

Literacy, Language and Business Communication: Creative Tools for Entrepreneurial Business Activities in Nigeria

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Abstract

Though literacy is conceived as a concept that is fluid and country specific, nevertheless; it remains along language and communication, creative tools for entrepreneurial business skills in Nigeria especially in the 21st century, a time when the use of language is regarded as fundamental to business development in Nigeria and indeed Africa despite the neglect it has witnessed over time. Humans have in them the urge to delve into issues and find out origin of phenomenon which carries them beyond the reality of their physical environment to that of a rather foreseeable or 'thought future', this is made possible owing to an individual's dexterity in the reading and writing art which consequently extend to fluency of language use when speaking and listening. It is agreed that a person is functionally literate when he has acquired the knowledge and skills in reading and writing which in turn enables him to engage effectively in all activities in which literacy is normally assumed in his cultural group and since language is a human phenomenon, therefore, it is pertinent to note that the importance of language and communication to entrepreneurial business skills development in the country cannot be overemphasized. This study deems it necessary to consider literacy, language and communication as veritable innovative tools for businesses to thrive in Nigeria consequently the language teacher has an important role to play building the literacy mechanics in learners who are the reality of a true Nigerian market in the long run; an avenue towards growing entrepreneurial awareness in Nigeria. It is with these at the background of the study that the researchers made a frantic effort at synchronizing literacy, language and communication as essentials for

organizational development in Nigeria which must, as a matter of urgency, be addressed from the classroom.

Keywords: *Literacy, communication, language, creative tool, functional literacy, entrepreneur...*

Introduction

Nigeria is naturally endowed with entrepreneurship opportunities; however the realization of the full potential of these opportunities has been dampened by so many factors one of which hinges around communication challenges-literacy. Recent developments in the previously less-explored areas of telecom, transport, hospitality, entertainment and food processing have high probability of success if the literacy and language challenges facing the country are addressed properly because it is regarded as a factor for development whereby Nigerians can read, write, listen and at least speak with adequacy. Literacy or being literate has been conceptualized in a number of ways, and these definitions are growing on daily basis and from place to place.

Sometimes, it refers only to reading and at other times it refers to reading and writing yet sometimes, more rarely, to reading, writing and speaking and listening. However it seems, literacy in the context of this paper not only refers to reading and writing but also related to listening and speaking. Most children learn to talk fairly easily and in contrast, learning to read and write is a herculean task though an achievable one for that matter. It is believed that the ability to read and write makes a person 'literate', with varying degrees of fluency some of which are owing to cultural and environmental factors. Our view here is therefore that learning to read and write translates into speaking and listening which are essential for business development as much as reading and writing. While it is accepted that some businesses are done in print, other businesses are done while potential clients meet one on one for dialogue, this is where listening and talking are paramount most especially when one tries to avoid any form of irregularities and ambiguities brought about by print. This, however, does not mean that businesses done in print are not reliable, our submission remains that literacy is the ability to read, write, speak and listen well.

A literate person should be able to *communicate* effectively with others and to understand written information which consequently metamorphoses into a business tool for persons' or organization's business deals. It is disturbing that a wide range of definitions relating to literacy focuses only on the ability to read and write at an appropriate level as if businesses are done only by reading and writing. Taking Blake and Hanley (1995) into consideration, they opined that the attribute of literacy is generally recognized as one of the key educational objectives of compulsory schooling; however, there is no commonly accepted definition of what an appropriate level of literacy is. Lawton and Gordon (1996)

also said that there is no universal standard of literacy but then we can refer to functional literacy as a concept which looks at literacy from purpose and that of perspective of individuals or community as the case may be. They defined functional literacy as 'the level of skill in reading and writing that any individual needs in order to cope with adult life'. It must be noted that adult life also includes the business life of an adult who makes frantic efforts on daily basis to put food on his table. In Nigeria, the aim must be to incorporate adults into established economic and social values and practices.

Functional literacy has been concerned as a means to an end' (Lankshear, 1993). Hoggart (1998) echoes this view and argues that 'we have to adopt the slogan that literacy is not enough' which implies that more needs to be done. The two main reasons for seeing literacy as important are the links with economic stability and individual well-being. What does it mean to be literate?

Definitions of what it means to be literate are evolving. UNESCO (2013) has as one of its mission statements saying: 'UNESCO is at the forefront of global literacy efforts and is dedicated to keeping literacy high on national, regional and international agendas.' Different countries are placing literacy at the top of the agenda, redefining what it means to be literate and considering the pedagogical implications across the whole curriculum, literacy is seen as: skills, employment, levels or competences and as morbidity. According to Edwards and Potts (2008), they opined that there are two views of literacy, a 'broad view held by many researchers and educators' and also a narrower view, 'bounded by a focus on the early years of school, assessment and accountability.' They sum up the evolved definition of literacy at that time as 'indicating an increasing focus on the utilitarian and economic aspects of literacy rather than the cultural, moral or intellectual.' For example, in the introduction to the Singapore English Language Syllabus (2010), the emphasis is on the acquisition of language. It is described as a 'Language Use Syllabus' and highlights 'effective communication' as a key aim. Another stated aim is for students to learn 'internationally acceptable English (standard English)' which will be used to grow whatever business one intends to engage in irrespective of the starting capital especially in this 21st century. All of these accounts for the essence of this paper which attempts at synchronizing literacy, language and communication as prerequisites for business skills in Nigeria.

Literacy, Language and Communication

Language is uniquely human in that no man can successfully exist without a language. Language has always been seen as everybody's affair from a narrow perspective and on this note, Crystal, (1974) states: "It is such a familiar phenomenon that we can very easily fall into trap of thinking that we know all about it". Language is particularly human, Notterbhom (1975) and Chomsky (1972). In nature, communication is of dual role functionality, and this

underscores the interactive texture of language. Communication takes place between two parties; these two parties are known as interlocutors. One culture common to these two parties is the ability to understand each other. The understanding and intelligibility between them must be at par and this is where literacy must attain a level of standardization irrespective of geographical location.

Communication is at the centre of every human activity since people have to interact with one another. Communication can be verbal or symbolic. Apart from facilitating social interaction, communication helps people to influence others and maintain good relationships. It provides a dependable means of exchanging ideas and ensures achievement of organizational goals. Because of the various functions of communications, different scholars have defined it in various ways some of which are that:

- Communication is that process which enables people to observe stimuli by drawing inferences with or without observable physical responses. (Platt, 1955);
- Communication process is a continuous action conveying information, ideas, attitudes and feelings among individuals and groups at all levels of organization. This definition highlights the interactive role of communication. (Chruden and Sherman, 1978);
- Communication is a process by which an individual or group shares information with another person or another group with the aim of ensuring mutual understanding.

Components of Communication

1. **Stimulus** which is the motivating force for communication
2. **Encoder** who is the initiator of the discourse.
3. **Message** which refers to the thoughts, ideas, attitudes and feelings which the encoder sends to the decoder.
4. **Medium** which refers to the mode or form the message took to the receiver e.g oral, written or non-verbal.
5. **The Channel** which implies the means by which the message got to the receiver, e.g. radio, television, phone, letters, report, memo, telegram, telex etc.
6. **Decoder** who is the person that receives and responds to the message – since communication is a two way business.
7. **Feedback** which is the reaction of the message however it depends on the decoders level of understanding. This determines whether communication has taken place.
8. **Noise** is that component of communication for all forms of obstacles that hinder the effectiveness of communication. Noise reduces the quality and quantity of what is communicated. Noise can be physical, psychological or linguistics. **Physical noise** includes distracting conversations, unorganized sounds from nearby workshops, market

noise, loud sounds from musical equipments etc. **Psychological noise** occurs in the form depression, fatigue, poor mental attitudes and general emotional stress. **Linguistic noise** refers to all those problems created by the inability to use the language of communication as effectively as would be required.

The two forms of human communication are the verbal and non-verbal forms. The verbal form of communication includes speech and writing both of which are forms of human language. Oral communication/ oral business communication can be intra-personal, inter-personal or used within a group. In general terms, a business communication starts at the intra-personal level and spreads to the interpersonal and group levels. Oral business type of communication encourages feedback which will help the encoder to determine what next step to take in the process of business activities. It also provides an opportunity for the reinforcement of the message. This reinforcement may come in the form of gestures, facial expressions and other forms of paralanguage which give indication of the feelings of the speaker sometimes as regards the business subject. There is equally the advantage of message clarification offered by oral business communication. Since the encoder is given the opportunity to explain and clarify his points on the spot, the quality of the message is improved and chances of distortion and misinterpretation greatly reduced. To this end, it must be noted that oral business communication which involves speaking and listening reduces tension and conflicts.

Business Communication in Nigeria: Effectiveness and Flaws

The same general issues and principles that relate to communication are relevant to business communication. Success in businesslike communication depends to a large extent on the promptness of the encoding and the decoding of the message and the level of similarity of experience between the encoder and the decoder. The aim is to make sure that information is not distorted unnecessarily. The following principles are identified according to Yusuf and Ogbulogo (1996) as principles of business communication:

- The message should be thoroughly thought about.
- The audience should be analysed so as to ascertain what is appropriate to them.
- The message should be logically planned to ensure proper interpretation and understanding
- Proper words, codes, and symbols must be chosen to express the thoughts of the sender and to match the experience of the receiver.

According to them, in practical terms, business communication should not be ambiguous. It should express just what it has to. Vague and confusing expressions should be avoided. Business communication must exhibit *clarity, sincerity, simplicity, courtesy and conciseness*. For business communication to be sincere means that it should sound credible to ensure that the receiver or

listener believes in the contents/statements and takes it seriously. Simplicity means that letters/ statements should be delivered in simple language with easy-to-understand words. Courtesy in business communication means that the receiver's convenience must be taken into serious consideration. The audience must be accorded some respect and their feeling appealed to. For business communication to be concise, it must go straight to the point. There is usually no room for personalized details and pleasantries. Indeed, all aspects of business communication should be taken as formal and simply official. There are, however, a number of flaws which result in communication breakdown in an organization or between people. These problems are structural, human and technological, (Yusuf and Ogbulogo, 1996:9). Structurally, when the physical buildings of an organization are wide apart or built in segments, obviously, communication will be affected as most relayed messages are likely to get distorted so much so that it can promote ambiguity. There may be lack of cooperation amongst staffs some of whom feel insecure due to differences in business building location. Clerks may even misplace important files deliberately thus causing an unwarranted delays perhaps to favour the cabals of the organization.

Human barriers or challenges are those occasioned by their work environment. Too much information at the disposal of a person can be disastrous as the person involved is likely to forget some vital information consequently leading to lack of organization. A poor human relation does not help communication too. These attitudes manifest through frustration, negative perceptions, poor interpersonal relationship and general apathy.

Linguistics barriers relates to disparity in levels of the use of language maybe due to the level of the differences occasioned by education of the people involved. It is normal to have an itch when an extremely educated worker relates with a co-worker who has poor educational and linguistic background.

Rumour is another challenge of an organization as they are capable of adding or subtracting from the substance of a business communication.

Technological constraints come in form of inability to cope with an existing work gadget or when there is the introduction of a brand new gadget with complexity of operational functions. Without proper training for the staff, inability to use such gadget will lead to communication breakdown mostly if such a gadget is to promote the course of communication within the organization.

Tools for Business Communication

Ayo and Ogbulogo (1996) have noted that for effective functioning and success of business and entrepreneurial activities, timely, accurate and effective communication of information is required irrespective of the type of business

be it sole proprietorship of multinational. The following are business communication tools:

- Mails
- Telegrams
- Telephones
- Facsimile(fax)
- Telex
- Computers
- Mouse etc.

The Art of Written Business Communication

Written communications in business organizations are meant to document information provide information or record information. This is done to prevent such information from being forgotten or disputed. It is also to preserve information for future reference. Written forms of information include:

- Memoranda
- Letters
- Proposal
- Agenda
- Reports
- Minutes etc.

Public Relations and Business Communication

Public relations is employed by an organization to influence its clients and the general public without incurring direct media cost. Public relations can be effected through periodical releases, congratulatory messages and decoration of public places. It can also be achieved by sponsoring programmes in schools, colleges and in sporting activities, Ayo and Ogbulogo (1996). The essence of communication in public relations is to make known the organization that is sponsoring the specific projects. Language here should be simple and announcement brief and clear. Where there are inscriptions on the facilities being presented to the public, the writing should be clear, decent and eye-catching, if not, the essence of public relations is defeated.

Communication and Advertisement in Entrepreneurship

Communication is very important when one intends to advertise. Just as language is pivotal to communication so also is advertisement with business growth in Nigeria. Inability to use the appropriate language in advertisement renders the endeavour futile. The language of advertising, like every other field or discipline, is unique, aside from its unique register; very often it does not follow the grammar or logical rules of everyday language. It is a kind of language that functions and familiarizes itself with the context in which it is used. Disciplines such as law, Journalism, Arts and Humanities have kinds of

languages peculiar to them such that the linguistic features employed directs one to know the field that such language use belongs. This clearly shows the inevitable power of literacy, language and communication and the capacity to influence people and their behaviours. This is also true in the field of advertisement where the choice of language affects the way messages are composed and relayed. Advertisement of products and article publications are both different aspects of business development. The language of advertisement normally is very positive and emphasizes why one product stands out in comparison with another. This is the effectiveness of communication and can be accessed from different areas of linguistics analysis. Communication can take place graphologically and lexically to achieve certain objectives and goals in business particularly when it relates to advertising. The language of advertising serves the function of informing the public about the availability of a product in the market. It is also a persuasive and emotive language meant to appeal to the minds of the consumers. Sharing the above view Broom(1978) observes that... the language of advertising is audience oriented ... this is because, notwithstanding the level of socialization and knowledge of the advertiser, he or she does not impose on the listener, but rather resort to a language that is transparent. In other not to bore the listener, the language of advertising is characterized with the use of simple diction which will expose the message first hand. Writing about the emotive nature of the language of advertisement, Denis (1978) observed that certain lexical items are often selected instead of others. This is revealed through this example: *'every bright toothpaste 'helps' get your teeth whiter and cleaner'*. It 'helps' ingredients fight tooth decay. In analysing the above piece of advertising, Denis observes that the word 'helps' is used constantly, but that the word 'helps' does not mean 'does'. Denis canvasses that it would have been more appropriate to say 'does' but 'helps' is just one of those adjectives adopted by advertisers to appeal to the emotions of the listeners. Through this study, it is discovered that the language of advertisement is persuasive, informative and it serves as a reminder to the consumer to patronize the products.

Business Language in Nigeria

The importance of communication to man is incalculable, especially when daily human interaction is considered such as business communication. In political and social policy, language functions as a vehicle of interaction and an instrument of communication with the use of communications, although it has always possessed an added cultural importance as a tool of the dominant ideology. That is to learn a language is not only reaching out to others but to maintain a variety of the social bond, a shared sense of values and communal awareness.

Language is a powerful tool of control used by the colonial powers. Language forms a large part of the culture of people-it is through their language that they express their folk tales, myths, proverbs and history. It consists of a comprehensive and overlapping set of "sub-languages, " both ethnically and geographically defined territory known as dialects--some are in some cases

defined by shared settings known to be registered while others are linked to profession, class or educational level or a combination of these elements.

Language includes a wide range of variation from a variety of human activities in a system of interaction with somebody, society, or culture. It also plays a crucial role in the social, political and economic life support of the people in a given geographic entity. In spite of all perceived roles of languages to humankind, an all-embracing interpretation of it continues to elude us due to the complexity of its structure and the functions it performs. A useful definition of communication should include the feeling that language has been widely studied and acclaimed as the most valuable human institution and is indispensable in all spheres of life.

In view of the ongoing discourse, the Nigerian government declared the lingua franca and national language of Nigeria as **English Language**. Today, the general populace especially those who ply their trade off the shores of the country try endlessly to improve their spoken English Language on the ground that English has become the world's language of business. However it must be pointed out quickly that at the grassroots level, one must consider the language of business. A typical Nigerian local market makes use of the pidgin and indigenous language for the purpose of business communication even though an attempt at standard English usage is in no doubt. Even the man on the street attempts to speak and do his business in English language.

Different "Englishes" had appeared from diverse geographical or regional contexts. Such differences lend credence to the idea of establishing regional model rather than enforcing the British Standard Model for communication purposes especially in locations where English is used as a second/ foreign language. *English has become a global, academic and required professional language for the ever increasing international communities around the world* (Kamla, 2013; KG support 2013).

Research shows that over 1.5 billion people speak English Language as either native, second and/or foreign language in developed or developing countries of the world, including Nigeria (SIL Ethnologue, 2013). It is the official language of the Nigerian people and as such the official language for business communication in the most populous black nation of the world. This is why the Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria formulated a language policy that the teaching and learning of English Language should be one of the core subjects starting from primary through secondary schools and the official medium used in teaching other subjects from the senior primary to tertiary institutions (FGN, 2013). This paper therefore submit that despite the multilingual nature of the Nigerian society, English Language remains the language of business communication since it is the official language of the Nigerian people- taught in the classroom and also used as tool for the teaching and learning of other subjects.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that literacy, language and communication are essential to the development of private ownership of businesses in the country. This is owing to the idea that learning to read and write as well as listening and speaking which are language skills, are important when one attempts to engage in any form of business in the country. Teaching and learning of these skills is therefore encouraged so much so that the literacy level of learners is enhanced with the resultant effect on the development of the economy of the country.

Recommendations

Based on the discussion in this paper, the following recommendations are made:

- The government of Nigeria should enforce the policy of education which pronounced literacy for all Nigerians through provision of basic education for all children of school age.
- The need to take children of school age off the street should be taken very seriously by the government and other relevant agencies.
- The aspect of language teaching which focuses on communicative competence should be re-emphasized by stakeholders in education.
- Collaborative learning of language skills should be encouraged in our schools.
- Learners must be advised and encouraged by teachers to improve on the art of speaking English Language whenever they are not in the school.
- Business communication skills should be integrated in business study as a subject in the upper basic school while it should also be introduced as a subject at the senior school level.

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