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**The Indispensable Role of the English Language in Sustainable
Development: The Nigerian Case**

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Abstract

Previous researches and prevalent issues have revealed that the world has indeed become a global world with a dominant language which is the English language. English has become a unifying factor in multilingual multicultural nations. In Nigeria precisely, the English language occupies a unique position and consequently plays a very significant role in the formation of national values and integration of the nation state. This is owing to the fact that the country is a multilingual nation with diverse ethnic groups and cultures. Such diversity has made it imperative on the nation to use English in almost all her correspondences. The main thrust of this paper is to examine what roles the English language plays in the attainment of sustainable development goals and agenda. This paper therefore explored the roles of the English language in contemporary Nigeria in particular and the world at large and this exploration is in concordance with sustainable development goals and their subsequent attainment.

Key Words: Sustainable Development, Multiculturalism, National values, Economic growth

Introduction

The English language came into Nigeria during the time the country was colonized by Great Britain. Since that time, English remains a great asset to Nigerians. In fact, the English language is predominantly spoken as an international language; it has indeed become the language of the world. The English language continues to enjoy its primacy, especially in the formation of political and educational system as a medium of instruction in the Nigerian sector. Today, Nigerians have given the English language a reputable position when compared to other languages that are of native origin. Although, the ethnologue records the existence of over four hundred languages in Nigeria, the English language remains the official language of the country.

Nigeria is a multilingual nation where English Language has acquired the status of a second language to many people, while it is the first language to a few others. English plays a significant role in education, politics, government administration, the judiciary, economy and legislation. Ige (2000) stressed that English is the lamp by which the youths travel through the education tunnel. Ogundare (2004) referred to it as one of the major Nigerian languages as a result of its unifying and integrative roles. It is an indispensable medium that helps man to achieve effective communication as it mirrors the mind in deep and significant ways. In the bid to buttress the predominate role which English equally plays, Asade (2000) reiterated that:

Literature through language, warns people of dangerous and anti-social practices, ridicules people of mean and despicable character, criticizes such evils like corruption, injustice, nepotism, bribery, economic and political sabotage, oppression, colonialism and neocolonialism, dictatorship, racism or colour segregation, literary theft, money laundering, examination malpractice, cultism, armed robbery, militancy, abduction, drug peddling, human trafficking, election rigging, arson, sectarian crisis, looting, extra-judicial killing, etc. Good poetry, songs and music, especially those philosophical ones which extol good virtues and deride ignoble course or action are capable of correcting societal ills.

Language therefore performs an important role in nation building. Without language, humans cannot communicate with one another. It is used to express our emotions, feelings, views and opinions. As explicated above, it helps to point out and correct societal ills and consequently help in sustainable development.

The Concept and Origin of Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development emerged in the 1980s in response to a growing realization about the need to balance economic and social progress with a concern for the environment and stewardship of the Earth's natural resources.

The Brundtland Commission's brief definition of sustainable development as the "ability to make development sustainable—to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" is surely the standard definition when judged by its widespread use and frequency of citation. The use of this definition has led many to see sustainable development as having a major focus on intergenerational equity. Sustainable development is broad in that it includes economical, ecological, social and educational aspects of sustainability. Thus, there are many different ways to approach the issue of creating more sustainable community.

Sustainable development is a term widely used by politicians 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, 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 centre of concern for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature."

Sustainable development implies the fulfilment 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.

Impediments to Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Nigeria 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 resulted to 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 nowadays. 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.

It is worth mentioning that Language is an indispensable tool for national development and rebranding; it is a bridge to wider opportunities. The English language plays a pivotal in development be it educational, social, economic etc. Much work needs to be done in terms of improving the health and life prospects of many Nigerians and the world at large. Nigeria, as pointed out earlier is a multilingual multicultural society and as such language performs an integral role in sustainable development. It holds the key to solving societal and security problems.

Nigeria as well as many developing countries remains mired in corruption, crime, poverty, and violence despite the promulgation of several laws like in other countries as the principal mechanism for curbing corruption. According to the NEEDS draft document (2004) and Obayelu (2007):

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 poor economic growth as well as its attending factors. Corruption impedes the successful attainment of sustainable development goals such as:

- (i) End poverty in all its forms everywhere
- (ii) End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
- (iii) Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- (iv) Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- (v) Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- (vi) Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
- (vii) Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

- (viii) Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- (ix) Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
- (x) Reduce inequality within and among countries
- (xi) Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- (xii) Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
- (xiii) Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- (xiv) Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
- (xv) Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
- (xvi) Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- (xvii) Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

The Nigerian community presently records a high rate of poverty. The sustainable goal which aims at ending poverty in all its forms everywhere is far from being attained. The masses are unfortunately living in severe hardship in the area of food supply, healthy living, equitable quality education as the majority cannot cater for their children/wards' education. Again, the issue of gender inequality adversely affects growth and development. The goal which stipulates the availability and sustainable management of water can hardly be attained in the face of economic hardship that thrives in the country. In view of these, the present researcher recommends that the English language should be fully utilized and maximized to attain sustainable development goals as explicated below.

English Language's Roles in 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 progress of creating a sustainable way of life around the globe. People who are multilingual and multi-competent in communication strategies can have a greater appreciation for the interconnectedness of modern life.

The indispensable role of the English language in sustainable development cannot be overemphasized. English plays a cardinal role in education. Woolard (1998, p. 3) stated that English has advanced as a valuable resource for international development, the associations being made are the perceived benefits to which the language can provide access because of its global status. She wrote: 'ideologies of language ... envision and enact ties of language to identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology'.

Economically speaking, English has been associated with sustainable development. English is the avenue to sustainable development in Nigeria. It is a necessary prerequisite for employment or hiring a new employee. This underlines the fact that English 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, English performs an integral role. For one to socialize effectively, a mastery of the English 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 the key to socialization between individuals and among countries of the world.

Nigeria is a multilingual/multicultural community. Consequently, 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 where the role of English cannot be relegated to the background. Again, in the area of curbing/solving security problems, English 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. In Nigeria, if the English language is accorded its role, unity and peace will be tremendously restored. The role of English in this domain should be recognized especially in the present Nigerian society where the country faces a lot security challenges and other issues that border on the country.

Conclusion

The English Language is an indispensable tool for national unity, integration and global communication. It plays a pivotal role in the attainment of sustainable developmental goals. The paper advocated total utilization of the English language roles especially in

contemporary Nigerian society where corruption, underdevelopment, security quagmires have eaten deep into its fabrics. English should be allowed to perform its role most importantly in nation building. The English language is the language of Education in Nigeria; helps in economic empowerment; it is the avenue to sustainable development. English is equally the language of nationalism. It plays a significant role in almost all spheres of human endeavour, be it in education, politics, the judiciary, administration, economics, religion, government, business and legislation. Summarily, it is the key factor to unending development in Nigeria in specific areas such as education, national unity and the overall nation building of the country.

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