywhere in the country and contribute their quota to the development of the nation without any reservations.

Nigeria is a nation made up of hundreds of ethnic groups, and almost 500 indigenous languages and one of these ethnic groups is Igbo who speak the Igbo language. With Igbo, the Igbo identify themselves as Igbo, one of the peoples of Nigeria. This in essence helps to foster brotherhood and unity among and other Nigerians as belonging to one and the same great mother called 'Nigeria'.

And Igbo as one of the languages entrenched in the constitution as one of the national languages, and also enshrined in the National Policy on Education (NPE 1981) as one of the languages in which Nigerians are taught at schools from primary to university levels, in the three geographic zones of the country. Igbo language is then a language of education, education being one of the unifying factors of this nation.

However defined, a language identifies a culture unit, a group of people with shared knowledge, traditions, values and interests. Such a unit gives its members a strong sense of belonging, a framework for the development and transmission of knowledge and values.

The challenge of reviving and promoting Igbo in national development demands action on all fronts. On the household front, we must make sure that we start to bring up our children, whether we live in Enugu Ezike or Enugu, Lagos, New York or Tokyo, as Igbo children. We must make them know where they come from, the environment, traditions and values. We must make them understand, speak, read and write Igbo. Abroad, wherever there are Igbo residents we must make special arrangements for the enculturation of their children.

On the schools front, primary schools must be equipped to teach Igbo properly. The pupils must be exposed to the appropriate folk tales, games and books to build up their knowledge and pride as Igbo children. At secondary school level, all schools in the Igbo-speaking states and local government areas must make Igbo a compulsory subject and provide adequate staffing, material and equipment to ensure effective teaching. At tertiary level the provisions and facilities for teaching and research must be vastly expanded. [HYPERLINK http://ukwufoundation.org/language-and-national-development-in-nigeria-the-igbo-dimension/](http://ukwufoundation.org/language-and-national-development-in-nigeria-the-igbo-dimension/).

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