

Language, Communication and Education for Africa's Transformation

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Abstract

For over five century, Africa has been a continent of horror. Intra tribal wars were followed by the nasty colonial exploitation. The advent of Independence which ought to be a prelude to better transformation ushered in despotic military and civilian leaders who have no love for their countries. A chaotic society cannot thrive economically and politically. A war turn zone cannot experience development. Undoubtedly, no society is totally free of crises. From the naïve hamlets to the most complex city of Africa, there have always been records of incessant conflict needing urgent intervention. The memories of Ebola virus are still causing nightmare in many West African countries. The massacre perpetrated by terrorist organizations like Maitacine, Boko Haram and Al Shabab have become source trauma to many powerful Nations of our the black continent. The terrorist attack of 14 November 2015 in Abuja that claimed over hundred lives is fresh in our memory. The most heartless are moved with pity when they watch the horrifying experience of Migrants. This paper therefore sees language use, communication and education as powerful weapons in conflict resolution and transformation. While the communication received can guide or mislead an individual, proper education can perpetually lead him out of poverty. In other words, this paper looks at the manner communication and education can be used as a mean of fostering peace at all levels of human engagements, with special reference to the mass media.

Keywords: Language Communication Education Transformation Africa.

Introduction

The world is today filled with incessant pandemonium, fear, anxiety, famine and wars. Every day, new heart throbbing tumults occur in every continent which needs man's urgent intervention in order to make the globe a conducive place to live in. One can easily think of the horror of the terrorist attack against Washington D.C. and New York. The Israel-Palestine conflict is escalating day by day. According to Jonathan (2012), for thousands of years, military engagements between opposing nations and societies have had important effects on all aspects of human civilization. While the most direct and recognizable impacts of war are the victories and defeats that shape the course of history, warfare also affects human culture in ways that are not always appreciated or understood.

Today, man is so treacherous and mischievous that through technological advancement, he has produced weapons capable of totally destroying the globe. Political and religious crises have rendered many nations a wasteland. Moreover, international contests have continually threatened the world peace and consequently making man to live in constant fear. War, no doubt, begets misery and ruin. All these nasty occurrences have devastating effects of the third world, especially Africa whose standard of living is dwindling at an alarming rate.

Adesola and Adediran (2015) describe the early man of Africa as pathfinder for he embarked on the organization of social life through which communities came into existence. His discovery, invention, mastery and use of iron technology transformed not only the man himself but also his environment. Africa no doubt, grew as a continent where ancestral relationships are anchored on traditional values of family solidarity. African culture can be traced to their language, festivals, ideology, belief and occupation. Integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief and behaviour that is, both as a result of integral to the human capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generation is being referred to as culture (Adolf 2009).

Africa's contact with the western world caused a lot of setback in the continent. Slave trade that took away hundreds of millions blacks to the western world, colonization with its total domination and intensive exploitation of the land, as well as the independence which brought to power, despotic African leaders to direct the affairs of African nations, came one after the other. Consequently, the traditional African values are today bastardized and eroded by a number of factors which include poverty and corruption at all levels of the society. Nigeria for example, has been declared as the most corrupt country Africa because the leaders both present and past have looting the treasury of the nation.

Moreover, diseases like HIV/AIDS and Ebola claimed numerous lives. According UNAIDS (2015), an estimated 25.5 million people living with HIV live in sub-Saharan Africa. From 1976 (when Ebola was first identified) through 2013, the World Health Organization reported a total of 1,716 cases. The largest horror of Ebola is the 2014 West Africa outbreak, which affected Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Nigeria. As of 26 August 2014, 3,069 suspected cases resulting in the deaths of 1,552 have been reported. A great deal of negative impact this has had on education. Children are forced to abandon schools because sick parents can no

longer afford the fees. Qualified teachers are reducing by the day leading to a gloomy school environment. Many who should be in schools have ended in refugee camps.

Worse still, terrorism has incessantly rendered many Africans homeless. The Chibock girls' trauma is still fresh in our memories. According to eastwest.eu/en/opinion/.../terrorism- since 2006 attacks in Africa increased by 1,000% "Over the last decade, terrorist activities in Africa grew by 1.000%, it was due to youth employment. No, wonder many young Africans travelled to Malasia and other Asian countries to sell one of their kidneys after which they return to the country to ride in very expensive cars. In this wise, arms cannot be folded and there is need for transformation at all levels in the society. The researcher therefore sees language use and education as having a great role to play in checking these anomalies and bringing a long lasting peace, thereby enhancing the economic power of the society. In addition, communication can also serve as a means of transformation defined by businessdictionary.com as a basic character and little or no resemblance with the past configuration or structure.

The Role of Language in Fostering Societal Peace

Language is a system of communication in speech and writing that is used by people of a particular country or area. It is a means of conveying ideas to others. This can also to a certain extent be done by the use of gestures and signs. Language is a natural phenomenon and it is as old as the existence of man on the earth. According to Owolabi (2007), language is a system of communication consisting of a set of small parts and a set of rules which decide the ways in which these parts can be combined to produce messages that have meaning.

Language is different from signs and gestures because it employs sounds which have meaning for the users as well as the hearers. It is not therefore surprising that some people are so moved by what they hear to the extent of engaging themselves in suicide missions. While examining the importance of language, Olaoye (2015) asserts that language is an index of identity which serves as a repository of a people's culture, industry and exploits. Fabarebo (1999) sees the power of language through insult among the Yorubas as a weapon of socio-cultural orientation. No doubt language is an indispensable element of our society without which we cannot live together in an organized way. Considering the importance of language, Breckenridge and Vincent (1965) define it as: *a primary means of social intercourse, being used not only to relieve people's own views, but also to awaken a response in other people and to influence their attitudes and behaviour.*

Language as a tool has frequently been considered as an integral part of nation building. Since July 31, 2007 the United Nations has four purposes:

1. To keep peace throughout the world
2. To develop friendly relations among nations
3. To help nations work together to improve the lives of poor people, to conquer hunger, disease and illiteracy and to encourage respect for each other's rights and freedom.

4. To be a Centre for harmonizing these goals.
5. These purposes to maintain peace in the world.

Language is one of the defining features of our species; yet when it comes to international and local development discourse, language is often left on the periphery. We know, however, that language as a cross-cutting issue is inextricably tied to all aspects of human development. Development is all about sharing experiences and ideas to find better ways of working together as humans, and thus the languages of initiative, of education, of trade, of creative expression, of justice and of peace building, are so crucial to sustainable development. (www.britishcouncil.com/sn/en/programmes/language-development-conference-2017).

The role played by language and communication in peace settlement all over the world cannot be overemphasized. The way people react depends on how they perceive communication because language influences the behaviour and attitudes of the individual. Language has the power to transform the most gentle of persons into a wild being. It is also able to make an angel out of a devil. That is why one can conclude considering the assertion of Fadokun and Adewuyi (2012), that

Language is a means of communication used to express one's mind, thoughts, ideas, feelings, emotions, beliefs, opinions and attitudes. Language is the main tool used for interaction in every society. Without it, the whole process of human development and emergence of better and progressive citizens would have been difficult.

It cannot be disputed that language plays a vital role in the co-operation existing between nations of the world. In the case of Africa, a multilingual continent with over 10000 indigenous languages, each country has to solve the national language so that the minority group will have easy access to language of education and promote peace. Promoting the language of the colonial masters in Africa would mean slowing down the pace of progress of Africa in solving the needs of our society through science and technology. In addition, Africa where there are a number of official languages of the colonial masters, there should be continuous interchange of French, Portuguese and German Students in Nigerian Universities and countries' learning English for the language immersion programme. By so doing, there will be stronger ties between the nations involved. This of course, will lead to transformation of rural societies in Nigeria. Another obvious fact observed is that Hausa-man has the tendency to be friendlier with a Yoruba man that speaks his language. That is why the Hausa trader will sell his commodities cheaper to the Yoruba woman who understands his language. Every child should be encouraged to learn at least one other indigenous language other than his.

According to Edema (2004), effort should be geared towards translation of local terms into European languages from concepts that are peculiar to Africa languages and vice-versa. This has to do with cultural terminology created in the sector of modern techniques such as

radio, television, medicine, mechanics or electricity. Ogunsiji (2007) defines language as the cement of the society which enhances our living together. The mother tongue of Africans should play a major role in changing their behaviors, attitudes and practices in relation to evil practice. Right from the early stage of life the child will be taught to have a transformed life so as to shun the vice such as cyber-crime, drug trafficking, cultism, robbery and terrorism associated with the youth.

The Role of Communication in Fostering Societal Peace

Just like language, communication can be a means of unifying the community. Communication can be defined as a medium of transferring a message or information from one person to another. According to Akinseye (2009), communication is a means of using language as a tool to persuade to appeal to an individual and consequently modify the behaviour of the reader or the listener. When language is properly exploited, communication is enhanced to play a key role in nation building. On the other hand if it is not properly used, it leads to break down of law and order. The Yoruba people say “*pẹlẹ’ní akọ ó sì ní’abo*”. (soft spoken words pave the way for hospitality whilst abusive words stir emotions).

This brings us to the role of the media in relation to the way they read out to the public in order to keep peace. This channel of communication is a basic necessity to human existence. Adeniran (1980) and Folarin (1993) in their researches have presented the mass media as having a great role to play in the socio-economic and political life of the society. Out of several functions of the mass media we can highlight these:

1. To enlighten and educate the public about events happening far and near.
2. To give proper orientation to the public and objectively mobilize them to achieve a peaceful society.

The question that comes to the mind of many right thinking persons is how well and how effectively do the mass media play this role? As noted by Kimble (1962), of all the weapons in the educator’s armory, none has a wider appeal than the mass communications media. Since most of these media houses are owned by private individuals or political groups, they have to satisfy the interest of the owners. He who plays the piper dictates the tune. Consequently, they chant the praises of the politicians and arouse the tension of the masses in times of crisis. The press has been guilty of excesses. At the moment, most state radio stations spend a lot of time relating the exaggerative achievements of the governors of the winning party.

If the mass media is to work objectively for societal peace, the announcers, the producers and the editor must note that:

1. They should stop being the mouthpiece of politicians
2. They should see themselves as agents to objectively influence and mould public opinion.
3. The press should not be spectators of political evolution; rather, they should take an active part in it.
4. Readers and viewers should exhibit a reasonably balanced opinion on affairs.

5. The press should not be found to be supportive of a religious group.
6. Provocative journalism should be highly discouraged.
7. The press should be more to quicken the pace of nationalism

Education: An Agent of Transformation, A Weapon Against Poverty, A means of Promoting Peace

. Many great educators of the past have expressed their views on education. Plato stated in unequivocal terms that education is supposed to be a powerful instrument for the reconstruction of the state and for social, political and economic development. Aristotle advocated that all children should be educated by the State so as to develop their potentials to the fullest capacities and make them become good citizens. Dewey felt that education should be used as an instrument to solve the problem of life.

Building on the experience of the old, educators of our days also see education as a process of perfecting the human self through enlightened living; the application of skill and knowledge in such a way to find solution to whatever problems confronting man. Education is geared towards helping an individual to develop his whole being, physically, mentally, morally and to enable him function in the society. Adele (2001) stated that education provides the manpower needed for the development of various sectors of the economy. Education is so indispensable to economic and social development that various governments fashion their philosophy to suit this purpose. For example, the philosophy of Nigerian education aims at a just egalitarian society and a great and dynamic economy.

Education allows every human being to acquire the values, attitudes, knowledge, skills and behaviors necessary to shape a sustainable future and positive societal transformation. It also helps to promote key issues into teaching and learning (e.g. Climate change, disaster risk reduction, poverty reduction, biodiversity, sustainable consumption, gender equality etc.). (UN Document on Education for Sustainable Development, 2004-2014). Schultz (1973) quoted by Mimiko says:

The prosperity of the U.S. cannot be explained merely by its Natural resources and its physical plants. The money and effort that had been put into education over a long a time must explain a large part of the otherwise inexplicable gap between the U.S and other countries”.

The role played by international bodies in bringing long lasting peace to the world cannot be overemphasized. The United Nations was formed after the Second World War to give renewed hope to the world communities. Its major purpose was to keep peace and promote human welfare. It has kept several peace treaties since its formation and has continuously campaigned that everyone has the right to education.

It is obvious that, education, apart from being a tool of nation building, also enhances upward social mobility. However little it may be, any additional educational achievement of any individual will help improve his standard of living. It will help reshape some negative values that oppose progress. Some societies need to revisit their cultures and belief. By so doing they can alleviate the misery of their people. Education should teach us to tolerate one another when it comes to issues on which we have diverse opinions. Conflicts are resolved when group interests supersede those of the individual. According Ondimba (2016),

L'éducation, ce n'est pas seulement lire, écrire et compter. C'est aussi l'apprentissage du vivre ensemble dans un monde de plus en plus interconnecté et une planète fragilisée dont les ressources se raréfient. Pour créer les citoyens de demain, c'est donc la philosophie même de nos systèmes éducatifs qui devra s'adapter aux besoins les plus pressants de nos sociétés futures.

Education is not only being able to read, write and count, it also learning how to live together in a world more or less interconnected and a fragile planet which resources are becoming rare. To create the citizens of tomorrow, it is therefore even the philosophy of our educative systems that will be able to adapt themselves to the most pressing needs of our future societies.

Today many activist groups have utterly condemned the fact that women are relegated. Many societies and religion do not encourage the education of women. This should be discouraged as some chaotic situations arising as result of poor finance will be avoided. Such women also refuse to be seen as objects of reproduction. They kick against having a large family, which they will not be able to cater for. Koppell (2016) of the United States Agency for International Development, better known as USAID, even called female education a “silver bullet” for empowerment and progress. There are lessons to be learnt from Rwanda where most men were killed during the homicide. The country which had always relegated women has to be controlled by a few women who have the opportunity to be educated. Many are the advantages of offering quality and universal education to young girls; these include increased literacy, Human Trafficking, Political Representation, Thriving Babies, poverty reduction among others. According to Obama (2012), the sustainability and progress of all regions depend on the success of women across the globe. “The future must not belong to those who bully women. It must be shaped by girls who go to school and those who stand for a world where our daughters can live their dreams just like our sons.”

So far we can affirm that education plays diverse different roles in the tackling the maladies that impeded positive transformation in the continent. Apart from literacy campaigns, which aim at rendering people literate in foreign and indigenous languages, more topic having to do with positive societal transformation has to be integrated into the curriculum programmes at all levels of educational systems: the Primary School, Secondary Schools and Tertiary Institutions. Formal and non – formal education should be of top priority especially for the age group of greatest risk of becoming infected with HIV/AIDS. There is the need to create through it awareness for the general public on how to avoid contract Ebola. The youth should be taught to value life and refuse to join terrorist groups.

The adult who are the leaders and politicians should imbibe the spirit of patriotism and stop embezzling public fund. When there national budget give priority to education, more citizens will become literate which will make easy to reach a larger public. In addition, apart from the role effective role of the media, churches and mosques can serve as sources of sensitization; health talks, symposium could easily capture the mind of people in a worship environment.

When knowledge points the citizens to the creator, several problems are solved. We therefore have to turn to God for solution to man's problems. No wonder a communist nation like Russia ended up breaking up because it did not give a room to God. Leaders in the third world have allowed themselves to be led by devilish advisers thereby creating untold hardship to the citizens. The Bible says righteousness exalts a nation while sin is a reproach to God. We can then commend the United States of America who says in God we trust. They have grown prosperous and even use their wealth to aid other people and settle conflict all over the world.

Conclusion

Education has been said to be the panacea to most human problems. It has helped many individuals for effective citizenship. It also helps to restructure our society to make it different from that of animals. Similarly, communication when properly channeled can calm tension. Personal interest will be put aside if members of our society are given the proper awareness. Consequently, the society will be rid of internal conflicts, diseases, illiteracy and malnutrition. If peace is to reign all over the world especially in Africa, communication and education must be geared towards achieving national development.

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