

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND QUALITATIVE LEADERSHIP: A PANACEA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

Language and leadership are related concepts because they both focus on the enhancement of human society. They also play complementary roles to each other. Previous researches and prevalent issues have revealed that the world has indeed become a global village with a dominant language which is the English language. The essence of this paper, therefore, is to examine how the English language has become an invaluable tool for qualitative leadership and sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper explores the contributions of the English language in building qualitative leaders for sustainable development in Nigeria, in accordance with global development goals. The study emphasizes the significant role the English language and quality leadership play in almost all spheres of human endeavor having occupied a prominent position in nation building. Since English language and qualitative leadership skills are indispensable tools for national unity and global communication, their total utilization is recommended in order to ensure sustainable nation building.

**Keywords:** English language, qualitative leadership, sustainable development, globalized economy

### Introduction

Language as a concept has been defined as more than a tool for communication. It helps to shape the identity of individuals and groups, as well as serves as a key element in social integration and cultural development. This means that language helps to identify a people as a tribe and transmit their way of life to the next generation as they use it to interact within the group and with other groups of people. Dabo (2001) defines language as a means of communication within a speech community which helps to sustain relationship with other people. It is a vehicle for sharing ideas, thoughts, feelings experiences, using speech, sounds and symbols. Language and communication are inseparable. This is because language is the principal means for communication. A good mastery of language makes

communication easy. Language could be non-verbal or verbal, oral or written, and must convey exactly what the speaker or writer has in mind to transmit to the listener or reader for communication to take place.

Language – the divine benevolence to man – is so inexorably tied to the effective existence of man in society that any meaningful discussion of man must begin with it. It steers the course of the discussion, and ends the discussion. The end and purpose of language is to enhance communication. So, human existence and development depend largely on the existence and development of language for communication. Language is important because through it man is able to express content (and meaning). Language enables man to have self-expression, that is, to express what he means. Human perception and conception are conveyed through language in the form of a message, and then the message is transformed into meaning. The end and purpose of language is to enhance communication with which quality leadership is ensured.

Leadership is a key component of all organizations. With increased involvement in globalization and technology development in many organizations, the function and capacity of leadership are getting more complicated (Akudi, 2004). Technological advances extend the possibility of global economy which has changed the way people do business and communicate. Cross-cultural managers must look at the word ‘change’ as a challenge and an opportunity for organizational growth and individual development. In addition, to cope with the changes, international business educators and facilitators need to respond swiftly to the impacts of demographics, technology, and globalization in order to offer specific job skill development on global leadership, work ethic, and continuous learning (Aggarwa, 2011).

As the demand of knowledge-based enterprises rises, it is both employees’ and managers’ responsibilities to enhance the success of workplace learning and workforce development (Harteis, 2012). Global leaders need to build their interpersonal skills to deal with racial conflicts that have occurred and to develop individuals and groups in the workplace. A successful international leader must know what leadership entails and execute it accordingly (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2012). Individuals with different cultural backgrounds may vary in their conception and expectations of leadership. Owing to the largely Western and individualistic perspective on leadership, the extent to which Western leadership theories apply globally is being questioned. To create a leadership that lasts over time, global leaders must show expected competence in cross-cultural awareness and practice. It is

important they understand the significance of leadership and leadership expectations, and to develop and sustain effective leadership strategies for long-term change (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2012). Quality leadership anchored on effective communication is a key to unlock the mystery of working with diverse employees and thereby ensure sustainable development in any organization.

### **Language and Leadership in a Globalized Economy**

Language as an integral part of man surpasses communication and social interaction. It influences thought and thought often conditions actions, and also influences conduct. Language, therefore, is the medium of transmitting culture and social reality. In the competitive landscape of the twenty-first century, a sustainable advantage of globalization depends on the skills and abilities of a leader to use language effectively in order to manage diversity and implement increasingly complex business strategies. Effective workforce diversity management is a key to global business success (Okoro, 2012). In pursuit of leadership effectiveness in today's globalized world, cross-cultural leaders need to be able to manage culturally diverse settings, known as a capability of cultural intelligence or cultural quotient (CQ) efficiently (James et al., 2011). Since CQ is significantly related to individual international experiences (Abbah & Abbah, 2011), global leaders should be aware and appreciate the diversity they face in leadership practices.

Phenomena such as Group Dynamics and Cultural Diversity have been identified significantly as challenging leadership practices globally. Group dynamics plays an influential role in global leadership practice. Different leadership styles and management approaches must be applied depending upon group dynamics and circumstances (Akudi, 2004). A critique or judgment can significantly affect individuals' behavior and values when the environment is shaped by the same group pattern or thought. In many cases, leadership is often influenced by the perceptions of the peers, subordinates, and superiors. A number of group dynamic processes of norms, roles, relations, and behaviors are normally created to separate group members from others. Each of these group dynamics plays an important role in shaping the global leadership with a strong impact on organizational culture and climate. Group dynamic is the key for cultural innovation (Brooks, 2012). However, dynamic cross-cultural competencies are accordingly vital to global leaders and managers, which can be enhanced by personal characteristics and cross-cultural experiences development (Kalu & Kalu, 2012).

Leadership competence is conceptualized differently in different countries based on culture (Kowske & Anthony, 2007). In high context countries, such as Japan, China, and South Korea, employees tend to prefer indirect messages and rely heavily on nonverbal codes. However, employees from low context countries, such as Germany and Great Britain, tend to communicate directly and construct more information in written messages. In accordance with different cultural expectations, different cultural groups have different expectations of leadership, and this can affect the behaviors of employees and managers. It is critical that people are aware of their leaders' appreciation for individual cultural differences without personal bias (Nguyen & Umemoto, 2009). With effective use of language, the leaders can better fulfill their responsibilities of creating a multi-cultural environment and a strategic foresight.

### **Language, Leadership and Sustainable Development**

Language is the window through which we look at a nation's culture, traditions and history. With language, people are able to communicate with one another. Communication, therefore, plays an important role in the process of creating a sustainable way of life around the globe. Leaders who are multilingual and multi-competent in communication strategies can have a greater appreciation of the interconnectedness of modern life. The indispensable role of language in sustainable development cannot be overemphasized.

Economically speaking, language has been associated with sustainable development. English, especially, is the avenue to sustainable development in Nigeria. It is considered a prerequisite for employment or hiring a new employee. This underlines the fact that language skills enhance business and trade, while also improving an individual's economic conditions. In Nigeria and other countries of the world, there is a motivating factor for individuals to learn English in order to obtain well-paid jobs within the most dynamic organizations and industries.

Socially, language performs an integral role. For one to socialize effectively in a country like Nigeria, a mastery of the English language is recommended. Communication is a two-way process that requires input from both the speaker and the listener/addressee. For the speaker's message to be understood the speaker should choose words that best convey his/her message. On the other hand, the listener is expected to grasp the intended ideas/message of the speaker and then respond accordingly through feedback. Socialization gives way for development. An individual who socializes has the wherewithal to communicate with people from the

international communities. Consequently, the nation is empowered/developed through its communication with other countries.

English is a viable key to socialization between individuals and among many countries of the world. Nigeria is a multilingual/multicultural community; therefore, different languages abound. There are many ethnic groups in Nigeria and it is English that functions as a national language. Such groups can function effectively as one through English. The argument for the use of an indigenous language to serve in the domain of a national language has remained controversial in Nigeria. This is why the role of English language in sustainable development especially in a country like Nigeria cannot be relegated to the background. Again, in the area of curbing/solving security problems, English language has an integral role to play. It serves as a unifying and an integrative factor that brings people together and usher in the spirit of oneness and togetherness.

For the attainment of Nigerian developmental goals, citizens must be well educated in the correct use of the English language. Development has a lot to do with improving the well-being of the majority of the population, ensuring people's freedom and increasing their economic security. Undoubtedly, the key to the achievement of all these is language.

Development can simply mean providing qualitative improvement in the lives of the people or providing greater quality of life for humans. It is the act or process of bringing to a more advanced state, growth or progress. There are different forms of development which include: social, political, economic, educational, environmental, cultural, green development and so on. Hence, development can also be described as material progress or economic growth or reformation of social institutions and infrastructure. The primary objective of all types of development is to promote authentic human development. This focuses on the inter-connectedness of economics with political, socio-cultural and environmental spheres, as well as the necessities, capacities and potentialities of human beings. Development requires growth and structural change, some measure of distributive equity, modernization in social and cultural attitudes, a degree of political transformation and stability, an improvement in health and education, and an increase in employment.

From the fore-going, it is clear to us that though there are different perspectives to development. There is a general consensus that development will lead to a good

change manifested in increased capacity of people to have control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology; and obtain physical necessities of life (food, clothing and shelter), employment, equality, participation in government, political and economic independence, adequate education, gender equality, sustainable development and peace (Igbuzor, 2005).

The concept of sustainable development emerged in the 1980s in response to the need to balance economic and social progress with a concern for the environment and stewardship of the earth's natural resources. Hence, the Brundtland Commission defined sustainable development as the "ability to make development sustainable—to ensure that it meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Sustainable development is a term widely used by leaders all over the world, even though the notion is still somewhat new and lacks a uniform interpretation. Important as it is, the concept of sustainable development is still being developed and the definition of the term is constantly being revised, extended, and refined.

According to the classical definition given by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987, emphasizing the definition by the Brundtland Commission, development is sustainable if it "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." The famous Rio Declaration, adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 (also called the 'Earth Summit', held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil), placed it this way: "Human beings are at the center of concern for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature." Sustainable development, therefore, implies the fulfillment of several conditions: preserving the overall balance, respect for the environment, and preventing the exhaustion of natural resources. Reduced production of waste and the rationalization of production and energy consumption must also be implemented.

Following the Rio conference of 1992, most countries undertook to draw up a national strategy for sustainable development. The implementation of these strategies has turned out to be tricky, because it must address very serious issues within economic and political contexts that are marked by strong inertia. The aim of sustainable development is to define viable schemes combining the economic, social, and environmental aspects of human activity. These three areas must therefore be taken into consideration by communities, companies, and individuals. Nigeria, for instance,

is faced with challenges in all three dimensions of sustainable development—economic, social and environmental. More than half of the populace is living in abject poverty, and income inequality and this has caused a lot of social problems, unsustainable consumption and production patterns that have resulted in huge economic and social costs. A lot of problems abound in Nigeria today. Hunger and malnourishment, while it is decreasing in many developing countries, remain persistent in Nigeria. In fact, insufficient food supply and security issues continue to be a major setback.

Language and quality leadership skills are indispensable tools for national development and rebranding. They can serve as a bridge to wider opportunities since they play pivotal roles in development, be it educational, social, or economic. Nigeria, as already established, is a multilingual, multicultural society, and as such, language (the English language) and quality leadership should perform integral roles in sustainable development. They hold the key to solving the societal problems. Nigeria as well as other developing countries remains mired in corruption, bad leadership, crime, poverty, and violence, despite the promulgation of several laws as the principal mechanism for curbing corruption. According to the NEEDS draft document (2004), as cited in Anthony (2013):

Corruption manifests in Nigeria in the form of abuse of positions and privileges, low levels of transparency and accountability, inflation of contracts, bribery/kickbacks, misappropriation or diversion of funds, under and over-invoicing, false declarations, advance fee fraud, collection of illegal tolls, commodity hoarding, illicit smuggling of drugs and arm, human trafficking, child labour, illegal oil bunkering, illegal mining, tax evasion, foreign exchange malpractices including counterfeiting of currency, theft of intellectual property and piracy, open market abuse, dumping of toxic wastes, and prohibited goods.

The prevalent cases of corruption which pollute our country could be attributed to poor leadership and ineffective communication as a result of poor knowledge of the use of English language as well as other attending factors. It is worthy of note that corruption impedes the successful attainment of sustainable development goals such as ending poverty in all its forms, and ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong opportunities for all, among others.

## **Conclusion**

The sustainable goal which stipulates the availability and adequate management of language and leadership can hardly be attained in the face of economic hardship that thrives in the country. Nigerian society presently records a high rate of poverty. The goal which aims at ending poverty in all its ramification is far from being attained. The masses are unfortunately living in severe hardship in the area of food supply, healthy living, good governance, and quality education, as the majority cannot cater for their children/wards' education. Again, the issue of gender inequality adversely affects growth and development in the country. In Nigeria, the connection between the English language and quality leadership should be better exploited for unity, peace and sustainable development will be tremendously achieved.

## **Recommendation**

As indispensable tools for national integration and global communication, English language and qualitative leadership play pivotal roles in the attainment of sustainable development in Nigeria. This paper, therefore, advocates for a better utilization of the English language skills in addressing the issues of qualitative leadership for sustainable development in Nigeria – a country where corruption, underdevelopment, and security quagmires abound. The English language skills, applied in leadership, would play significant roles in almost all spheres of nation building in Nigeria – politics, education, judiciary, administration, religion, economics, and legislation. Therefore, they are the key factors to sustainable development in Nigeria, especially in specific areas such as national unity and overall nation building.



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