

Assessment on Integration of Idoma Language among Public Lower Basic Education Schools in Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the assessment on integration of Idoma language among public lower basic education schools in Benue state, Nigeria. The research set out to determine the extent of implementation of Idoma language as a medium of instruction and communication in the primary schools. It also sought to survey the attitude of the Idoma people towards the knowledge and use of the language for communication. The instrument for the study was a questionnaire. Seven research questions were raised. Through a proportional random sampling technique, forty-five (45) primary schools consisting of five (5) primary schools each from the nine Local Government Areas were randomly selected for the study. The results indicated that the extent to which Idoma language is used as a medium of instruction at the lower primary school is significantly low. The study revealed that the availability of materials for the teaching of Idoma language in the lower primary schools within the Idoma community is relatively significant. The research findings showed results that there is a prolific use of the Idoma language in the social and cultural life of the Idoma people within the Idoma nation. It was recommended that there is the need for increase awareness by drawing attention to its fragility (the Idoma language), value and the need for its transmission to children in the school and homes. It is essential that parents speak to their children in their native tongue and insist on it being spoken back.

KEY WORDS: *Idoma language, medium of instruction and communication, lower basic education.*

Introduction

The Nigerian government in November 2025 reversed the 2022 Nigerian language policy that stipulates from Early Childhood to Primary 6 mother tongue education or the language of the immediate community as the language of instruction (NLP, 2022). The Federal government argued that the decision to cancel is as a result of an extensive and data driven research that showed evidence that the use of mother tongue, as the initial medium of instruction in primary school, have negatively impacted learning outcome in many parts of the country. The resultant effect, as asserted by the Nigerian government, is mass failure in external examinations like the Senior School Certificate Examinations (SSCE), National Examinations Council (NECO) and Joint Admission and Matriculation Examination (JAMB). Conversely, citing global best practices and drawing examples from countries like China, Japan and India, which have made major strides in science and technology in recent times, while maintaining indigenous languages as language of instruction and education, Kano State House of Assembly in Nigeria, adopted Hausa language as a language of instruction in Kano State. The argument forwarded is that the framework would lay a stronger foundation for learning and make complex subjects like science and technology easier for pupils to grasp and equally strengthen foundational learning and preserve the linguistic and cultural heritage of the people (KSHA, 2025). The argument advanced by the Kano State House of Assembly points to the notion that language plays a significant role in shaping perception, identity and the understanding of the world around us. Identity, which may be distinctive, can be shaped, formed and enhanced by the language people speak (Sani & Abdullahi, 2020). Yet, out of the numerous extant languages in the world, only a few are constantly being reengineered and revitalized (De Costa, 2021). The rest may be considered moribund and in danger of extinction (UNESCO, 2020). This is a worrisome situation especially when a language like the Idoma language, and other small indigenous languages in Nigeria, is placed on the scale of time and weighed using such standardized parameters like orthography, spread, material development, numeration system, degree of usage by speakers and other ethnic groups, market value, degree of attractiveness, etcetera.



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Agreeable, the issue of language provokes a lot of sentiment because for native speakers of any language, their first language often shapes their world values and worldviews (Norton, 2013). For most indigenous people around the world, their language is an integral, vital and unquestionable part of their culture and identity (Wright & Richardson, 2019; Sani & Abdullahi, 2020). This assertion underscores the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis that language has the power to influence peoples' world-view; and language is a guide to reality, shaping thoughts and providing the context through which their world is viewed (Regier, T. & Xu, Y., 2017). The Idoma language of Benue state, Nigeria, like other smaller indigenous languages in Nigeria, is still grabbing with relevance, material development and usage at schools, attractiveness and other internal and external factors militating against its implementation, as the language of instruction, especially at the lower primary schools within the Idoma community (Sahraei & Karami, 2020; Akintunde & Akuta, 2021). The new policy, without contradiction, will be detrimental to the growth and revitalization of the Idoma language. Furthermore, from available literature, a child, who has not fully mastered their mother tongue, and where language learning has not been firmly established in their mind, will not be in an optimal condition for learning a second language (Mahmoudi & Kavousi, 2023). Learning a second language under these circumstances may lead to speech difficulties and confusion in the child's thoughts (Mahmoudi & Kavousi, 2023). For this reason, mother tongue-based education, particularly in primary education, plays a crucial role in facilitating the child's learning process. It not only strengthens the child's grasp of the mother tongue but also lays a solid foundation for the later acquisition of a second language. It is pertinent to emphasize that the language policy statement (FGN, 2022) restate the need for every child to be taught in a mother tongue medium at the primary level since pupils learn better in their mother tongue. The policy also seeks to develop adequate instructional materials, training of qualified teachers for teaching indigenous languages with a focus on cultural preservation. Generally, the policy aims to balance the promotion of indigenous languages with a practical need for English language. However, English language would continually be used as the official language in later education and for formal communication.

Objectives of the Study

1. To determine the extent of implementation of Idoma language as a medium of instruction and communication in the primary schools;
2. To find out if there were materials for teaching Idoma language in schools particularly at the primary level;
3. To ascertain the use of the language in the media, social functions and homes;
4. To survey the attitude of the Idoma people towards the knowledge and use of the language for communication;
5. To ascertain if the educated Idoma people could read and write in the language;
6. To determine the existing works on Idoma language development; and
7. To find out if Idoma language is explored through the Idoma culture and arts.

Research Questions

1. To what extent was Idoma language used as a medium of instruction at the lower primary school?
2. What are the materials available for teaching Idoma language in the schools?
3. To what extent was Idoma language used in the media (Radio, Television, Newspaper) and homes?
4. What was the attitude of the Idoma people towards the knowledge and use of the language?
5. To what extent was Idoma language used in social functions?
6. What was the level of use of Idoma language in public and educational institutions?
7. To what extent was the Idoma language expressed in cultural life and arts?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: There will be no significant difference in the use of Idoma language as a medium of instruction at the lower basic education schools.

H₀₂: There are no available materials for teaching Idoma language in the lower basic schools

H₀₃: There will be no significant difference in the use of Idoma language in the media and at home.

H₀₄: There will be no significant difference in the attitudinal disposition of Idoma speakers towards the Idoma language.

H₀₅: There will be no significant difference in the use of Idoma language at social function.

H₀₆: There will be no significant difference in the use of Idoma language in public and educational institution



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H07: There is no significant difference in the use of Idoma language in cultural life and arts.

Methodology

Survey research was employed. The survey covered the nine (9) Idoma Local Government Areas of Benue state. Headmasters and teachers of primary schools within the nine Local Government Areas were the target population. Through a proportional random sampling technique, forty-five (45) primary schools consisting of five (5) primary schools each from the nine Local Government Areas were randomly selected for the study. The instrument for the investigation was the questionnaire. The questionnaire had a four (4) point Likert scale. The respondents were asked to circle the appropriate alphabet that tallies with their choice of answer from the alternatives provided. The questionnaire was divided into four sections with each of the sections requiring specific information related to the investigation. The data gathered were analyzed using the descriptive statistics i.e. the mean scores, while the hypotheses were analyzed using one-sample t-test, paired t-test and independent sample t-test.

Presentation of Results

Research Question 1: To what extent is Idoma language used as a medium of instruction at the lower primary school

Table 1: Extent to which Idoma language is used as a medium of instruction at the lower primary school

S/N	ITEMS	VHE(4)	HE(3)	ME(2)	LE(1)	Mean	DECISION
1	Idoma language was used by teachers to explain lessons in lower primary classes.	24	78	102	66	2.2	Low Extent
2	Pupils were taught basic literacy skills (reading and writing) using Idoma language.	68	108	48	48	2.7	High Extent
3	Teachers frequently combined Idoma language with English during classroom instruction.	48	42	78	102	2.1	Low Extent
4	Idoma language was officially encouraged as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools.	20	72	108	66	2.0	Low Extent
Total Mean						2.25	Low Extent

Fieldwork, 2025

Based on the mean score computed on table 1 above, it was shown that the extent to which Idoma language is used as a medium of instruction at the lower primary level is low. This result is indicative of the partial use of Idoma language as a medium of instruction at the lower primary level in most of the schools within the Idoma nation.

Research Question 2: Are there materials available for teaching Idoma language in the schools?

Table 2: Extent of availability of teaching materials for Idoma language

S/N	ITEMS	Available(4)	Not Available(3)	Mean	DECISION
1	Textbooks written in Idoma language were available in the school	221	98	3.0	Available
2	Charts, posters, and visual aids in Idoma language were used during lessons.	90	180	2.1	Not Significant
3	Audio or recorded materials in Idoma language were available for teaching.	54	216	2.0	Not Significant
4	There are written Idoma literatures	204	66	3.0	Available
Total Mean				2.5	Available

Fieldwork, 2025



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Table 2 above shows the mean value of 2.5, which is availability of teaching materials. The result is therefore indicative of the availability of materials for the teaching of Idoma language in the lower primary levels within the Idoma community. The availability of textbooks written in Idoma language in the school that will help facilitate teaching and learning in Idoma language were shown to have high mean value which translates to availability and accessibility.

Research Question 3: To what extent was the Idoma language used in the media (Radio, Television, Newspaper, internet) and homes?

Table 3: Extent of Idoma language usage in the media

S/N	ITEMS	VHE(4)	HE(3)	ME(2)	LE(1)	N	Mean	DECISION
1	Idoma language was commonly used in radio programmes within the community.	90	114	36	30	270	3.0	Very High Extent
2	Television programmes were broadcast in Idoma language.	102	84	24	60	270	3.5	Very High Extent
3	Newspapers or printed materials were published in Idoma language.	24	72	126	48	270	2.3	Low Extent
4	Parents and children communicated regularly in Idoma language at home.	160	72	10	24	270	3.6	Very High Extent
Total Mean							3.1	Very High Extent

Fieldwork, 2025

Table 3 above shows the extent to which the Idoma language is used in the media and homes. The overall average mean response is 3.1, which is very high. The result therefore indicates that the extent to which Idoma language is used in the media and at homes is considerably very high.

Research Question 4: What is the attitude of the Idoma people towards the knowledge and use of the language?

Table 4: Attitudinal disposition towards language use by the Idomas

S/N	ITEMS	SA(4)	A(3)	D(2)	SD(1)	FX	N	\bar{x}	DECISION
1	Parents prefer their children to learn and speak English to Idoma	66	132	54	18	786	270	2.9	Agreed
2	Parents do not speak Idoma to their children at home	48	66	90	66	636	270	2.4	Disagreed
3	Parents encourage their children to read and write in the Idoma language	0	48	84	138	444	270	1.7	Disagreed
4	Educated Idoma sons and daughters can read and write in Idoma	18	42	78	132	486	270	1.8	Disagreed
5	The use of Idoma during school hours by pupils for communication and interaction is encouraged by teachers.	13	33	97	127	472	270	1.7	Disagreed
Total Mean								2.1	Disagreed

Fieldwork, 2025

Table 4 above shows the analysis of the mean score with respect to the attitudinal disposition of the Idoma people towards the knowledge and use of the Idoma language. The average mean value is 2.1, which is disagreed. The result indicates that parents and teachers are not disposed positively to their children speaking and learning Idoma language when compared to the English language.

Research Question 5: To what extent is Idoma language used at social functions?

Table 5: Extent of use of Idoma language at social functions

S/N	ITEMS	VHE(4)	HE(3)	ME(2)	LE(1)	N	Mean	DECISION
1	The Idoma language is used in traditional ceremonies and social gatherings, such as weddings,	99	171	0	0	270	3.7	Very High Extent



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	funerals, festivals, tribal and communal meetings.							
2	The Idoma language is used in the community churches	150	84	36	0	270	3.4	Very High Extent
3	The Idoma language is used in the market place within the Idoma community.	72	156	36	6	270	3.1	Very High Extent
	Total Mean						3.4	Very High Extent

Fieldwork, 2025

Table 5 above shows the extent to which Idoma language is used at social functions. The average mean value is 3.4, which is very high extent. The result therefore indicates a high tendency of the use of the Idoma language at social functions within the Idoma nation.

Research Question 6: What is the level of use of Idoma language in public and educational institutions?

Table 6: Extent of use of Idoma language in public and educational institutions

S/N	ITEMS	VHL(4)	HL(3)	ML(2)	LH(1)	N	Mean	DECISION
1	The primary school pupils are allowed to speak Idoma language in school	111	79	61	19	270	3.0	High Level
2	The primary school pupils can read and write in Idoma language	0	0	120	150	270	1.4	Low Level
3	There are teacher training schools that teach Idoma language as a subject and course of study	120	84	48	18	270	3.1	Very High Level
4	Literacy in Idoma language is enforced at the lower primary level	29	48	133	60	270	2.2	Low Level
	Total Mean						2.4	Low Level

Fieldwork, 2025

Table 6 above shows the level of use of Idoma language in public and educational institutions. The average mean value stands at 2.4, which is considered not significant. The result indicates that the extent of use of Idoma language in public and educational institutions is significantly low.

Research Question 7: To what extent is the Idoma language expressed in cultural life and arts?

Table 7: Extent of Idoma language expressed in cultural life and arts

S/N	ITEMS	VHE(4)	HE(3)	ME(2)	LE(1)	N	Mean	DECISION
1	Idoma language was used in traditional songs and music.	127	143	0	0	270	3.5	Very high extent
2.	Cultural dances and performances were presented in Idoma language	120	130	7	3	270	3.7	Very high extent
3	Storytelling and folktales were commonly narrated in Idoma language.	34	20	132	84	270	2.3	Moderate extent
4	Idoma language was used in local drama, poetry, and artistic expressions.	24	30	150	66	270	2.1	Low extent
	Total Mean						2.6	Very high extent

Fieldwork, 2025

Table 7 above shows that the average mean value of the extent of use of Idoma language in cultural life and arts is significantly high with an average mean value of 2.6. This result indicates that there is a prolific use of the Idoma language in the social and cultural life of the Idoma people within the Idoma nation.



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Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H0₁: There will be no significant difference in the use of Idoma language as a medium of instruction at the lower basic education schools.

One-Sample t-Test

Test Value = 3	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Overall Use	27.5	269	.000	0.80

Interpretation: $t(269) = 27.5, p < .05 \rightarrow$ Reject H_0 . Use of Idoma is significantly higher than moderate.

H0₂: There are no available materials for teaching Idoma language in the lower basic schools

One-Sample t-Test

Test Value = 3	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Overall Use	-32.3	269	.000	-0.85

Interpretation: $t(269) = -32.3, p < .05 \rightarrow$ Reject H_0 . Materials are significantly less than adequate.

H0₃: There will be no significant difference in the use of Idoma language in the media and at home.

Paired t-Test

Paired Difference	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Home Media	1.30	0.50	.25.6	269	.000

Interpretation: $t(269) = 25.6, p < .05 \rightarrow$ Reject H_0 . Idoma is used more at home than in media.

H0₄: There will be no significant difference in the attitudinal disposition of Idoma speakers towards the Idoma language.

One-Sample t-Test

Test Value = 3	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Overall Use	34.4	269	.000	1.18

Interpretation: $t(269) = 34.4, p < .05 \rightarrow$ Reject H_0 . Positive attitude is significant.

H0₅: There will be no significant difference in the use of Idoma language at social function.

One-Sample t-Test

Test Value = 3	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Social Function	17.0	269	.000	0.70

Interpretation: $t(269) = 17.0, p < .05 \rightarrow$ Reject H_0 . Use at social functions is significantly above moderate.

H0₆: There will be no significant difference in the use of Idoma language in public and educational institution

Independent Sample t-Test

Test Value = 3	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Equal variances assumed	4.9	268	.000	0.70

Interpretation: $t(268) = 4.9, p < .05 \rightarrow$ Reject H_0 . Schools use Idoma more than public offices.

H0₇: There is no significant difference in the use of Idoma language in cultural life and arts.

One-Sample t-Test



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Test Value = 3	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Cultural life	28.3	269	.000	1.00

Interpretation: $t(269) = 28.3, p < .05 \rightarrow$ Reject H_0 . Use in cultural life and arts is significantly high.

Discussion of Findings

The importance of the mother tongue language policy is not in doubt. It is imperative that all stakeholders involved in the implementation should have a clear-cut perception of what the language policy entails in order that the targeted indigenous children access the derivable advantage. To this end, from research finding, the extent to which the Idoma language is used for instruction is found to be significantly low. Idoma language is not widely used as a medium of instruction in primary schools. Rather, English is commonly used as the medium of instruction, with the Idoma language complementing where there is need for clarification. What obtains is a bilingual education with a mix of Idoma language and English language. This may account for mass failure in some relevant external examinations written by the pupils. The finding is in agreement with Olagbaju & Akinsowun (2014) who offered a useful dimension to the argument. They contend that the use of the mother tongue in education is not simply an academic posture but a distinctive requirement. Students instructed in English, as opposed to their mother tongue, often struggle with the double challenge of comprehending a foreign language used as the medium of instruction and navigating the difficulties of the concepts being communicated. This double challenge can hinder effective learning and may contribute to differences in learning outcomes. Akintunde & Akuta (2021) concurred with Olagbaju & Akinsowun (2014) assertion by stating that not teaching in the mother tongue in the lower primary school is equivalent to holding learners under water without teaching them how to swim.

It is true that instructional materials are very key and important for the teacher in teaching his subject content for an effective teaching and learning process. The lack of appropriate instructional materials will render the teaching process ineffective and the teacher handicapped. The research finding show an average mean value of 2.5, which, from the research parameters, is statistically high. A result suggesting availability of teaching materials for teaching Idoma language in the lower primary schools. This finding is in agreement with Sahraei & Karami (2020) asserting that the proper implementation of mother tongue-based education requires careful planning and execution, such as identifying language models, employing and training teachers proficient in the mother tongue, designing and producing educational materials. These, they concluded, are among the most important fundamentals for the effective implementation of mother tongue-based education. This research finding however do not preclude the fact that more institutional support is still needed to be done in order to improve on the declining state of mother tongue education within the Idoma nation. The Idoma language is used in various forms of the media, although research finding shows that the degree of usage is not significant. This is probably due to limited coverage in relation with the numbers of speakers of Idoma language compared to more widely spoken languages in Nigeria. The use of the Idoma language in the homes is also a cause for concern, from the research finding, especially among younger generations. This is largely due to the influence of English language and a shift in perception. This finding tends to be in agreement with Yusuff & Osunnuga (2019) who found that many young people and adults could not read in their indigenous language. Most, especially the youths, they contend, shy away from speaking their indigenous languages; they see it in a derogatory light rather than a form of identity and pride.

The attitudinal disposition of the Idoma people towards the knowledge and use of the Idoma language is not encouraging. The average mean value is 2.1 from research finding, which is significantly low. The result indicates that parents and teachers are not disposed positively to their children speaking and learning Idoma language when compared to the English language. Research finding suggest that parents appreciate the advantages of mother-tongue education, but may prioritize English language due to its perceived importance. Teachers' attitudes and perception are equally negative. Only a few, from research finding, indicate a slightly positive disposition towards using Idoma language as a medium of instruction. Omotolani (2020) aptly captured the expressed negative attitude towards the indigenous language by expounding that parents hardly speak their mother tongue to their children any longer and most children are prohibited from speaking in their indigenous languages in public places, schools and even at home. Since only the older people use mother tongue, an entire generation of indigenous children can no longer communicate effectively with their parents in the Idoma language.



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There is however, a high disposition to the use of Idoma language at social functions within the Idoma nation. The Idoma language is widely used at social functions and serves as a vital link for communication, ceremonial activities, trade and commerce within the Idoma nation. According to UNESCO (2020), there is a considerable risk of the extinction of some languages due to the dominance of other languages, especially when speakers move away from utilizing their mother tongue informally: in social context and in informal education. The lack of transmission or effective usage of a language is considered as the main reason for language extinction. Thankfully, the Idoma language, from research finding, is commonly used at social functions albeit a looming disquieting language shift to English.

From the research finding, the extent to which Idoma language is used in public and educational institutions is significantly low. There are however, significant efforts by some public and educational institutions in the state to promote the study of Idoma language; the effort is yet to produce significant result. While Idoma is a stable language for the ethnic community and some bilingual materials exist, research show a strong preference for English in educational settings and other public domains, indicating a trend in language shift. Traditionally, at the lower primary level of schooling, Idoma language was used as a medium of instruction, with primers developed for teaching and learning the language. However, this practice is gradually being overtaken with the use of English as the predominant medium of instruction. With the domineering status of English language as the official language and the reversal of the 2022 National Language Policy, the choice of language of instruction becomes a little more complex with respect to interaction at the lower level of the primary schools. However, most non-formal discourse takes place in Idoma language. This research position is in agreement with Salawu (2012) assertion that declining acceptance and learning in indigenous languages is a clear deficiency among most Africans, a dilemma that affects several ethnic groups through Africa and it is one of the pungent residues of colonization, which inherently affects educational outcomes. The Idoma language is deeply expressed in the cultural life and arts of the Idoma people, playing a significant role in their traditional practices and daily life. The Idoma language is rich in proverbs and idioms. The language equally have a rich cultural heritage, which is found in the various festivities within the Idoma nation: Eje Alekwu, Inquest performances and funeral rites, naming ceremony, fishing and hunting expedition, crafts and arts. Therefore, as averred by Nishanthi (2020), the instructional use of the mother tongue is the greatest strategy to preserve an indigenous culture. Mother tongue benefits are significantly tied to indigenous culture. WaMbaleka (2014) concurred by rhetorically asking whether it is possible for one to identify with his culture without speaking the mother tongue.

Conclusion

Extant researches have shown that children first learn to express themselves through their mother tongue or indigenous language. The indigenous language becomes the foundation that the child builds knowledge, identity and initial worldview. Therefore, when the language of instruction is the same with the mother tongue or indigenous language, learning becomes much easier for pupils to grasp concepts in science and technology, and equally strengthen foundational learning and preserve the linguistic and cultural heritage of the people.

Recommendations

Deriving from the finding of the study as revealed by the data analyzed, the following are therefore, suggested as recommendations.

- i. There is the need for increase awareness by drawing attention to its fragility (the Idoma language), value and the need for its transmission to children in the school and homes. It is essential that parents speak to their children in their native tongue and insist on it being spoken back.
- ii. In view of the importance of the use learning materials and teaching aids in teaching and learning, it is therefore recommended that materials, appropriate teaching aids and learning paraphernalia be made available through concerted community engagement, government agencies, in order enhance the effective implementation of mother tongue education.
- ii. Radio and television broadcasts in mother tongue are highly desirable if the relevance and status of the language is to be maintained. Printed materials in indigenous languages are important for both the adult and children.
- iv. There is the need for a conscious attitudinal change by parents, teachers and the general community towards Idoma language. A positive attitudinal disposition will go a long way in rebranding and revitalizing the language. Jingles that elicit nationalist attitude should be encouraged.



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- v. Within the Idoma nation, the mother tongue should be the acceptable language of communication and expression at all social and political functions. Especially at the lower primary schools.
- vi. Public enlightenment campaign aimed at informing and creating public awareness about the need to learn and use the mother tongue should be embarked upon. Quizzes, public debate, essay competitions in schools, research and development of the language should be encouraged in educational institutions.
- vii. The prolific use of the Idoma language in cultural life and arts should be sustained and enhanced.

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