

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE: A VERITABLE TOOL FOR NATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

**JULIANA CHINWE NJOKU**

Department of English Language and Literature  
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri

**E-Mail:** [Juliana\\_njoku@yahoo.com](mailto:Juliana_njoku@yahoo.com)

**Abstract**

English language is the engine that drives all forms of development in Nigeria. First, it is a unifying factor in our multilingual nation. It is also the language of political administration, and most importantly, it is the language of education in Nigeria. Education is unarguably an essential instrument for change and for human and national development. The quality of education in a country underpins the growth of individual and national wealth and helps to drive economic development. This paper submits that if English language is the medium through which the concepts in education are expressed and acquired in this country; then, it is a veritable tool for both human and national development in Nigeria. Apart from this, English language has conferred a lot of privileges on Nigeria, both on the home front and the global scene. It has advanced Nigeria socially, politically, economically and technologically. This paper therefore suggests that new methods be injected into the issue of English language education, considering its importance to national development. The paper draws its inspiration from the theory of Community Language Learning (CLL) to achieve this lofty ideal.

**Keywords:** English language, Education, National development, Community language learning

**Introduction**

Language is an instrument for human communication. It is a means through which information is shared and knowledge transmitted. Development has many aspects such as social, political, human, economic, cultural and technological dimensions. National development refers to the ability of a nation to provide an all-round and balanced development of different aspects and facets of the nation as mentioned above, as well as providing an improved standard of living for its citizenry. No matter the aspect or form of development sought, language remains the core means for realizing it. Language enables

human beings to acquire all forms of learning (formal or informal) that is akin to their growth and development. Hence, language cannot be separated from development.

In Nigeria, English language occupies a colossal position that confirms it a veritable tool for national development. First, it functions as the language of wider communication in a multi-lingual environment. Secondly, it is the official, as well as the national language in Nigeria. It is used for political administration, for trade and commerce and most importantly; it is the language of Education.

Education unarguably is an essential instrument for change and national development. Through education people acquire relevant skills and knowledge that enable them to realize their full potentials as human beings. The knowledge, expertise and skills that education provides, ensures man's continuous growth and all-round development. The medium through which the concepts in education are expressed and acquired is very important. For Nigeria, this medium is the English language. Suffice it then to say that English language is a veritable tool for human and national development in Nigeria.

Consequently, the paper creates an undeniable awareness on how the English language has helped Nigeria to develop socially, politically, economically and technologically. Then on the basis of community language learning theory (CLL) this paper advocates that new methods and approaches be injected into the issue of English language education. This is to ensure that proficiency in the use of English is achieved by the wider population and not just the elitist few, considering its importance to national development. This paper also uses the human theory of development by Amartya Sen, to explicate the importance of improving the capabilities of human beings, which in turn propels national development.

### **Clarification of Concepts**

**Development:** Development means change or improvement on the status quo. It means making something better. Development involves progress, positive change from one state or condition to another. It is a process that brings a change that allows people or a nation to achieve their maximum potentials. Development as a concept is an idea that embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all its ramifications. Thus,

development has many dimensions such as economic, human, environmental, social, political and so on. Tadro (1981.56), defines development as “a multidimensional process involving the re-organization and re-orientation of the entire economic and social process”. In fact, the concept of development implies growth and expansion.

**Human Development:** This has to do with conditions that allow individuals to improve their capabilities and achieve their maximum potentials as human beings. Human development focuses on people rather than the economy in which human beings live. It is a process by which individuals acquire skills and knowledge that will transform their lives and make them better people, able to solve their problems, live a better life and contribute meaningfully to the society where they live. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Human Development Report (HDR, 2015) defines human development as “ability to lead long and healthy lives, to be knowledgeable, to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living and to be able to participate in the life of the community” (n.p web).

**National Development:** This cuts across all facets of the society. Lawal and Abey (2011), aver that national development has to do with increase, upgrade in the living standard of the citizenry, national economy, structure of the legal system, infrastructure and so on. It is the ability of a country to provide an all round and balanced qualitative life for her citizenry. Unfortunately the focus has been on economic growth, without achieving the needed and expected balance. National development does not involve economic development alone, it also involves equitable distribution of national wealth, provision of health care, education, housing and other essential services; all with the view to improving the individual and collective quality of life.

**Economic Development:** This refers to the pace at which the economy of a nation is able to convert the natural resources (in forms of raw materials and energy) into products and services that are useful to humans. This could be expressed in terms of:

- The total natural resources and energy consumed

- The total products and services created and
- The total pollution generated

The value of products and services created by the economy of a given nation in one year is measured by dividing it with the number of people in that country. This is then referred to as Gross Domestic Product Per Capita (GDP). The net yearly income from foreign investment is referred to as (GNP) Gross National Product. These are widely acclaimed indices for measuring a nation's economic growth. Conventionally, a common assumption has been that, if an economy generates more products and services, then humans will enjoy a higher standard of living. This is not necessarily so. Going by the Human Development Index (HDI), a country that has a high number of poor people cannot be said to be developed no matter the increase recorded in her GDP or GNP.

Seers (1969), suggests that (national) development occurs when a country experiences a reduction or elimination of poverty, inequality and unemployment. Similarly, the World Development Report (WDR 1991) states that :

the challenge of (national) development... Is to improve the quality of life...better education, higher standards of health and nutrition, less poverty, a cleaner environment, more equality of opportunity, greater individual freedom and a richer cultural life. Emphasis added (web)

### **English Language Education**

English language education seeks to develop learners' proficiency in the use of English in a variety of contexts: for work, study, leisure and social interaction. It seeks to provide them with opportunities to extend their knowledge and experience of other cultures through the English medium. It also provides learners the opportunity for personal and intellectual development.

For Orell Digital Language Lab, the general aim of teaching English in schools is to develop various abilities among the students such as: to understand what is heard, to understand what is read, to express ideas in speech correctly and to express them in writing as well. Once a student is able to excel in these abilities it is assumed that he or she will be able to communicate both effectively and efficiently.

Schools are encouraged to continue with the good practices that they have developed which are in line with the recommended curriculum developments. More importantly, they are encouraged to enhance learners' experiences by providing a language-rich environment through:

- providing greater opportunities for learners to use English for purposeful communication both inside and outside the classroom;
- making use of learner-centred instruction to encourage learner independence;
- making greater use of literary or imaginative texts to develop critical thinking and encourage free expression and creativity; and
- promoting language development strategies, values and attitudes that are conducive to effective, independent and lifelong learning.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper is hinged on two theories. First, on Amartya Sen's 'A more Human Theory of Development' and secondly, on Charles Curran's Theory of Community Language Learning. In Sen's book, *Development as Freedom*, written in 1999, he makes it abundantly clear that human development is about the expansion of citizens' capabilities. For Sen, Freedom means increasing citizens' access and opportunities to the things they have reason to value. He challenges the mainstream concept of measuring development by economic growth. According to him, poverty, unfulfilled basic needs (like food, shelter & clothing), occurrence of famines, violation of political freedoms and the neglect of the agency of women remain with us today despite 'unprecedented opulence'.

Sen, focuses on human capabilities, that is on what people can do and be. It is these capabilities rather than the income or goods that they receive, that determine their well being. It is his ideas that led to the construction of the Human Development Index (HDI) which include: poverty reduction, access to education, increase in life expectancy and women empowerment. Today as never before, the rights of the poor are taken into consideration as those of the rich.

This theory is suitable for this paper because of the apparent fact that human resource is one of the most important catalysts in a nation's development. In fact it is a major

propeller for development. Let an environment be created in which all citizens are opportuned to improve and expand their individual capabilities and see how it rubs off on both the economy and national development in return.

This paper also draws on the theory of community language learning (CLL) developed by Charles Curran in 1972. CLL was inspired by Carl Roger's view of Education; that all living creatures are motivated to live up to their potentials, but human beings are often impeded by their environment and personal problems. Once the impediments are eliminated, the individual can develop his full potentials. Community language learning is a language teaching approach based on counseling techniques. Here the hierarchical student-teacher relationship is dispensed with and the counselor-client relationship is adopted. The idea is to eliminate any sense of challenge or risk-taking from the emotionally delicate client, which theoretically would loosen him or her to learn a second language without difficulty. In other words, it is an approach that alleviates anxiety and threat and other personal problems a person encounters in learning a second language.

This theory is also relevant on the issue of English language education considering the importance of English language to the nation's quest for development. If the aim is for English to be used by the wider population as this paper suggests, then this approach would be suitable for teaching the citizens in both formal and non-formal settings. Once their impediments are removed, Nigerians would learn English with ease. This would enable them develop their full potentials both as individuals and as members of the society.

### **Education and National Development**

Education is defined as “the act of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgments, and generally preparing oneself and others for mature life” (dictionary reference). Again Inko-Taria, cited in Njoku 2017, defines education as “a process of developing a person in all aspects of life, to be able to function properly as an individual and be useful to society” (p. 215). From the above definitions we can see that education is life-long process which enables the continuous development of a person's capabilities as an individual and as a member of society.

Education can be formal, informal and non-formal. Formal education is the one acquired within the walls of a school. Informal education is picked up within the environment where one lives, while non-formal education refers to organized, systematic educational activity carried out outside the framework of the formal system that is the school. The non-formal system provides selected types of learning to particular sub-groups in the society such as adults, women and children who are not opportune to have formal education.

At the different levels in both formal and non-formal education, students are equipped with life-long knowledge and skills that would enable them to realize their full potentials as human beings. They are taught numeracy and literacy skills, scientific, technological and entrepreneurial skills that would enable them to become employable in the world of work or become self reliant. Education also makes them to develop reasoning ability, critical thinking, autonomy, creativity and ability to make value judgments. Through education people acquire relevant skills that promote development efforts.

The economic and social advantages of education cannot be over emphasized. They include: faster growth of (GNP) Gross National Production, higher family income, higher productivity, a more skilled labour force, better wage employment, self employment and so on. Good quality education enables people to transform their lives and the society in which they live. Education raises income levels and improves standard of living.

Eyisi asserts that good education is the key to modernization and development. Njoku and Izuagba concur to this by stating that it is only through education and civilization that man can achieve growth and development for himself and his community. The quality of education in a country underpins the growth of individual and national wealth and helps to drive economic development. For each government, education is a long term investment, but a citizen's individual ambition is a prime factor. Euromonitor report on Nigeria indicates that individuals regard education as the best way to escape poverty. So, many Nigerians aspire to be educated, hence we have educated professionals in various fields of human activity. Through education, Nigeria has been provided with a vibrant work force that can compete effectively anywhere in the world.

The issue of education cannot be discussed successfully without the language which serves as the medium of instruction. The skills and knowledge which education provides for human development will not be possible without the language through which the concepts are expressed. This is where English language comes in, because in Nigeria, English is the language of education. Since we cannot talk about education without the language through which the learning experiences are relayed, and English being the language of education in Nigeria, one can therefore state categorically that English language is a primary tool for national development in Nigeria.

### **English Language and National Development**

Having identified education as a major tool in human development earlier, it is essential to note that the language through which education is acquired is also of utmost importance. As shown in the last section, English is the language of education in Nigeria. Every form of education is expressed and acquired through language. It is through English language that formal education is acquired in Nigeria. In other words it is through English language that the skills and knowledge needed for human development is acquired. Therefore, by extension, English language is a primary instrument for human development in Nigerian.

The benefits of education (acquired via English language) are enormous; they include:

Improved social relations

- Better job opportunities
- Higher family income
- Higher productivity
- Access to better health facility
- Improved standard of living
- Ability to participate in the life of the community

Besides these benefits, English language has conferred on Nigerians other privileges that bear on human development as well as national development, both on the home front and on the global scene. On the home front, English language is essentially regarded as a unifying factor. It has allowed Nigerians to co-exist peacefully even in their diversity. It

is this peaceful co-existence that engenders development either on individual or national basis.

Considering the multilingual nature of the country, the communication crises that would have occurred among people from different linguistic background is bridged by the use of English. It is possible for Nigerians irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds, to study or work in any part of the country. The same goes for teachers/workers who could also choose to teach/work in any part of the country without fear of language barrier.

English language has advanced Nigerians economically. Locally, people engage in trading and other business activities to increase their economic power and improve their standard of living. This has been successful because of the use of English. Globally, people engage in international businesses facilitated by the use of English. Again, the status of English as a second language in Nigeria has attracted foreign investment. According to Euromonitor, the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows from the English speaking countries such as USA and UK are typically high in the

countries that use English as their 2<sup>nd</sup> language. Thus, Nigeria has benefitted in this regard because of their use of English. Examples of such foreign investors are; Mobil, Shell, Nexen in the oil and gas sector. Other sectors that are boosting the nation`s economy are – information technology (IT) services, banking and telecommunications.

As stated in the Euromonitor:

Companies such as MTN communication and Microsoft have found that both Nigeria and Pakistan offer a more attractive business environment than many other countries as a result of these countries higher levels of English proficiency among other factors (8).

This confirms the fact that improved English language skills help to attract more foreign investments. These investments in turn create more job and career opportunities for Nigeria

Euromonitor report also confirms that Nigerians believe that learning English in particular offers great opportunity for career advancement and higher pay. In affirmation to this statement, Olofin opines, “Before any Nigerian can occupy any position of

eminence today, he must be ‘English compliant’ ”. He further avers that promotions and ability to advance one’s career through national and international communication is tied to one’s education and particularly to one’s ability to speak good English (137). This is in line with Osuafor’s assertion that “people who could speak and write English had more chances of being employed than those who could not” (23).

English language provides a link to the global world. Being a major language of communication in the global world, it offers the people of this nation the benefit of participating in global affairs. Access to adequate information is gained on a global level.

English language has also assisted technological development in Nigeria. Ike avers that English language is the window to the world of science and technology. It is the language used in space science and computing technology. There is easy knowledge transfer now in quantities and at speed unimaginable in the past. There is digital communication of massive data bases via the internet, smart phones, fax machines, television, print media and so on. One can easily connect to databases anywhere in the world from the comfort of our rooms. Although some innovations to technology have negative effects, their advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. Most organizations, industries and parastatals have gone digital. It makes administration easy and provides easier method for storing and retrieving information. Nigerians are active participants in this digital world because of their knowledge of English language. They are also able to read and interpret such information or instructions enclosed in scientific literature and put them into use.

Literacy in English language is very important to all round human development in Nigeria. Anyone who wishes to be relevant in the Nigerian polity as well as the global world should learn English by all means. Therefore, a more functional approach should be adopted for the effective teaching and learning of English language in our schools.

### **Conclusion**

Many issues have been raised in this paper some of which are: the communicative role of language, education as an instrument for change and human development, the importance of English as the language of education in Nigeria and the benefits of literacy in English to both human and national development. The paper concludes that the knowledge, skills,

and expertise gained through education are only made possible by the language through which they are acquired. Hence English language and education in Nigeria cannot be separated. They both work together to bring about human and national development in Nigeria.

Again, English language has not only advanced Nigerians educationally, it has also advanced them socially, politically, economically, technologically and otherwise. It has conferred a lot of privileges on Nigerians both on the home front and on the global scene. Therefore, efforts should be geared towards injecting innovative and new breakthrough strategies of improving the teaching and learning of English language in Nigeria.

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