

INDISPENSABLE GLOBAL ROLE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE FOR SUSTENANCE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: NIGERIA IN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Throughout human history, the primacy of language has never been in doubt. A language achieves genuine global status when its use for communication has special effects recognized universally. Today, it is almost impossible to escape the global influence of the English language. Its importance as a means of communication is incalculable and indispensable. By the 21st century, English has been widely accepted and is used as a common language for communication, making the world more interconnected and accessible. This paper explores the reasons why learning English is essential, its role in global sustainable development goals, and how it sustains these goals, using Nigeria as a case study. Key terminologies framing the research are discussed in relation to the topic. The paper links the essential reasons for learning English to its role in achieving development goals, establishing the language's prime influence worldwide through common global communication. Recommendations are provided on how to sustain English communication to ensure its role in supporting sustainable development goals, particularly in Nigeria and globally.

Keywords: Language, English language, Communication, Global Role, Indispensable, Sustainable Development Goals, Sustenance.

Introduction

English language has an unquestionable supremacy around the world. As David Crystal put it “the power of English language is closely related to the history and development of the British empire. Due to colonization, the British empire took over other countries and introduced English as the new official language. To avoid negative effect, the native people adopted the new language. According to Viereck et al, (2002: 151), “Before the colonial period,... The supremacy that English has around the world today was not foreseeable”. Though it took some centuries, but English language replaced Latin and French as the language of the court proceedings, official correspondence, educational and scientific treaties. In some countries, it serves as the official language along with other languages; for instance, Tanzania, Singapore and Pakistan. Even where English is not officially established, it is used and taken for granted. Finegan, (1989). In effect, English language has a “three-pronged development of –first-language, official language and foreign language”; Crystal (1994:4). This gives English language the status of a global language.

English language is the third largest in the world after Chinese and Spanish; but the most widely spoken in the world. It is spoken in 112 countries by 328 million speakers. The interesting phenomenon is that unlike Chinese which is also widely spoken but restricted to one area, English language is spoken all over the world. From the United Kingdom, it has spread to other countries and continents like America, Australia, New Zealand and Africa. It is the lingua franca in many countries. According to David Crystal, there has never been a language so widely spread or spoken by so many people as English. English is everywhere, even in an official monolingual country like Germany.

From the foregoing, English language is very influential. This gives it a super imposing global role over all other languages of the world, and therefore the enablement to sustain global development goals. The question therefore is, of all the many languages in the world, why is English language so influential? As if in answer to this question, David Crystal even sees English as the most influential language ever when it comes to international relations. Crystal (2000:70). “The majority of the world’s population areexposed to English every day-via America brand names, advertisements and commercials, through subtitled Anglophone TV, Film and DVD Productions...lyrics and titles of all kinds”. Gottlieb (2005:162).

People do not use English the same way in every country. Some countries use it because they were raised with it as their mother tongue in places like Canada, USA, Britain etc. The second group use it as an addition to their mother tongue because English helps important domains such as government, laws, the media and educational system in their countries. Such countries include Singapore, Ghana, India etc. The third group learns English at school as the major foreign language in countries like Nigeria, China, Russia, Spain, Germany, etc. To give them a structure, the linguist, Braj. Kachru (1983), united them in his three circle model as inner, outer, or extended and the expanding circle. It is called lingua franca in places like Nigeria where it serves as their official language.

English language got its way of being influential because many speakers adopted it through assimilation, Crystal (1997). This assimilation process was possibly because most of the colonialists were English speaking and they made other groups adopt the language so as to be able to communicate with them. These English-speaking colonists made their language official. Slaves imported from Africa learned English but due to their separation from the common society, they could not learn the language properly; and consequently the so called “Black English” developed. It exists till today because it is communicable and serves the purpose of the language.

As a multilingual multicultural nation, with diverse ethnic groups and cultures, Nigeria uses English language as a unifying factor in almost all her correspondences. English language came into Nigeria at the time the country was colonized by Great Britain. Since then, English remains a great asset to Nigerians. Today in Nigeria, English language has taken a reputable position when compared to other languages that are of native origin. The ethnologue records the existence of more than four hundred languages in Nigeria, yet English language remains the official language for the country. As a multilingual nation, English language has acquired the position of a second language. It plays a significant role in education, politics, the legislation, judiciary and economy. 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 Graddol(2007), put it, English language has a spread around the whole world, and very extensively developed as an international language for economic, social, and technological purposes, and predominantly spoken as an international language. The dominance of English over other languages empowered it to serve the global role of common language for the whole world at large and Nigeria in particular; in all transactions of life including sustainable development goals. It is for all these reasons that this paper delved into an examination of English language and its indispensable role for sustenance of sustainable development goals for the globe at large and Nigeria in particular.

Concepts Explication

Language/English language/Communication

Language is a vital aspect of human connection for meaningful co-existence. The Holy bible even proclaims in 1 Corinthians (14:10) that “ There are many different languages in the world and every language has meaning”. The meaning of any language is discovered in the expression of the language. Though all species have their manners of communication, human beings are the only ones that have mastered cognitive language communication which is very important for sharing of ideas , thoughts and feelings with others. The import is that language is what makes us human. All languages are different from one another with respect to their popularity, cultures, dictions, influence, scope, aspects, accents, extra-linguistic features, standardization, status etc. When one learns a language, it means that the person has mastered a complex system of words, structure and grammar to effectively communicate with others. To most people, learning a language comes naturally especially in the first language, but takes more time to be learnt in the second language. Whichever way a language is learnt, the importance of language for effective human existence is unmatched. This may be reason why much attention is given today to the learning of English language.

English language is the native language of the inhabitants of England. Among all the languages in the world, English language is the most widely dispersed. It is a language without competitor as it appears to be increasing across the globe. Grucza et al, (2016). Given the historical imposition of English through colonization in conjunction with its growing global status, it is not a surprise that English is statutorily elevated, Crystal (2012). However, Crystal(1997) argues that English is the language of global communication, scientific resources and publications. Troudi (2009) on his part, is of the view that English language is a necessity for students because most of their resources including the electronic version in the internet are in English. Access to this global language which is widely perceived as a language of opportunities needs to be guaranteed. Crystal(1997). It is little wonder therefore that the interest of the researcher here determines the indispensable role of English language that enables sustenance of sustainable development goals.

The existence of every language is known only through communication. With language, people are able to communicate with one another. Therefore, communication plays an important role in the progress of creating a sustainable pattern of life around the globe. Countries like Nigeria which is multilingual appreciate the interconnectedness of modern language through a common communication strategy. Each of all the worthwhile functions of English language through the globe that put several nations under one umbrella of relationship is gathered through communication. It is defined as the sending and receiving of information which can be one-on –one or between groups of people. It can be face to face or through communication devices The communication process involves understanding, sharing and meaning. It requires a sender, the person who initiates communication, to transfer their thoughts or encode a message. The message is sent to the receiver, one who receives the message , and finally the receiver must decode, or interpret the message for meaning to be possible (Evans,. 2021).

In effect, the importance of communication cannot be overstated. After all, there cannot be a society, culture, or civilization without the ability to communicate with one another. Good communication creates understanding and prevents wars; provides information and guide, leading people to development as they transact within and outside their locality. Any language that can't be communicated invariably does not exist; and English language presents itself as the most widely used all over the world. It is for this reason

that the importance of English language which is available as a world means of communication will always be a focus in spite of any other language.

Global

Simply put, global means relating to the whole world. The whole world is synonymous with worldwide, international, or universe. Due to the wide dispersion of spoken English, it is said to be global. As earlier stated in the introduction, English is spoken in 112 countries by 328 million speakers. Hence David Crystal (1997), declares that there has never been a language so widely spread or spoken by so many people as English language; and he called it the language of global communication. Crystal (2003), further explains that a language can be considered global when it is spread in every country. As if in support, Beacco & Byram(2003:52) state that English language prevails in the worldwide academia since it is acknowledged as “the first foreign language in almost all education system.” “By now the expansive spread of English language is undeniable and unstoppable” (Fishman 2000:1).

Role

The word role comes from German and Old French as Rolle; and from Latin as Rotula or Rotulus. Role theory has its origin in the work of American sociologist, Robert Merton (1957). Role is synonymous with function and associated with leadership and decision making. A role is a comprehensive pattern of behavior that is socially recognized, providing a means of identifying and placing an individual in society. It also serves as a strategy for coping with recurrent situations and dealing with the role of others. On its part, the Oxford Language dictionary defines role as a function assumed by a person or thing in a particular situation. The particular situation in this context is the sustainable development goals where English language has assumed a function of common communication platform, to sustain these goals throughout the globe. In effect, there is the need to sustain the indispensable global role of English language for Nigeria in particular and the world at large.

Indispensable

Indispensable is something or someone so good or important that one could not manage without it. By implication, anything indispensable is absolutely necessary. Such is the global position of English language in sustenance of development goals. The globe or world - over is incapable of disregarding English language for the success and sustenance of sustainable development goals because, it has proved itself indispensable as the common communication channel. In other words, English language is most essential and extremely important. The high level of effect of English language production is therefore indispensable for global economic security. Therefore, the indispensable role of English language for sustenance of development goals in the world at large and Nigeria in particular cannot be over-emphasised.. This all important acknowledged global role has made English language supreme over other languages and therefore indispensable.

Sustenance

The Oxford dictionary says that sustenance is the maintenance of someone or something in life or existence. Sustenance is synonymous with support. Globally and in Nigeria to be specific, such is the work of English language to sustainable development goals; a source of strength and nourishment. It is one thing to treasure a thing, and basically another thing to keep what is treasured alive for posterity. Sustenance implies the fulfillment of several conditions such as 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. The sustainable development goals are so much treasured that the role of English language to ensure that development goals are sustained cannot be taken for granted.

English language makes it possible for all nations to be in contact with one another if so desired, to transact development issues they have in common. For instance, Nigeria transacts most with the following countries; Spain, India, France, United States of America, and Netherlands; which in turn transact with one another in their development issues. Hence, nothing works in life without effective communication. Thus, English language has proved itself the global channel of common communication among nations of the world. In effect English language is highly valued for transactions in Nigeria and beyond. As English language sustains global communication for effective co-existence, it is trite that English as a language be sustained too, to enhance its sustainability power on sustainable development goals.

Sustainable Development Goals

Sustainable development goals also referred to as global goals provide an approach for making better decisions on the issues that affect all our lives. They are those objectives aimed at transforming our world by developing resources in a way that allows them to renew or continue to exist for others and for posterity. It defines viable schemes combining the economic, social, and environmental aspects of human existence. It requires the implementation of reduced production of waste, and the rationalization of production and energy consumption. It must address very serious issues within economic and political contexts that are marked by strong inertia.

The concept of sustainable development emerged in the 1980s in response to a growing realisation of the need to balance economic and social progress, with a concern for the environment and stewardship of the earth's natural resources. According to the 1987 United Nations World Commission definition on Environment and Development; development is sustainable if it "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs". The SDGs were born at the United Conference on sustainable developments in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. The purpose was to come up with a set of universal goals that would help the urgent environmental, political and economic challenges of our world. The famous Rio Declaration (also called the Earth Summit) 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". The following three advantages are identified:

1. To help ensure a better life for present and future generations.
2. Lower environmental impact of air, water and soil pollution.
3. Help to achieve long-term economic growth.

In 2015, 17 interlinked global goals designed to be a "shared blueprint for peace and prosperity, for people and the planet, now and into the future" (Mission Statement); were set up by the United Nations General Assembly, intended to be achieved by 2030; with the principle of "leaving no one behind", The new Agenda emphasizes a wholistic approach to achieving sustainable development for all. The year 2016 marks the first implementation of the SDGs. (Wikipedia.) Sustainable development is an amazing way to conserve the resources provided by nature. The United Nations earmarked 19 targets and 25 indicators for 17 SDGs. Targets specify the goals and indicators represent the metrics by which the world aims to track whether these targets are achieved. Even in the light of these, some countries are disproportionately affected by

shocks and stressors such as: climate change, disaster, violent extremism, conflict, economic and financial volatility, epidemics, food insecurity and environmental degradation.

Nigeria adopted sustainable development goals in September 2015. Since then, Nigeria has continued to demonstrate its commitment to achieving the global goals through its commitment to leadership and ownership of the implementation process; yet report by 'The Nation' ranked Nigeria 146, out of 166 countries globally, with a score of 54.3 percent in 2023 index. In that index, Finland tops with a score of 86.6 percent making Nigeria among the 20 least countries to achieve sustainable development goals by 2030. Nigeria's challenge over achieving sustainable development goals is that, despite its rich endowment of resources including oil and mineral, Nigeria struggles with staggering levels of poverty. February 2024 World Bank reference, points out a sobering picture of Nigeria. Out of over 200 million, over 140 million Nigerians live below poverty line. In another recent index research by UNDP reference, Nigeria ranks 161 out of 189 countries, placing Nigeria on the category of low human development. Nigeria experiences some national development issues which include: urban population, rural stagnation, unemployment, and growing inequalities.

Sustainable development goals is a call to action by nations, for people worldwide, to address the five critical areas of importance among the seventeen sustainable development goals by the year 2030. The five critical areas are: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership which are mnemonically referred to as the 5Ps. Globally, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) call for action by all countries whether developed or developing. These 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) marked to transform our world are:

- Goal 1. No Poverty
- Goal 2. Zero Hunger
- Goal 3. Good Health and Well-Being
- Goal 4. Quality Education
- Goal 5. Gender Equality
- Goal 6. Clean Water and Sanitation
- Goal 7. Affordable and Clean Energy
- Goal 8. Decent Work and Economic Growth
- Goal 9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- Goal 10. Reduced Inequality
- Goal 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities
- Goal 12. Responsible Consumption and Production
- Goal 13. Climate Action
- Goal 14. Life Below Water
- Goal 15. Life on Land
- Goal 16. Peace and Justice Strong Institutions
- Goal 17. Partnerships to achieve the Goal

As a part of the globe, and member nation of the United Nations, Nigeria partners in the 17 sustainable development goals. As already pointed out above, the sustainable development goals are thriving in some countries but are failing in others. The ranking measures the total progress towards achieving all 17 goals. A score of 100 percent indicates that all Sustainable Development Goals have been achieved. In the 193 member states, Finland ranks first with 86.51percent and Nigeria ranks 139 with 54.23percent. In spite of the indispensable role of English language, Nigeria, a nation with multilingual and multicultural numerous

ethnic groups but English as its second language with 139 position and 54.23 percent as score, is ranked low in sustainable development goals. The low rank is as a result of corruption in Nigeria. According to Anyanwu (2017), as quoted from NEEDS draft document (2004), and Obayelu (2007); that corruption manifests in Nigeria in the form of abuse of positions and privileges. The prevalent cases of corruption which pollute Nigeria contribute to poor economic growth and other attending factors which impedes the successful attainment of sustainable development goals. The first of the sustainable development goal is to end poverty in all its forms; yet presently, Nigeria records a very high rate of poverty of about 93%. That is to say, sustainable development goal which aims at ending poverty in all its forms everywhere in the world is far from being attained in Nigeria especially by the year 2030 as targeted by the United Nations. The masses are living in severe hardship in the area of food supply, healthy living, equitable quality education and many cannot cater for their children or wards' education.

Essentials of Learning English Language

Why is it important to learn English as a second or foreign language? English is the language of international communication. English must have had a complicated past but it has a bright future. Though it is not the most spoken language, it is the most common second language in the world. That is why it is the most widespread and most influential. According to the British council, by 2020, about two million people in the world will be studying English because of the following reasons:

1. It gives an open door to the world and makes global communication possible.
2. It can also help in personal and professional life as it connects to a global world.
3. English makes tourism easier and interesting. Since English is spoken in 53 countries, and a second language in over 118 countries, learning the language makes it easier to travel anywhere. Hence airport announcements, train time tables, emergency information and street signs are often available in English. Even when you travel to a country that doesn't speak English, you are sure to find someone who understands at least some English expressions to assist you.
4. English helps to create more entertainment and easy access to the internet. TV shows, music and books are published in English. A person who understands English would not bother with translations. Through these media, one can continuously improve on English listening and reading skills.
5. English opens more career opportunities. In recent times, the job market is global and many companies need employees who can communicate with partners and clients all over the world. That means, employment requires people who speak English. The global market has even created employment opportunities for bilingualists. So by learning English, one can be a translator, teacher or marketing professional for a global market.
6. A success in English tests like TOEFL (Test of English as a foreign language) show colleges in English speaking countries that are ready to study in English language universities across the globe. Apart from TOEFL, other English language proficiency tests are IELTS- International English language Testing System and the Cambridge exams.
7. Finally, learning English language makes one smarter and helps in personal and professional life. This means that English is crucial for success as it is the most populous means of communication world-wide. The import of all these points raised is that English language must be learnt for communication to be globally feasible and lively for ease of interaction among

nations to enhance ease of sustainability of sustainable development goals in Nigeria and the world at large.

Functions of English Language

Essentials of learning English metamorphosed from the following functions of English which are anchored on communication.

1. Globally English language performs the function of the first global lingua franca and the most widely used in the world, in international trade, diplomacy, mass entertainment, international telecommunications and scientific publications as well as publishing newspaper and other books. Most native and non-native speakers of English use English as their mode of communication in business matters.
2. English occupies the status of a commercial language by connecting all nations with a common interest in business. English is spread all over the world into almost all fields such as science, engineering and technology, medicine, trade and commerce, scientific research, education, tourism, internet, banking, advertising, film industry, transportation, pharmacy, and to name a few.
3. English is like a snowball that is too big to prevent. Many researchers have tried to coin a term by considering the various aspects of the use of English in diverse domains. For instance Ahulu (1997) calls it “General English”, McArthur (1987) calls it “World Standard (spoken) English”; David Crystal (1997) invents a phrase for it thus, “English as a global language.” House (1999), Gnutzmann (2000), Seidlhofer (2001) and Jenkins (2007) say it is “English as a lingua franca.” Furthermore, Widdowson (1997), Modiano (1999) and Jenkins (2000) expressed it in another phrase as: “English as an International language.” Brutt-Griffler (2002) invents a new word, “World English.” Of all these, the one that most synchronises with the topic under discussion here is David Crystal phrase, “English as a global language.” Even if there is a variation in vocabulary as these terms are used, they still give almost the same meaning signifying that English is the most widely spoken and the most widely used in almost all the major fields round the world.

The Indispensable Role of English Language

Every language is expressed only through communication; and communication is the life wire of every human existence. When a language is not expressed, invariably it does not exist. At the same time, when a language is global, it is synonymous with internationalization and refers to the interconnectedness and interdependence of people and institutions throughout the world. (Omachonu, Abu & Alhassan, 2017).

English language is global, and Nigeria being part of the global community, has benefited from the global spread of English language. English serves as a tool for sustainable development of national unity in Nigeria. In the midst of compounding complexities of numerous indigenous languages in Nigeria, English language is the only language that emits the spirit of oneness in the whole country. Collective identity of Nigeria is hinged on national institutions through the medium of English language. For instance the Army, the NAVY, THE Air force, and the police that safeguard the territorial integrity of Nigeria and its peaceful coexistence; the National Youth Service Corp(NYSC) which aimed at bringing young Nigerian graduates together is held with English language. Obiegbu(2015), states that, if the idea of sustainable development is to create a system that is sustainable, English language becomes a key factor to unending development

in Nigeria, in the areas of education, economic empowerment and national unity. Beyond Nigeria, English language functions globally too to sustain sustainable development for the world at large. In effect, the indispensable role of English particularly in Nigeria and the world at large is anchored on its communication spread and acceptance. With this English language as a channel of communication is the umpire for sustainability of sustainable development goals in Nigeria and beyond.

Recommendations On How To Sustain English In Sustenance Of Sustainable Development Goals

For the achievement of SDGs, three core elements of economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection must be harmonized with the use of English language as the lamp holder. These elements are interconnected and are all crucial for the wellbeing of individuals and societies. In effect, English language in its prominent communication role need be sustained for its possibility in sustenance of sustainable development goals. This is achievable through the spread of use of English, especially in non-English speaking countries, and users of English as a second language: by:

1. Teaching /use of English language in and out of school.
2. Early introduction of use of English language in homes, churches, market places and among peers.
3. Award of prizes and incentives in competitions for effective use of English from early school days.
4. Continual awareness for effective use of English language especially through the media.
5. Government and non – governmental institution's conduct and encouragement of workshops and conferences, to practice the use of English language.
6. Providing and encouraging teachers and learners of English language with teaching aids and practice materials and equipment.
7. Inter visits and discussions among first English language users and second English language users to encourage fluency and confidence.
8. Promotion of standard Western form of English language against other Englishes.

With a strong hold of a continual use and spread of English, sustenance of sustainable development goals can be enhanced through communicable English among and within nations by:

1. Embrace renewable energy.
2. Promote sustainable transport.
3. Practice waste reduction and recycling.
4. Support sustainable agriculture.
5. Advocate for conservation.
6. Educate and raise awareness.
7. Promote ethical consumerism.
8. Empower women and girls.

Summary and Conclusion

Sustainable development as an approach, in alignment with English language, aims to meet the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It is important because it integrates economic progress, social equity and environmental stewardship. Global communication through the use of English language has proved most effective for this purpose. With the

use of English language, the globe can ensure a balanced and prosperous future by all embracing practices. Nigeria can follow suit by debunking selfish and corrupt leadership.

The term “international language” has been widely used only after English became both the mother tongue as well as the second language spoken by non-native speakers of various regions in the world. Globally, sustainable development goals are synonymous with proper and effective human existence. It thrives in symbiotic relationship harnessed under a common language that links one group to the other. It is appropriate to reiterate at this juncture that English deserves the position of an international language or global status in order to fulfill the needs of the people who live in various regions of the world and speak different languages.

One thing certain to all linguists and researchers of English language is the role English language plays now-a-days. As Anderma & Rogers (2015) put it, English language due to its expanse and dispersion has made communication easy and common. In agreement to that, Fishman (2000) said that the expansive reach of English is undeniable and.... unstoppable. Sair (2006: 187) concludes by saying that English is “the most important language in the world.” Another linguist, Robert Phillipson, tagged the expansion of English language a “linguistic imperialism”. According to Phillipson (1992), “Linguistic imperialism is the dominance asserted and retained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages.” Kachru (1983) further states “As a result, English became the most dominating and most powerful language in the world that motivated many linguists and language researchers to call it *an international language*.”

In effect every sustainable developmental goal is attainable and transactable because a common communication link exists in English language for all member states of United Nations. With the English language, a symbiotic relationship of all member states is possible for sustenance of sustainable development goals. The implication is that, globally, English language remains the super language. Hence the sustenance of English language all over the world (which includes Nigeria) is unavoidable to ensure its sustenance of sustainable development goals. Since the aim of sustainable development goals is to transform the world, the continual spread of the use of English language must not be overlooked. In effect, SDG’s clarion call to action for end to poverty and inequality; to protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy health, justice and prosperity without mishap to the future generation must be answered.

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