

Language and Communication as Veritable Tools for Youth Employment and Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

All human beings need the ability to communicate. This is beyond the speaking ability, since it dovetails into writing and other communication skills as well. Thus, when one is writing, for instance, one is reaching out to others in a specific way that shows both capacity and prowess. For instance, the writer has a subject of personal interest, an audience of choice needed to achieve his goal. But this need cannot be actualised without the basic tools of interaction, properly acquired. Herein lays the importance of language and communication competence as basic tools for youth employment and empowerment. This paper will seek to apply the theory of postmodernism as the basis for this discourse, x-raying in the process, how language and communication can be appropriated by youths in the realisation of their dreams of gainful employment.

INTRODUCTION

Nothing can be as frightening as the notion that “over (two hundred) 200 million people across the globe are unemployed today” (Prakash Loungani, 2015, p.6). More frightening, if one understands the social implication is the demographic fact that this figure is predominated by youths. This is not only worrisome; it is a pressing challenge, an obstacle that demands the efforts of all and sundry to surmount. It is crucial that this task be achieved, because, according to Roosevelt (1934, p.14) “No country, however rich can afford the waste of its human resources.” The corollary is clear for those who ventured into this misadventure, as the spate of social upheavals bedeviling such nations, Nigeria inclusive, can only be better imagined that experienced. The reason is clear. “Demoralization caused by vast unemployment is our greatest extravagance. Morally, it is the greatest menace to our social order.” (Roosevelt, 1934, p.14).

To say that our society today is in a state of socio-political, cum economic quagmire is to state the obvious. Youths are not only demoralized, majority of them are frustrated and traumatized as a result of large scale unemployment that is prevalent in the society. Neglect of the past is presently bearing bountiful fruit in our nation today. This is epitomized by the various militant groups in the country, each wreaking havoc, and wrecking the very fabric of our collective existence. This bleak scenario makes empowerment and employment for our teeming youths, a desideratum for an orderly and peaceful society. The amnesty, reintegration and retraining given to the Niger Delta militants during the President Umaru Yar’adua’s administration is an eloquent testimony to this.

EMPLOYABILITY OF THE NIGERIAN YOUTH: A DIALOGICAL APPROACH

The noun employability is derived from the adjective, employable. Both words have two basic constituent parts. They are employ + ability or employ + able. When examined independently, the words will yield a better understanding of the above construct. The word ‘employ’ is a verb and a noun. It means to use the services of (a person) in return for payment, keep (a person) in one’s service. The state of being employed, especially for wages. Ability on the other hand, means capacity or power, cleverness; talent. The word ‘ability’ has the following synonyms: knack, proficiency, strength, competence etc. this presupposes that for one to be employed, one has to exhibit certain competences, proficiency, etc. The question one may ask is, why is the employability of the Nigerian youth such a difficult task?

A survey of the labour employment and unemployment figures in Nigeria between the year 2000 and 2005 is enough to make us act as if our hairs are on fire.

Table 1:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Labour force (million)</i>	<i>Employment (million)</i>	<i>Unemployment rate (%)</i>
2000	49.7	41.1	18.01
2001	50.45	43.6	13.60
2002	51.23	44.8	12.60
2003	52.68	46.8	11.20
2004	53.7	47.81	22.00
2005	54.25	48.39	10.80

Source: Adapted from Sani, D. (2007). Strategic employment generation. *Management in Nigeria*, 43(1) 36-39

Though there is a noticeable reduction in the rate of unemployment as the years progress, still the rate of 10.80 is still on the high side. Bringing the scenario further down to the South East geo-political zone in Nigeria, a national Bureau of Statistics document shows the rate of unemployment in the region within the six year period, examined above.

Table 2: National Average Unemployment Rate in the South-East Zone of Nigeria: 200-2005

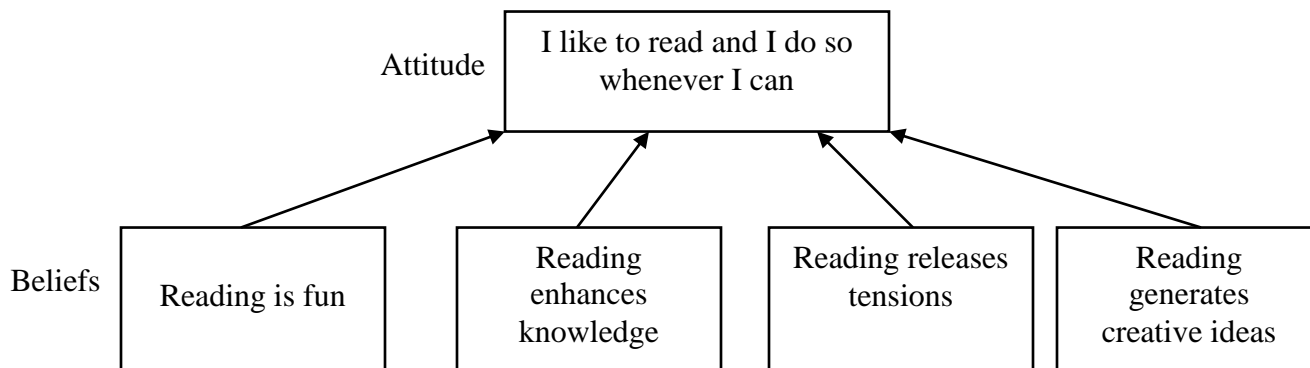
<i>States</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>Average %</i>
Abia	4.20	16.00	14.80	11.40	9.65	7.90	10.65
Anambra	21.20	5.00	6.60	9.10	9.45	9.80	10.19
Ebonyi	3.90	13.10	2.80	16.70	11.85	7.00	9.22
Enugu	21.20	16.00	15.20	16.50	21.95	27.40	19.70
Imo	27.20	32.50	19.90	22.10	19.30	16.50	22.92

Though the statistics vary from State to State, it is still worrisome, that the rate of unemployment could reach such alarming rate of 22.92 as recorded in Imo State. It is because of such data as this that scholars, opinion leaders and experts have in different fora made issues about youth and employability topical issues over time, knowing the consequences of such a monumental neglect. The problem indeed is pandemic as such it requires every concerted effort at nipping it in the bud. Among other things,

unemployment leads to destitution. It can dehumanize a person, blur the vision and focus of such a one, and begin to manipulate their psyche. Unemployment is evil. It leads to human degeneracy.

FACTORS AND FORCES OF UNEMPLOYMENT

Many are of the opinion that attitude is a major factor of unemployment all over the world. An anonymous saying has it that attitude is like a price tag, it tells everything about your value and worth. Little wonder, Milton Rokeach, a Cognitive and Behavioural theorist, came up with a model of human behaviour based on beliefs, attitudes and values. In his work, Rokeach (1969) conceives of a highly organized belief-attitude-value system that guides the individual's behaviour and supports the person's self-regard. He is of the opinion that beliefs are our conception of the self and the world around us arranged according to their centrality or importance to the ego. The crux of his message is that behaviour is a complex function of sets of attitudes. Rokeach came up with a simple illustration of the belief structure of an attitude that is similar to the one below



The overriding motive of this principle is the notion of “self concept”. This is seen as the individual's answer to the innumerable questions around them. Rokeach (1969, p.216) state that “the ultimate purpose of one's total belief system, which includes one's values, is to maintain and enhance...the sentiment of self regard. The question one may ask is, what attitude does the young job seeker bring to the employer, right from the initial process of hiring? Going by our notion of employability as discussed above, it becomes axiomatic that the employer is looking for some salient traits in the person they are going to hire. Does the person have the right attitude that will contribute to the uplift of the corporate goal of the organization? Or is the candidate a post-modernist, with an attitude of complete denigration and apathy towards established norms and tradition. Attitude is key, apart from skills needed in a work place. Attitude is a way of thinking that affects a person's behaviour. One can speak, write or behave affectedly. That is attitude. As the saying goes, attitude can affect one's altitude in life. So the youth must develop positive attitude that can make them fit into organized labour.

Even in the areas of entrepreneurship, which is foisted on some by chance and circumstance, a positive attitude, aside other attributes is needed for the enterprise to thrive. Unfriendliness, rudeness, lack of zeal for work/laziness and consistent murmuring and nagging would ipso facto, impact negatively on any establishment. Workers who engage in the ‘blame game’ will never move any organisation forward whenever things

go awry. Workers who are not ready to engage in new tasks or are unexcited about new projects may be seen as square pegs in a round hole. They may soon find themselves in the job market. In essence, attitude is vital in the quest for employability within the youths.

The thrust of this paper is language and communication as veritable tools for youth employment and empowerment. It, therefore, becomes imperative that the two terms 'Language' and 'Communication' be examined at this standpoint to find their relevance in the employability of Nigerian youth in the global economy.

Language

From the perspective of Samovar and Porter, the authors of *Intellectual Communication*, Language is an organized, generally agreed upon, learned symbol system used to represent human experience within a geographic or cultural community.

Inferences from the above definition

- Each culture has specific imprint on word symbols.
- Labels are arbitrarily given by a community of people.
- The meanings for words are subject to a wide variety of interpretations.
- Because, language is an inexact system of symbolically representing reality.
- It is the primary vehicle by which a culture transmits its beliefs, values, norms and world view.
- It is the means of connecting and interacting with other members of the culture.
- It serves as a mechanism for communication and
- As a guide to social reality.
- Language influences perceptions, transmits meaning, and helps mould patterns of thought.

Communication

As a complex, multi-disciplinary field, communication does not easily yield to an all encompassing monolithic definition. Dance's (1970) Conceptual components will suffice.

Conceptual Components in Communication

1.	<i>Symbols/Verbal/Speech</i>	“Communication is the verbal interchange of thought or idea.”
2	Understanding	“Communication is the process by which we understand others and in turn endeavour to be understood by them. It is dynamic, constantly changing and shifting in response to the total situation.”
3	Interaction/Relationship/Social Process	“Interaction, even on the biological level, is a kind of communication; otherwise common acts could not occur.”
4	Reduction of Uncertainty	“Communication arises out of the need to reduce uncertainty, to act effectively, to defend or strengthen the ego.”

5	Process		“Communication: the transmission of information, idea, emotion, skills, etc., by the use of symbols – words, pictures, figures, graphs, etc. It is the act or process of transmission that is usually called communication.”
6	Transfer/Transmission/Interchange		“The connecting thread appears to be the idea of something’s being transferred from one thing, or person, to another. We use the word ‘communication’ sometimes to refer to what is so transferred, sometimes to the means, by which it is transferred, sometimes to the whole process. In many cases, what is transferred in this way continues to be shared; if I convey information to another person, it does not leave my own possession through coming into his. Accordingly, the word ‘communication’ acquires also the sense of participation. It is in this sense, for example, that religious worshippers are said to communicate.”
7	Linking/Binding		“Communication is the process that links discontinuous parts of living world to one another.”
8	Commonality		“It (communication) is a process that makes common to two or several what was the monopoly of one or some.”
9	Channel/Carrier/Means/Route		“The means of sending military messages, orders, etc, as by telephone, telegraph, radio, couriers.”
10	Replicating Memories		“Communication is the process of conducting the attention of another person for the purpose of replicating memories.”
11	Discriminative Response/Behaviour Response	Modifying	“Communication is the discriminatory response of an organism to a stimulus.”
12	Stimuli		“Every communication art is viewed as a transmission of information consisting of discriminative stimuli, from a source to a recipient.”
13	Intentional		“In the main, communication has as its central interest those behavioural situations in which a source transmits a message to a reviewer(s) <i>with conscious intent to affect the latter’s behaviours.</i> ”
14	Time/Situation		“The communication process is one of

15	Power	transition from one structured situation-as-a-whole to another, in preferred design.” “Communication is the mechanism by which power is exerted.”
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Source: Dance (1970). ‘The concept of communication. In Littlejohn S. W. (1989). *Theories of human communication. Journal of Communication*, 20:204-208.

The Purpose of Communication

It is generally accepted in the various fields of communication that the purpose is usually:

- To inform or persuade
- To obtain a decision or request action.
- To get something done.
- To maintain relationships or respond to previous communication, among other reasons.

According to Wood (2001, p.15) “The pressures of modern-day living mean that when you communicate in business it must be clear, accurate and efficient so that time, effort and money are not wasted.”

From the foregoing, it is now axiomatic that successful communication which is an integral part of language use must have a clear purpose and intention to achieve its objective. We should note that:

- The need to communicate is intrinsic in us, but the perception of a message is not. Hence, communication and language use require painstaking efforts to acquire. This is one basic tenet that is lacking in the lives of our present day youths.
- The decoding of messages cannot be effective if the recipient of the message lacks the ability to absorb and assign intended meaning to it. Hence, the acquisition of both formal and non-formal education to enhance our communication ability is a sine qua non. Formal education is education acquired within the established formal system, and non-formal education is any organized educational activity outside the established formal system... that is intended to serve identifiable learning clienteles and learning objectives (Coombs, 1973, p.11).

Overtime, human capital theory has dominated discussions of education for the global economy. Under human capital theory, education is a social investment that, in the most efficient manner, prepares human resources (students) to contribute to economic growth. Herein lays, the importance of youth education, using the tools of language and communication in enhancing employability in a global economy. For youths to be employable, they must master the rudiments of language use and know the nuances and cadence of communication. This underscores the notion that language is power, and power properly utilised can influence and manipulate things to our advantage.

Postmodernism, the Death Knell of Youth Education.

Owelle Rochas Okorochoa, the Governor of Imo State in a programme aired on NTA network services on Tuesday, 2nd August, 2016, said that the era of using canes to flog students in order to bring them into conformity, has gone. He urged teachers to be more

creative, by adopting and integrating entertainment into their teaching methods, in order to carry students along. This is the spirit of the modern age. The spirit that equates vigour with rigour in order to escape training. Postmodernism has a high level of skepticism towards models of truth, value and history. They see laws that guide human thought as naïve. They do not believe in organisations of science and education, etc. This accounts for the fall in the standard of education that has become worrisome to experts in the field. Professions or trades that appropriate mass culture is now the norm among youths. That is why hip hop has gained ascendancy in our modern period. Cheap virtue has become the rule rather than the exception. This is the bane of the modern youth.

Conclusion

Learning is an age old method of acquiring knowledge. The youth should go back to the basics and condition themselves to the rudiments of education and learning. Though this may not be achieved at the rate of knots, but the pros and cons of learning are enormous. The pros will always outweigh the cons, and the society will be the better for it, as it will boast of high level of employable youths, who can hold their heads high in entrepreneurial skills and other rewarding ventures.

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