

**LANGUAGE, COMMUNICATION, AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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**Abstract**

Language and communication, no doubt, play a credible role in the development process of any nation. This is because the development of any society is actualized through language. Language is, therefore, presented as an important means of human communication, a social tool used to properly inform, incite, influence, and educate the community and the larger society for development purposes. However, human communication is faced with a lot of problems and difficulties where misinterpretation and misunderstanding arise. Since no society can attain national development amidst mistrust, fear, tension, crises, violence, and insecurity, promoting the effective use of language and communication becomes a core strategy to entrench the peaceful conditions required to achieve sustainable development in any society. This study, therefore, interrogates the extent to which language and communication have impacted national development, as well as examining its challenges. For the theoretical framework, this study adopts the Functionalist linguistic theory. Relevant research questions were raised in line with the study's objectives, which were analyzed using a qualitative approach. The findings reveal, amongst others, that, lack of effective and sustainable language policy implementation in Nigeria, coupled with the inappropriate use of language as well as miscommunication, hinders effective communication, which in turn affects national development. Finally, the study recommends, amongst others, that there is a need to promote intercultural communication and understanding, and create policies that promote diversity and inclusion.

**Keywords:** Communication, culture, language, national, society, sustainable development.

**Introduction**

Learning to speak and understand a language is one of the most complex types of learning for humans. Despite the difficulties associated with learning how to speak and understand, humans must acquire the necessary linguistic skills for communication purposes. Language is recognised as old as human society, although the concept of national development is relatively new. Language and communication play a crucial role in society. Effective communication is crucial for any meaningful development as it connects and brings people together. Since national development has to do with improving the well-being of the population, language and communication, therefore, become a tool in achieving these developments in any society. Language and communication are an essential part of cultural

character that reflects a society's history, values, and traditions. These two media are used to communicate development ideas, devise policies, and implement them. Language and communication help to define and distinguish various cultures, which contribute to the rich tapestry of a country's heritage. Nwadike in Olaoye (2013) emphasises that language and communication are 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 to wealth or affluence, thus bringing about national development. This development ranges from growth in education (i.e., intellectual growth), politics, economy, science, and technology. Individuals develop educationally, socially, economically, politically, and culturally through their interaction with government agencies, which disseminate ideas and policies through various media in the languages that the individual speaks. Language and communication are the main pillars of the educational process, through which man must plan, instruct, and evaluate programmes.

Languages Unlimited (2024) further maintained that language is a crucial component of national identity and development in multicultural societies, and it is a form of communication that conveys a community's views, sentiments, and ideals from generation to generation. Language Unlimited (2024) states further that language not only helps people communicate, but it also reflects their cultural legacy and historical background. It allows people to convey their views, customs, traditions, and way of life. As a result, understanding the importance of language in determining national identity and development is critical for comprehending the diversity of cultures and communities worldwide. Adedimeji (2023) holds that studies in language, literature, and communication play significant roles in achieving unity, peace, and progress for sustainable development in Nigeria. Therefore, it is indisputable that language and communication are effective instruments that can be used to raise awareness and effect change. Through effective and persuasive communication, people and organizations can motivate action and encourage sustainable practices. Public awareness campaigns about the significance of sustainable development and the effects of different activities on the environment and society can have a big impact. Effective communication is imperative in promoting a positive transition towards sustainable practices. The utilization of persuasive language that resonates with the public can catalyze inspiring individuals to embrace eco-friendly behaviors, such as reducing energy consumption, recycling, and supporting sustainable products and services. Since language use is essential to effective community engagement, emphasising clear and compelling communication motivates people to take action towards a more sustainable future. Building trust, comprehending local needs, and promoting participation in sustainable development programs all depend on using a language that speaks to various groups. Development initiatives can be made culturally aware and responsive to the communities they serve by means of active engagement and communication. To make a lasting impression, it is crucial to speak in a language that appeals to a variety of audiences (Latiff,2024).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Language and communication are a social phenomenon that embraces all facets of life; it is, in fact, the lifeblood of any nation. Thus, any nation that wants to develop must work as one, plan together, and speak with one voice. For years, men have tried to live amicably with other humans as well, but because of the multitude of languages, meaningful cooperation is sometimes impossible, and when people are not living a cooperative life, it becomes difficult for them to come together and plan for meaningful development. Since no society can attain national development amidst a lack of trust, fear, tension, crises, violence, and insecurity, the effective promotion of peaceful language and communication becomes a

core strategy to entrench the peaceful conditions required to establish sustainable development in any society. This study, therefore, interrogates the extent to which language and communication have impacted national development, as well as assessing its challenges and proffering meaningful solutions.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study seeks to:

- i. Examine the extent to which language and communication have impacted national development;
- ii. access the challenges of achieving national development through language and communication; and
- iii. proffer meaningful solutions aimed at enhancing national development through language and communication.

### **Research Questions**

This study seeks to provide answers to the following questions:

- i. To what extent has language and communication impacted national development?
- ii. What are the challenges of achieving national development through language and communication?
- iii. What are the solutions to the challenges of achieving national development through language and communication?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts the functionalist linguistic theory by Michael Halliday (1978). This theory emphasises the function and purpose of language structures and elements in social and cultural contexts, with a focus on how language is used in everyday communication. It stands in contrast to methods like generative linguistics that are mainly concerned with the formal structures of language. Functionalists study how language is modified to accomplish these communicative goals because they see language as a tool for meaning-giving, emotional expression, and persuasion.

Language is far more than just a means of communication. It is a strategic lever for a country's progress, a reflection of its culture, and a vector of identity. Through sociolinguistic theories, sustainable development viewpoints, and language policies, the relationship between language, communication, and national development will be investigated in this study. As noted by Gao (2023), as people's living standards continue to rise, communication across countries becomes increasingly important. As an essential part of people's lives, movies and television works also play an indispensable role in the cultural exchange and communication of different countries, which not only can bring people a visual feast but also contribute to the dissemination of culture and development. In his book *Development as Freedom*, Amartya Sen (1999) emphasises the importance of human capacity in development. Since it facilitates access to public services, information, and education, using a language that everyone can understand is a prerequisite for enhancing these capacities.

Languages and cultures are always changing, and this occurs at all levels of structure. According to Osgood (1963), a language is a collection of linguistic habits that symbolise different features of a civilisation. No single speaker holds a whole inventory of the signs and structures of a living language; however, the society of speakers collectively possesses a language and can change its forms. However, people who want to utilise the language of another linguistic community must learn how to use the terms in a culturally acceptable way.

People who live apart from one another cannot retain a language since languages are primarily interactive, aimed towards the development of a people.

## **Conceptual Review**

### **Language, Communication, and Development**

Language is a social phenomenon because, first and foremost, it is not biologically inherited, but socially acquired. As Ohen & Oghiator (2024) clarify, a child readily learns the language of the environment in which he/she grow up and not necessarily the language of their biological parents, who may not be in the same environment with them and do not speak it to them. Crystal and Robins (2024) define language as a system of conventional, spoken, manual (signed), or written symbols that humans use to express themselves as members of a social group and participants in its culture. For Mu'in (2019), language is a system of communication that consists of words, sounds, and grammar utilised by a certain group or nation to express thoughts, ideas, experiences, and feelings. It expresses emotions, provides information, and connects people. Even though there could be many definitions of language as shown above, it is clear that the bottom line of these speculations is that language is a system of communication used by human beings. That means that humans cannot interact with one another without the use of language.

Communication has been regarded as being equivalent to culture, language, behaviour, personal effectiveness, etc., while communication is not only essential to man but to other animals as members of each group communicate among themselves. Some researchers consider communication to be an act of establishing contact between a sender and a receiver, with the help of a message, where the sender and receiver have some common experience that gives meaning to the message encoded by the sender and decoded by the receiver. Communication is a process in which two or more individuals or groups share information to reach a mutual understanding of the world in which they live. Overall, communication is a foundational element that supports various dimensions of national development. By facilitating information flow, fostering participation, and promoting social and economic cohesion, effective communication strategies can significantly enhance a nation's development trajectory. Quora (2024) examines the following key roles communication plays in national development:

### **Information Dissemination**

Effective communication helps disseminate information about government policies, health initiatives, and educational programs, ensuring that citizens are informed and can participate in national development. It enables access to vital information, which is essential for decision-making at both individual and community levels.

#### **a. Social Cohesion**

Effective communication fosters understanding and appreciation for different cultures and ideas, hence promoting social cohesion and national unity. It mediates conflicts and promotes conversation between different groups, which is critical for sustaining peace and stability.

**b. Crisis Management**

In times of crisis (e.g., natural disasters, health emergencies), effective communication is critical for coordinating responses and disseminating vital information to the public. It aids in building resilience by keeping communities informed and prepared for potential challenges.

**Technological Advancement**

The rise of digital communication platforms has transformed how information is shared, making it easier to reach wider audiences and engage with different demographics. Communication technologies can drive innovation and improve access to services, contributing to overall national development.

Development, on the other hand, is of different types, which include: social, political, economic, educational, environmental, cultural, green development, and so on. The primary objectives of all types of development, therefore, are to promote authentic human development. The word, development, has a variety of interpretations; Oxford Dictionary (2007) views development as the action of making a larger or more advanced new product, idea, or phase, or an area with new building on it. Catherine Walsh in Anyaeneh (2024) agrees with this by stating that development has recently shifted from economic progress towards a more humanistic view focused on the individual and the quality of life, which is often referred to as “integral and sustainable human development”. This emphasises the interdependence of economics with politics, culture and society, and the environment, as well as human needs, capacities, and potential. So development can also be described as: material progress or economic growth, or reformation of social institutions and infrastructures. For Uzoma (2016), development has to do with improving the well-being of the majority of the population, ensuring people’s freedom, and increasing their economic security. The key to the achievement of all these is language.

Development can also be said to simply mean providing qualitative improvement in the lives of people or providing a greater quality of life for humans. Orisawayi (2005) thoroughly asserts that the concept of development can be perceived as an omnibus package of several multifaceted phases and defining characteristics. It could be seen or defined in terms of steady and systematic advances towards the following parameters or directions of growth: Intellectual and mental expansion for the person in society; A stable polity with a strong sense of commitment to nationalism/nationhood among the people; Economic development, progress and equitable distribution of national wealth; Scientific and technological progress and its application to the improvement of the quality of life of the people; Highly enlightened citizenry with 80% - 90% achieved level of functional literacy among the people and highly sharpened awareness of individual and collective fundamental rights, with freedoms of speech and association; Stable employment for all citizens in private and public sectors of the economy; A highly developed network of communication and transport system.

Thus, as Igiri (2017) emphasises the link between language, communication, and development, he opined that communication of national development is made possible only with the instrumentality of language. One expresses to a citizen the goals he or she hopes to attain in terms of national development. So, one uses language to advance to himself/herself the best possible reasons in support of these objectives, projecting in the best possible manner the advantages which he/she expect to draw from the national development objectives. Again, whenever progress is achieved towards national development goals, it is shared to its citizens. All these are mainly done by the use of language. Also, the process of criticizing and assessing national development is done with the instrumentality of language.

### **National Development: The Challenge of Effective Communication**

National development is the development that belongs to a nation. According to Obasi in Igiri (2017), it refers to the “progressive transformation of the economic, social and political structures of a society from relatively less complex, less efficient and less desirable forms to relatively more complex, more efficient and more desirable forms”. Human communication, however, is faced with a lot of problems and difficulties. Misinterpretation and misunderstanding arise more often than not. This is because when individuals try to communicate, something always appears to come in the way of communication, and the message is not received in the intended manner. Even when there is understanding, it is often difficult to persuade individuals to believe or behave in the way that one desires, and this is primarily determined by the goal of the communication. For communication to be effective, Anyaeneh (2024) argues that a message must be received (heard or read), understood, accepted, and acted upon (change behaviour or attitude). If this does not occur, communication has failed, and those involved in a communication event become dissatisfied and resentful. Regardless of the activity or functions, the participants in a communication event communicate with and through other participants. As a result, individuals' communication abilities influence the effectiveness of any communication event. Therefore, it appears acceptable to say that one of the most limiting factors to the efficiency of any communication event is a lack of effective communication, and that good communication skills are critical to one's success as a participant in a communication event. To communicate effectively, both parties must use a language that they both understand, taking into account the communicants' linguistic proficiency in the language, the amount of vocabulary they share, and their culture. Hence, the major constraint to good health development, according to Akase (2012), in any society is ignorance engendered by a lack of adequate information and knowledge on prevention and cure. Take HIV/AIDS and Coronavirus diseases for instance, what people need more is speaking to them on the preventive measures in the language they understand. In other words, prompt dissemination of accurate information through language on the causes of the disease, elementary precautions, how and where to go or seek help when the need arises, as well as information on the existing facilities, should be made known to them and on time too. It is clear that without the language, the health institution will not function well, and this will be an obstacle to development.

Ngwu and Adimelechi (2021) identified factors that mar effective language use for society's development:

#### **Poor communication**

Poor communication is a lack of using proper language while speaking. Poor communication mars understanding and development. Communication is said to be effective when there is understanding between the sender and the receiver. Good communication is crucial in every society. When an intended goal is not made clear through communication, confusion sets in. There is no effective communication if there is no effective feedback. When the message is wrongly conceived, the reaction will be negative. Language is a medium of communication, and word usage plays an important role in communication. Be objective and select words while addressing the public, especially in a multilingual society, to avoid misunderstanding of the intended aims and objectives.

#### **Ignorance and lack of awareness**

Ignorance, they say, is a disease. A misinformed society is a deformed society. These two factors play dangerous roles in society. Wars, racism, terror, tribalism, and the like are caused by sheer ignorance and a lack of awareness. It is ignorance that makes people forget

that nobody lives forever, no matter your tribe, race, religion, rank, position, etc. Ignorance results from a conscious effort to do the wrong thing (Robert, 2011). If we are mindful of the weight of our utterances and their meanings in a given situation, some wars will be wedged. When you believe more in rumour than the truth, you live in ignorance. Those who cause disunity with the use of negative words operate in ignorance; hence, an adage says, “A stone thrown in the middle of the market may either fall on the head of your kin’s men or on the head of your mother’s kin’s men”. This means that when unrest erupts through the careless use of language, you are either affected directly or indirectly. Again, when there is a lack of awareness of the impending danger of wrong use of languages/hate speech, the reverse becomes the case.

### **Situating Language and Communication in the Process of National Development**

Language and communication undoubtedly play a role in the development process of any nation; this is because the development of any society is actualized through language. For instance, during the global COVID-19 pandemic, language and communication played a prominent role in sensitizing citizens on preventive measures. Further, Egbe and Bassey (2002) have the same view that language serves as a people’s mark of identity, pride and oneness and that a people’s language helps to preserve their cultural heritage and fosters unity among the diverse peoples of the nation which ushers in development, which cannot be achieved without unity. Language and communication have potential that can be tapped and maximized for development through adequate and proper use. Akase (2012) identified the following societal areas where language and communication can play developmental roles:

#### **Language and Communication Enhance Economic Development**

Every activity that is of economic importance is carried out by using language. In all human communities, buying and selling are done essentially through the use of language. At the level of production, all the human beings who are involved carry out their various roles or duties by using language. The use of language also makes the distribution of goods and services possible. In trading, the producer communicates with buyers of his goods with the use of language. International trade involves the use of language to communicate either in oral or written form. There is no way a country can carry out economic transactions with another without using both spoken and written language. If language is not in existence, trading among nations of the world would not be possible, and this would hinder development.

#### **Technological development is promoted through language and communication**

Technological inventions are recorded on paper with language. Scientists who carry out technological experiments communicate orally or in written form among themselves and to the general public with the use of one language or the other. These technological discoveries were made possible through language has enhanced development in our human society. Language is the basic tool for education, and education is the fundamental tool for development. Without education, there can be no development. Scientific discoveries that have enhanced development were made possible by education. Education and training are conducted in all societies with the use of language.

#### **Language and communication enhance the health system in society**

Health professionals are trained in the use of language, and health professionals like doctors, nurses, etc., communicate with patients with the use of language. If a person is sick, he would make it known to people by speaking in a language they all understand. It is when the sick

person has expressed the magnitude of the illness that his helpers would know the decision to take to help him.

### **Language and communication enhance information dissemination**

In all human societies, information dissemination is dependent on language. In fact, without language, there cannot be efficient information. Generally, information is relayed to the general public mainly with the use of language. The same thing is applied to the print and electronic media, where language is used as a means of information dissemination. Since information is essential for the survival and development of societies, language, which is the main means of information dissemination, is even more important. This is because without the language, there cannot be effective information and communication relay that will sustain development.

### **Methodology**

The three common approaches to conducting research, according to Williams (2007) are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. The researcher anticipates the type of data needed to respond to the research questions. For instance, numerical, textural, or both numerical and textural data could be needed. Based on this assessment, the researcher selects one of the three aforementioned approaches to conduct his research. Given the above, this study adopts the qualitative approach as its method. What constitutes qualitative research according to Leedy and Ormrod (2001) involves its purposeful use for describing, explaining, and interpreting collected secondary data. Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA), according to Nigatu (2009), is the range of processes and procedures whereby we move from the qualitative data that have been collected into some form of explanation, understanding, or interpretation of the people and situations we are investigating. The study therefore relied on the use of libraries, newspapers, the internet, journals, and publications, etc. for its secondary sources. Thus, the outcome of qualitative social research is an enhanced 'interpretative understanding' of the social world (Weerahandi, 2003).

### **Discussion and Analysis**

#### **Language and Communication and Their Impact on National Development**

There is an inseparable inter-connectivity between development and language communication as they play complementary roles to bring about meaningful development in any society. Language has a significant impact on national development, identity, and unity. A shared language can unite people and create a sense of belonging and community development. UNICEF (2015) buttresses this fact that language communication lies at the very heart of sustainable development. In some countries, the government has achieved the promotion of a specific language through policies such as language education, media, and official language laws, which have created a sense of national identity, unity, and pride among citizens who communicate in that language. Anaeto and Solo-Anaeto (2010) align with this position, that language communication helps in understanding the needs and realities of the people and mobilizes them towards development goals. Governments and societies must carefully consider language policies and practices to ensure that they promote inclusivity and diversity, rather than division and exclusion. Emenanjo, in Olaoye (2013), further buttresses that Nigerian languages have a lot to contribute to the evolution and success of democratic culture towards sustainable development. Nigerian languages can become veritable instruments for the full empowerment of Nigerian youths through a national language and literacy policy that



recognises egalitarian multilingualism and the full empowerment of Nigerian languages as vehicles of communication through literacy, causing them to fully appreciate democracy, its workings, its values, and, indeed, its *raison d'être* as a way of life.

Eyisi in Mbah and Ayegba (2014) also agree that language communication has helped in the development of intelligence and thought patterns, which enable individuals to express their creative potentials, which further contribute to the development of many societies. In the area of physical and moral instruction, language is vital because it is the means through which effective communication or interaction is achieved. Language communication is an important variable in developmental processes. The indigenous language(s) of a specific civilisation or nation are critical in any developmental problems that society faces. Olaoye (2013) equally confirmed that, as the world is fast becoming a global village through mass communication and information technology. The local languages are now being used in the teaching of science and technology, including computer science, thus contributing to advancement in science, health, technology, and national development. The Indigenous language keyboard has been designed to facilitate language learning. The keyboard has such linguistic facilities as tone markers, diacritics, special orthographies, graphic and graph-logical cues. All these are aids to faster learning of computer appreciation. The youths get empowered faster through these linguistic facilities.

### **Challenges of Achieving National Development Through Language and Communication**

With the multilingual nature of Nigeria, there is every need for an adequate and effective national language policy that puts all the ethnic groups and regions of the country into consideration. The sense of collective struggle and participation can only be attained linguistically if the attentions of all the ethnic groups in Nigeria are drawn, and their interests are represented in a well-reviewed language policy. Akase et al (2018) argue in line with this study that the use of indigenous language is central to the holistic development of any nation. It is critical to include linguistic aspects in order to ensure full participation of all citizens in governance. To ensure full and equal participation of all citizens in Nigerian governance and development, there is a need for understanding of government policies in local indigenous languages, so that locals can express themselves in their indigenous languages, contributing their fair share to the country's development. Development in social, agricultural, technological, political, economic, and scientific fields depends on the use of indigenous languages in administration. It is not just enough to formulate policies and programmes in the English language at the federal level or the top level of government, but it is of more importance to be able to understand such policies and programmes at the grassroots level for better implementation, utilization, and cooperation at this level through indigenous languages.

In line with this study, Akase et al (2018) further identified frustration on the part of the people and language conflict as issues in language communication that hinder development governance in Nigeria. He maintained that many people in the country are so frustrated as a result of the language used in governance, particularly those in the rural areas. They expect that the policies, programmes, and decisions of the government should be communicated to them in a language that they would understand and contribute to their implementation. Further, when an appropriate language is not used in governance, we usually experience language conflict, which contributes to hate speech. The consequence is that there will be disunity in the governance of the nation. This is because people from different ethnic groups will see themselves as united people, but they are in the country as different people, with different interests and identities. The result is that one group is always seen fighting the others, and peace

eludes the country, and disunity thrives. Agbedo (2007) and Uguru (2008) also identified a lack of effective and sustainable language planning and policy in Nigeria as a bane to national development. They argue that the multilingual situation of Nigeria has, over the years, generated linguistic rivalry; there is a struggle for whose language will be chosen as the official or national language of the country. The trilingual language policy, which constitutionally recognizes Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba as national languages, cannot work in a multilingual nation like Nigeria.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

According to the findings of this study, language is the most common means of sharing information for national growth. Language is more than just a means of communication; it also represents national pride, identity, and growth. Language is used to make government policies and agendas plain; without language, there is no communication, and no communication means no growth. As a result, for any significant development to occur and be sustained, language and effective communication must become the only mediums via which individuals of a community or nation may be persuaded to participate in initiatives that will yield beneficial results.

The study therefore revealed and contributed to knowledge that:

1. Language and communication have contributed to the evolution and success of democratic culture towards sustainable development among Nigerian youths; thereby enhancing the development of intelligence and thought patterns, which enable individuals to express their creative potentials, which further contribute to the development of many societies.
2. Lack of effective and sustainable language planning and policy implementation in Nigeria, as well as frustration on the part of the people and language conflict, are issues and challenges in language communication that hinder sustainable national development in governance in Nigeria.

The study, therefore, recommends the following as solutions to strengthen language communication in Nigeria towards sustainable development:

- a. There is a need to celebrate cultural festivals and events, as well as promote intercultural communication and understanding, and create policies that promote diversity and inclusion.
- b. To sustain national and cultural heritage, languages should be communicated in the national anthem, pledge, currency, or national flag.
- c. There is a need to draft a comprehensive language and communication curriculum framework aimed at enhancing reforms and effective implementation for national development.
- d. Languages and culture should be encouraged at the primary level of studies as a way to maintain their custodians' stature of indigenous culture, wealth of wisdom and experience, as well as history of the people, which is tantamount to development.
- e. There is a need to embrace linguistic diversity, to create a stronger and more inclusive national cohesion that celebrates and respects the cultures and traditions of all members of society

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