

HOW LANGUAGE COULD BE USED AS A TOOL FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

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Abstract

Language is a viable enterprise in the attainment of national development in Nigeria in particular and the world at large. This paper, therefore, examines the various ways language could contribute in attaining the development of nations of Africa and beyond. The data for this study were collected from published books, articles, internet materials and personal experience. First, the paper looks at the various conceptual understandings of the terms 'language' and 'national development'. After the establishment meanings of these concepts, the paper dives into exploring how language could be used as a tool for national development. It is found that every act of development in Africa is intrinsically linked to language; for example, there is a strong connection between language, trade and national development; language, education and national development; language, science and technology and national development; language public enlightenment and national development; language and literature for national development; and finally, language and socio-cultural development. It is thus concluded that language is playing and will continue to play a vital role in social, cultural, economic, political, and above all, national development. The role of language in the growth and development of any nation can never be overemphasized.

Keywords: Language, national development, science, technology, culture and economy

Introduction

Language, as a concept, has been proliferated with many definitions in the recent past. However, many scholars tilted the definition of language towards human phenomenon. It is on the premise of this assertion that Awotundun and Shittu (2018) view language as a vital instrument for man's activities on earth, and is built on rational and systematic arrangement which is agreed upon by the speech community. According to Agha (2006, p. 41) cited in Hassan and Jabbar (2018, p. 1) "language is the capacity to obtain and utilize complex frameworks of communication, especially the human capacity to do as such and a language is a particular case of such a framework.

Language, therefore, is a veritable tool humans deploy in the expression of ideas, feelings, thoughts, philosophies and cultures. In fact, the role language plays in the human society cannot be underrated. It is through language that we analyze sports, transact businesses, teach students, preach the gospel, update and improve our knowledge of the world. So without language, human activities would have come to a halt which in turn affects human and national development. Ogba (2017) rightly says "National development is inseparable from language, just as air and water are to human existence" (p. 1). This implies that there is a strong connection between language and national development. In other words, language is a tool with which national development goals are achieved.

What is National Development?

National development is a term that has received very many implicational definitions. National development, according to Olusegun (2019), it is a complete transformation of areas like language, economy, culture, society, politics, science and technology and education of a system or a particular society in order to meet its present needs. Kadiri (2021) defines national development as the change in growth and development which includes social, cultural and economic change. It is the ability of a country to improve the social welfare of the people. It would be the expansion and growth of the people in a defined territory or governments. Olaoye (2013) explains that 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. All of these definitions imply that for any nation to boost of meaningful development there must be progression in terms of standard of living of the citizens and other sectors of the system. However, this progression in question might be difficult to attain if language is treated as an isolated concept. In other words, the developmental strives of a country may not be achievable without the role of language.

Language as Tool for National Development in Africa

National development in Nigeria and of course, other nations, cannot thrive without the instrumentality of language. This is because it is through language that developmental goals are expressed. For example, national developments are documented and communicated through language. Nyasulu (2013) adds that language must be seen to be communicating the intended meaning as a vehicle to achieving set goals, and not an end in itself. These set goals in this case, would be education, national unity and/or identity, and socio-economic development. Nwaanyawu (2017) contends that language is a cultural heritage, not just cultural but also an intellectual heritage. Language conveys knowledge and local know-how, and is therefore irreplaceable tool for sustainability. Below are some instances of how language can be used a tool for national development:

Language, Trade and National Development in Africa

All economic activities are carried out using language. For example, local and international business transactions take place through the use of language. It is as saying that no business transaction can take place outside language. Eradicating poverty and hunger is one of the objectives of Millennium Developments Goals. Very many local people in Nigeria, in particular and Africa at large, engage in small scale business in order to maximize profit which will, in turn, enable them to live above the poverty line. All the act of buying and selling is done through the instrumentality of language. Mberia (2015) says “in any day of the week, across Africa, fishermen sell their fish; herdsman exchange animals for money; vegetable and fruit vendors trade in a wide range of fruits and vegetables; bus conductors demand and get fare from their passengers; shopkeepers buy and sell sugar, cooking oil, salt and wheat flour; and construction workers heave with building blocks, cement, ballast and metal. Kowo, Olusegun and Olalekan (2019) corroborate that Nigeria depends on commercial activities for

economic growth and most of them are engaged in the small scale business as the major means of earning their income particularly on agricultural sector, fishing sector and other business. These sectors contribute significant towards the reduction of poverty and unemployment. Virtually all these activities, which contribute immensely to the continent's economic development, are conducted in African languages" (p. 57).

More glaring is the fact that people who speak the same tend to transact business with ease, trust and confidence. Similarly, documents that are used to communicate national development are crafted using language. In Nigeria, for instance, the present government had mapped out some economic empowerment programs such as Npower, Market money, Farmer money etc. The documents that house these economic empowerment programs are expressed through language. This shows that language has contributed in lifting people out of poverty thereby ensuring national development.

Similarly, language has been found to play a crucial role in lifting people out of poverty thereby ensuring national development. For example, Kadiri (2021) says that English language serves as a tool for poverty alleviation in Nigeria and other parts of Africa. English language skills open a world of opportunities for Nigerians. Many industries, companies, hospital, tourism and so on, in Africa require basic English skills and many international agencies with offices in Nigeria use English for daily operations. With these English language skills, average Nigerians will be employed in these industries, international agencies, hospitals etc. This will enable them to live above poverty level.

Language, Education and National Development in Africa

The relationship between language and education is so close that the latter cannot do without the former. This is because educational contents get to the pupils through the medium of language. Baba, Pam and Kudu (2018) argue that language is required as a factor or a driving mechanism committed to succeeding in the quest for knowledge transfer through cross-fertilization of ideas. Without language, it would be very difficult for teachers to communicate their educational objectives to take place. This is as saying that learning takes place through language. Education, in its self, is a form of learning that brings about change of behavior in the learner. This change in question will remain a mirage without language. It is very true that

no nation grows above its level of education. This invariably implies that for this to be possible, there must be a means of transporting this knowledge which is the prerequisite for development; this means is nothing but language. No wonder Olaoye (2013) contends that language is a catalyst in educational development which is an important index of national development. He further argues that the medium will continue to remain the indispensable tool that man needs for development, social cohesion, especially in the present era of information technology.

In a similar way, in respect of students' specific disciplines, they must be exposed to language course (English) which would enable them thrive well in their respective careers. For example, an engineer must have a good mastering of English and other relevant knowledge for him or her to do well in their career. A medical doctor, on his side, needs to be grounded in English and other relevant language in order to carry out a successful diagnosis. In a like manner, an actor/actress needs to be fluent in English and other relevant languages to be successful actor/actress. So, language is vital in harvesting educational contents and career possibilities.

Language, Science and Technology and National Development in Africa

Every aspect of scientific or technological discoveries is first crafted in the mind of the inventor. This explains why most scholars believe that there is a strong connection between language and thought. So, before anything is invented, it had been thought about and eventually brought to reality through the medium of language. In another dimension, Science and technology is the brain behind any national development because the world is going digital or global on a daily basis. Language plays its quota to ensure that scientific and technological ideologies are brought to fruition. Language, for example, plays a vital role in ensuring that scientific and technological tools are put to proper use. In aviation, pilots need flight manuals to fly aircrafts. These manual are documented using language. Complex machines such as drilling machine, lifter, machine guns, etc. are operated through language. The role of language in science and technology cannot be underestimated.

Language Public Enlightenment and National Development in Africa

Information is very key to the development of any nation in the world. People die of diseases and plague due to lack of proper information. Government developmental programs get to the people through the use of language. Governmental and Non-Governmental Organization carry out sensitization campaigns through language. For instance, Yellow-Fever Eradication Campaign, Breast Cancer Awareness campaign and so on, gets to the people on the grassroots through the medium of language. It is pertinent to remember that a nation whose citizens are perpetually sick cannot be said to be developed. Information and communication remain paramount in cautioning these drastic effects. It is in the light of this that Olaoye (2013) is of the view that Government's policies and programmes are often couched in English language technical terms and translated to the masses in the language they understand. Translating government's pronouncements, policies, the National Anthem, Pledge and programmes into Nigerian languages, for instance, 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.

Language and Literature for National Development in Africa

Language is the medium of literature. Literary contents are, therefore, expressed through the instrumentality of language. Literature, on the other hand, mirrors the society through the writer's creative use of language thereby exposing the social evils in the society; by so doing, the developmental goals which our political leaders shy away from are satirically exposed. 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 precise 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. This form of literary exposure remains

the catalyst for the development of any nation because the poor as well as the elites would be fully aware of the societal happenings which are made known through the creative use of language.

Language and Socio-cultural Development in Africa

Culture is total way of life of a people. Language is one of the most fundamental properties of culture because all cultural nuances are expressed through language. All other forms and dimensions of development (political, economic, social, psychological etc.) are said to be cultural because it connotes how a particular group of people live their life. Ishima (2004) emphasizes that language is a vehicle of thought and the expression of culture. It expresses a people's way of life, their perception of things and their world view. This embodies their ideals and innovations which embrace respects for technological and scientific innovations; and all of these bring about national development.

Conclusion

Language is playing and will continue to play a vital role in social, cultural, economic, political, and above all, national development. The role of language in the growth and development of any nation can never be overemphasized. This essay has, therefore, highlighted the strong connections between language and trade, language and literature, language and media, language and science and technology, and language and culture. All of these connections, in turn, promote national developments which ensure good and quality healthcare, eradication of poverty, provision of developmental infrastructure, provision of good and quality education, protection of the environment, etc. Language, in a nutshell, is a tool for national development.

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