



## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the role English Language plays in fostering African developments in 21st century. The study focuses on role English language serves as an indispensable tool for global refocusing on African developments. The study adopted descriptive qualitative method of analysis to investigate the discourse. The method enables the researcher to relate ideas, perceptions, opinions that cannot be measured by numbers but are represented in words. The study was anchored on

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE AS A TOOL FOR GLOBAL REFOCUSING ON AFRICAN DEVELOPMENTS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN 21ST CENTURY

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## Introduction

The quest for development has become the driving force of all continents of the world. This driving force has paved way for both developed and underdeveloped countries to strive for achieving the seventeen goals of sustainable development in recent times. In Africa, development is yet to gain its whole grasp on the continent despite the wealth of human and natural resources that the continent has been endowed with. Ojo and Oluwatayo (2016) stress that Africa has been provided with manpower and wealth of resources that serve as an indispensable tool to achieve the economic, social and environment development. However, Africans are yet to utilise these opportunities to maximising meaningful development as to place them along with developed countries.

Sadly, most of the African countries have fallen under underdeveloped countries. This calls for concerted efforts for Africans to engage in useful ventures to actualise the goals for holistic development in the 21st century. For Africans to be positioned in the global refocusing on African developments, English language is one of the fundamental tools to achieve this goal. This position has been argued and advanced by Goldsmith (2011) and Olusoji (2012). It is true that English language is gradually spreading across the globe and it is reckoned as a global language (Crystal, 2003; Plonski, Teferra,



theory of globalization. The study identified corruption, poor governance, and poor leadership as major challenges confronting development pursuit in African states. The study further established inter-lingual problems, intra-lingual problems, environmental factors, and teachers' factors as some of the challenges of teaching and learning of English language in African states. The study submits that English language as a tool for global refocusing of African developments serves as a common medium of communication for sharing ideas to advance African developments, access information, means of international communication between researchers, language of bilateral trade, tool for reviving social, economic, agriculture, and health sectors. As for economic drivers, English Language explores inward investment, export activity with English speaking nations, internationalisation of small to medium-size enterprises, increase entrepreneurialism, and scientific and technological advancement. English Language plays a role for socio-cultural drivers by reposition the language to project the rich African cultural heritages in film, music and television industries as well as promote international tourism, international student mobility, and international migrant working. The study concluded that English Language is the most variant tool for global refocusing of African developments in the 21st century. The study therefore, recommends the adoption of the language as an official language in the African region.

[**Keywords:** African states, Cultural heritage, English Language, Development, Sustainable development]

& Brady, 2013), and as such it has the potential for facilitating development in the 21st century.

For a continent to achieve development holistically, such a continent needs to give attention to its educational sector. This is because education is considered as the bedrock of development as argued variously by scholars (Amadi, 2012; Ahmad, et al., 2013; Eimuhi & Ogedegbe, 2015; Abdulrasheed & Bello, 2015; Olorunsola & Bello, 2018). Globally, English language is viewed as the language of education. This again makes English language vital in pursuing this discourse under investigation.

Poor social amenities such as roads; bad water tapes; lack of power supply among others, have contributed greatly to the challenge posed to development in Africa. The challenge of social amenities has made many people to move from rural areas to urban places for the sake of improving their standard of living. The focal point here is to achieve the full well being of an individual in the society.

Development in African states seems to be a far reaching concept that demands maximum attention. Innovative ways and approaches which are relevant to bring about the desired development are neglected over the years. As a result, there are various factors that set in which brought under-development in African continent. Placing much emphasis on material development is one of the dangers that lead to the misunderstanding of this concept. This definitely results to the negligence of other areas



of development that are necessary for African states. Development must combine intellectual, economic and social elements. Desai and Potter (2008) stress that economic growth is a necessary but not sufficient condition for development; redistribution of income and wealth, inequalities are not going to be reduced, and there is much evidence that it is inequalities that hurt. Development must enhance human rights and welfare which are self-esteem, self-respect and improving entitlements that are central concerns (Sen, 1999).

It is important to note that several studies have been conducted on development in Africa (Ahenkan & Kojo-Osei, 2014; Cassidy, 2014; Ojo & Oluwatayo, 2016). However, most of these studies do not focus on English language as a tool to global refocusing on African developments. It is against this backdrop that the researcher has set out to reposition English language as an indispensable tool to achieve development in Africa.

### **The Concept of Development Clarified**

The concept of development has been examined in various disciplines: economics, psychology, sociology, political science, biology, technology, to mention but a few. Development entails different thing to various disciplines. For economists, the concept entails improving the economy a country with an aim of achieving high capita income. Development is understood in technological base, when a state achieves a reasonable self-sustaining growth to enhance industrial and technical progress for the benefit of its citizens. From this understanding, development is obtainable at the rate which a state acquires social, cultural, technical, industrial and other artifacts. Development in this sense is rather viewed on material perspective (Oduwole, 2016).

For Guzman (2011), development entails “the accumulation of human capital and its effective investment in the progress of an economy.” This definition treats the human person as a means to a certain end. The perspective of this view sees human improvement as important element of development it is because it is necessary for attainment of economic progress. According to Ihuah (2013), development is “the desire and ability to use what is available to continuously improve the quality of life, liberate people from the hazardous power and influence of natural, geographical, socio-historical, and world environment”. Development is defined as an approach “designed to satisfy human needs on the basis of self-reliance and harmony with the environment” (Lubieniecka, n. d.). This entails that self-liberation, self-reliance and self-realization should be a priority of every individual (Nyerere, 1973). In a general sense, development is viewed when there is progressive growth in scientific enterprise and industrialization.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on theory of globalization which emerges from the global mechanisms of greater integration with particular emphasis on the sphere of economic transactions. The theory emphasised on cultural aspects and their communication worldwide rather than the economic, financial and political ties. The theory argues that cultural elements will dictate the forms of economic and social structure in each country. These social conditions are dominant cultural factors within the conditions of each nation. The main assumption which can be extracted from the theory of globalization is that



cultural factors are the determinant aspect in every society. Globalization theories emphasise cultural factors as the main determinants which affect the economic, social and political conditions of nations (Moore, 1993).

The theory is relevant to this study because it provides the basis in which English language can be used as a tool explore all African cultural values to foster holistic development in the African states.

### **Methodological Approach**

This study adopts descriptive qualitative method of analysis. The descriptive data is in the form of written words. The process enables the researcher to interpret and relate ideas, perceptions, opinions that cannot be measured by numbers but are represented in words. This qualitative descriptive study aims at obtaining and analysing information that are concern with this discourse of global refocusing on African developments. As a qualitative method, the secondary method of collection data was mainly employed to investigate the discourse.

### **Challenges to Development in Africa in 21st Century**

There are fundamental challenges that are confronting development paradigm in Africa. Poor leadership, poor governance, and corruption are key issues that constitute as major challenges over the years that constraint development in most African countries. Other challenges confronting development in Africa in 21st century include the following poverty, insecurity, natural environmental hazard, insecurity, youth employment, infrastructure deficits, climatic variability, rapid population growth rate, and rapid urbanization (Africare, 2008; Kanayo, Kizito & Udefuna, 2013; Ojo & Oluwatayo, 2016).

Iganigan and Unemhilin (2011) also identified lack of adequate food, clean water, an equitable standard of living, safe shelter, a healthy and secured environment, and satisfying job for present and future generations as some of the challenges facing development in developed and underdeveloped countries.

Africa is underdeveloped continent because leaders and individuals lack the basic understanding to address these challenges to the root. Kanayo, Kizito and Udefuna (2013) stress that these challenges pave way to inconsistency in government policies that aimed at facilitating development in Africa.

As noted earlier, corruption is one of the major challenges to development in Africa. Corruption has led to misappropriation of government resources and funds that affect development in African states. It is on this footing that Amadi and Ekekwe (2014) viewed it as a global disease that has affected African developments. The high level of corruption, impunity and poor governance in Africa has clearly point out some of the social indicators that explained why Africa trails other continents. Lawal (2007) defined corruption as “a systematic vice in an individual society or nation which reflects favouritism, nepotism, tribalism, sectionalism, undue enrichment, amassing of wealth, abuse of office, power, position and deprivation of undue gains and benefits”. Lawal (2007) stresses that poverty, political culture, personalisation and the inability of political leaders to overcome their colonial enslavement of mentality have contributed to the high level of corruption in Africa.



It is obvious to note that corruption has engendered political stability, breakdown of law and order in the most African states. There is high abuse of human rights notably among the political leaders and the rich. Corruption has affected the socio-cultural life of the people. As a matter of fact, people do not appreciate the virtues of good morale, conduct and practices because corruption has changed the social values which are supposed to bring meaningful development in the lives of the people. Oduwole (2012) points out clearly that if there are no modalities to combat corruption then development will be questionable and impossible in Africa in general.

Poor leadership and poor governance are indeed the greatest challenges that confront development in Africa. These major challenges have paved way to Africans to experience poverty, unemployment, poor education, poor nutrition and so on. The African educational sector is low and defective, and it does not produce highly skilled manpower to be involved in reviving the African economy. Interestingly, it is important to note that the “poor governance causes social injustice and inequality in the public rights of the country” (Yasmen, Begum & Mujtaba, 2011). Poor governance has caused social injustice and inequality among the rich and poor in the African continent.

The prevailing insecurity challenge in African countries has brought setback for Africans to attain development in all ramifications. As a result, insecurity has been characterised by deaths, collateral tortures, injuries, rapes, and maiming in Africa as reported by Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) (2015). Civil wars, terrorism and kidnapping in recent times have been major activities threaten development drives in African countries that would have places it as developed continent. IEP (2015) notes that terrorism in African countries experienced the highest impact of terrorism globally as rated thus: Nigeria (3rd), Libya (9th), Egypt (13th), Central African Republic (14th), South Sudan (15th), Sudan (16th), Kenya (18th), Democratic Republic of Congo (19th) and Cameroon (20th) positions. This indeed has paved ways for Africans to experience hardship and poverty.

Poverty has affected development in Africa at a higher level too. This can be obviously seen in the widening gap between the rich and poor. As a result, the African states are currently experiencing backwardness in economy and agricultural sectors; there is unequal income distribution among the citizens. Africare (2008) reports that two-thirds of the African states population live in rural areas; and depend on agriculture as their major source of income.

The rapid population growth is a factor that has posed a challenge to development in Africa. The high rate of population growth in Africa has posed a challenge to the ecosystem. This has also led to food insecurity, land tenure, environmental degradation and lack of water supply. In addition, the rapid population growth has led to land, water and fuel wood shortages in rural areas and to urban health crises stemming from lack of sanitation and clear water (Todaro & Smith, 2009).

Another silent factor that has affected development in Africa is the matter of discontinuity of governmental projects by political leaders. Almost every political leader fails to see to it as a matter of necessity to continue with the uncompleted projects handed over to them by their predecessors. As a result, there are so many abandoned projects which had already consumed governmental resources. Our political leaders must



ensure that there is continuity from the previous political administrations; this will go a long way of enhancing development in the country in terms of material prosperity.

### **Challenges of Learning English Language in Africa**

The use of English Language in African states has received mutual attention. It has been noted that English language is considered to be a dominant language that is used for communicative purposes in 53 countries in Africa (Plonski, Teferra, & Brady, 2013). The use of English language was introduced in Africa dates from 1652, when the Dutch colonists arrived in the Cape. A century after Dutch involvement, the British lunch out a greater involvement of the language which dates from 1795, during the Napoleonic Wars and establish its control in 1806. The policy received considerable attention in 1820, when some 5,000 British were given land in the Eastern Cape. This development paved way for adopting English as an official language of the region in 1822, and thereafter an attempt was made to anglicise the large Afrikaan-speaking population (Crystal, 2003).

Inter-lingual problems, intra-lingual problems, environmental factors, and teachers' factors are fundamental challenges confronting the teaching and learning of English Language in African states (Eyisi, Omazu, & Akaegbobi, n. d.). The first challenge identified here arises from the interference of the native languages. English is learned by Africans as a second language who is an expert in speaking at least one language, which is usually the person's mother tongue. This mother tongue is most proficient because it is a speaker's native language. These interferences occur mostly at phonetic level. For instance, there are some English vowels and consonants which do not exist in African indigenous languages. Africans therefore, tend to replace such sounds with the ones they have in their indigenous or native languages. This poses a challenge for effective acquisition of English Language to most Africans.

Intra-lingual problems focused on problem of inherent in the English language itself. This problem is infuriated in a second language situation that posed challenge to African learners as it is against the background of African indigenous languages. This at the large extent constitute hindrance to Africans to attain reasonable degree of competence in speaking (pronunciation) and writing (spelling) of Language. Africans encounter difficulty in spelling problems in English Language because the African indigenous languages spelling system are virtually very simple due to the fact that words are spelt exactly the same way as they are pronounced. This is contrary to English language spelling system.

The environment has constituted another challenge for teaching and learning of English Language as a second language in African setting. Most of the African physical settings are not conducive enough and as such affect learning processes. Eyisi, Omazu, & Akaegbobi (n. d) observe that teaching and learning of English Language in school setting has been challenging because the environment has posed many errors that are seen in books of all kinds, radio and television programmes, and local and national dailies. These confusions affect learners of the Language.

The teacher factor seems to be one of biggest challenges posed to teaching and learning of English Language as a second language by Africans. There is shortage of competent English teachers in Africa. The shortage provided opportunity for a half-baked or an incompetent English teacher to teach the subject at primary and secondary schools which



is the foundational formation of learning process in the educational sector. When the wrong foundation is laid, it is much more difficult for such a foundation to be erased or corrected by the learner. It is true that these incompetent English teachers do not only induce errors, but they reinforce them.

### **English Language as a Tool for Global Refocusing of African Developments**

Development in African states is nothing to reckon with yet because of some of the challenges highlighted in this study. Africa seems to be the least among the seven continents in world in terms of development pursuits. There is need for Africans to sit at the round table to dialogue and figure out ways of actualising holistic development that will address social, economic, and environmental needs of the Africans. In bid to achieve this fundamental goal, the need of integrating English language as tool for global refocusing of African developments has become of great importance to this discourse. This study presents some of the opportunities English Language serves as a tool for global refocusing of African developments in the 21st century.

The African society is a multilingual society with different cultural diversities. These cultural diversities have set in nepotism and tribalism amongst the Africans. Adopting a common and unify language for communication is paramount in dialoguing to achieve a common goal and purpose. Adopting English language as a neutral language will silent the African cultural diversities because of its neutrality and potentiality as a global language of the world. Danladi (2013) agrees that English language is useful for integrating cultural diversities in the multilingual society. A meaningful development cannot achieve without dialoguing together. The dialogue forum provides opportunity for people to share useful ideas that will actualise development. English language therefore, serves as a common medium of communication for sharing ideas to advance African developments in the midst of cultural diversities. The African Union has recognised the importance of English as a global language and adopted it for deliberation during its plenary session. Nwanyanwu (2017) argues that allowing English to have dominance in the African states it will elude the native languages that promote African cultural heritage. It is true that promoting African native language in the 21st century will yield little or no result for Africans to achieve holistic development. Therefore, English language should be prioritised because of its importance in the 21st century.

English language is being considered as a medium for accessing information, and means of international communication between researchers. For Africans to achieve tangible development, they need to access information on different platforms such media, politics, governance and law from other parts of the world. English language helps in achieving this goal. This is because English serves as official language in most international political gatherings throughout the world (Crystal, 2003). The Triumph of English (2011) also affirms that about 85% of international organizations use English in carrying out official communication. This underscores the relevance of integrating English as a tool for global refocusing on African developments in the contemporary times as it has impact on educational institutions.

Acquiring competence skills in speaking and writing of English by Africans will serve as indispensable tool for reviving social, economic, agriculture, and health sector in the African continent. For instance, English language will serve as economic drivers for African states which in turn boast the African economy to be reckoned with others continents. The following has been identified as number of economic drivers employ by English language: inward investment, export activity with English speaking nations, internationalisation of small to medium-size enterprises (SMEs), increasing entrepreneurialism, and scientific and technological advancement (Brooker, 2018). English language as advocate here has potentials for achieving faster economic drivers than indigenous language. There are considerable evidences that English language plays a role of



achieving development and poverty alleviation as a medium of instruction. These evidences have been examined on the relationships between nations' economic policies and their language education policies compared in Singapore, Ireland and Puerto Rico. The study concluded that Singapore had achieved a high level of congruence between its economic policy and its policy on language education (according to which all subjects are taught through English, although one of three other languages - Mandarin, Tamil or Malay - must also be studied) (Roggeveen, Bharadwaj & Hoyer, 2007). The result will be overwhelming if Africans have taken this step to boost the continent's economy.

Africa as a continent is endowed with natural resources that serve as raw materials for industrialisation. English language therefore, will facilitate as language of trade at international level where these raw materials would be sold to other countries of the world. Ku and Zussman (2010) argue that English proficiency has a strong and statistically significant effect on bilateral trade at the international scene. Besides, the presence of English language at the continent will motivate other English speaking countries to situate industries across the African states because of the availability of raw materials that the continent has. This indeed will promote technological and industrialisation development in Africa.

A holistic development has to do with socio-cultural life of the people. For Africans to attain meaningful development, acquisition of knowledge skill of English Language is quite of great importance as a tool for socio-cultural drivers. Negash (2011) notes the importance of acquiring English skills for Africans as he writes, "English is going to be even more important as Africa, its member states and its citizens engage with the rest of the world more meaningfully. As Governments and people become more confident to have their say in global economic, social and political matters, the demand for English will increase." English language in this understanding plays a role for bring social status and opportunities for social mobility to paved a way for development in African region. It has been argued that English skills help in accessing the middle classes, and to achieve geographical mobility from less developed to more affluent localities (Graddol, 2010).

The African continent has a rich cultural heritage that if given attention to will project the African identity in a unique way. English Language will serve as tool of communicating and expressing this cultural heritage to foreigners so that they will consume it. To be precise, the use of English Language in African film, music and television industries is of paramount relevance as it helps foreigners to consume the African cultural products on these industries. Also, English Language plays fundamental role in the aspects of international mobility: international tourism, international student mobility, and international migrant working. Having noting these specific areas of international mobility which English Language serves a tool for fostering development, it is obvious that these areas of international mobility have not been fully explored to foster development in African states, especially engaging the use of English language. The African tourism centers should given priority and English language experts to be given opportunity to serve in the tourism centers. It will help the foreigners to interact with the Africans who are serving in these tourist centers as English language is a considered as a global language. Similarly, the sound command of use of English language in educational and industrial sectors in African will attract the attention of international students and international migrants to patronise the sectors.

### **Conclusion**

The study unveils ways in which English Language serves to foster African developments in 21st century. The study focuses on role English language serves as an indispensable tool on global refocusing of African developments in the 21st century. The study identified corruption, poor governance, and poor leadership as the major challenges confronting development pursuit in African states. These key problems paved way for poverty, lack of economic growth, natural environmental hazard, insecurity, youth employment, to mention



but a few. The study critically examines some of the challenges of teaching and learning of English language in African region.

The study establishes English language as a tool for global refocusing of African developments which serves as a common medium of communication for sharing ideas to advance African developments, access information, means of international communication between researchers, language of bilateral trade, reviving social, economic, agriculture, and health sectors. The study revealed that English language for economic drivers explores inward investment, export activity with English speaking nations, internationalisation of small to medium-size enterprises, increase entrepreneurialism, and scientific and technological advancement to reposition African development in contemporary times. English Language plays a role for socio-cultural drivers as to project the rich African cultural heritages in film, music and television industries as well as serves in facilitating and promoting international tourism, international student mobility, and international migrant working in African states.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the findings of this study the role English language plays on global refocusing on African development in the 21st century, the following recommendations were made:

1. English Language should be considered and adopted in African as official language.
2. English language should be adopted as language of education at all levels in educational institutions.
3. The African government should give scholarship to students of English at the tertiary institution this will promote effective teaching and learning of the language by the Africans.

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