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## **Appraising the Nexus between Education and National Development: The Human Capital and Modernization Theory Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

Interdisciplinary researches are becoming domesticated in the world of academics today. This is as a result of the interconnectivity between concepts and issues from diverse disciplines which are found to be relevant to the advancement of a society. To this end, this paper researched on the nexus between education and national development bringing to fore the contributions of education through language to the development of a nation. It advanced its discussion from the theoretical preoccupations of the two theories of national development which are the Human Capital Development and Modernization. The paper did a comparative and descriptive study of these theories as they relate to language, education, language policies on education and language functions in Nigerian education system. It revealed that these theories advocate the importance of education to the development of a nation. Such being the case, this paper posits that language plays a role in national development since the English language is amongst the languages used in the propagation of education. Therefore, in the appraisal of this nexus, these facts are premised. National development is achieved through education. The process of education as well as literacy acquisition is achieved using language. Therefore, language plays a crucial role to the development of a country, Nigeria to be precise.

**Keywords:** Education, Language, Development, Theory and Modernization.

### **1. Introduction:**

The concept of development is a term used to describe the state of affairs of a society or a nation. It is a phenomenon that is synonymous with growth, advancement, modernity, progress, achievement, etc. A nation is adjudged developed when it has attained a considerable advancement in its socio-economic and political aspects of life. More so, a society is considered developed when it has achieved education and technological growth. Whether in the areas of education and technology or social and economy, the underlying fact remains that for a nation to be termed developed, it must have achieved a great standard and modernity in these areas. To illumine this fact, this definition of development is brought to fore. He defines development as *"the socio-cultural, political, economic and the spiritual wellbeing of a society"* (Adekoya, 2012, P.64). Furthermore, the concept of *"development means change"* (Thirlwall, 1983, P.8), this change could be visible in the social and economic transformation within countries. Lorenzo (2011, P.5) also sees development as *"the process of change per se"*. A cursory look at these three definitions of development

reveals the fact that development has an associative meaning with change. However, this paper wishes to state here that the change being advocated here must have positive indices of improvement. To corroborate this, using Goulet's concept of development, to answer the question-development for what?, Thirwall (1983), explains that development is said to have taken place when *"there has been an improvement in the basic needs, when economic progress has contributed to a greater sense of self-esteem for the country and individuals within it, and when material advancement has expanded the range of choice for individuals"*

All these indices must be positively reflective in the quality of life of the citizenry, if a nation must be rated developed. This is suggestive of the fact that there abounds inequality in the pace and stages of the socio-economic level of modernity of the people of various nations of the world. These different stages of inequality gave rise to the different criteria adopted by social scientists to classify them. Such terminologies include 'developed', 'developing' and 'under developed' nations or 'less developed' nations. These criteria constitute topics of research interest to social scientist as well as other scholars of diverse disciplines as they search the nexus between the issue of development, national development to be precise and their various disciplines. The humanities are not left out. For language scholars; there must be interconnectivity between language and national development. Language is the opium of human existence; they say, therefore, there must be contributions of language to national development, a thought process which this paper wishes to explore. Indeed, the issue of national development has received very exciting debates by scholars especially in Africa, where we have most of the countries that have been adjudged 'developing' or 'less developed'. It is good to note at this juncture that, the conceptual reading for this paper should understand that the term 'socio-economic development' encapsulates these developmental indices – technological, political and educational.

Most African nations, Nigeria inclusive were under colonial administration, but by the 60's, most of them got their independence and began to channel their own course towards development. Nigeria became independent of the British Colonial rule in 1960 and since then her process of national development began. At the moment, she is still undergoing this process and therefore she is adjudged a developing nation and classified under the third world colony. Thirwall (1983) illumines these criteria which serve as indicators of the state of affairs in a developing nation. They include major exports of primary commodities, corruption, unstable political and economic policies, unemployment, rapid population growth, lack of basic needs or amenities, etc. Nigeria met most of these criteria thus, is a developing nation. In consonance with this, Howard (2004) asserts that development exists when the central problems of poverty, unemployment and inequality have been addressed adequately.

Nigeria has begun her process of nation building or national development with the objective to ensure quality living of her citizenry. To premise the process rightly, this article will bring to fore two theories of national development which are the Modernization and Human Capital theories. In these theories, reveals the fact that Nigeria has keyed into the right path to nation building. The keywords of these theories elucidate their concepts and semantic preoccupation. Modernization theory draws its linguistic strength from the term modernity. It states that for a nation to be developed, it has to transcend from a traditional society to a modern one; that is to say it must adopt modern values. To elucidate this, Emeh, (2012, P.54) opines that, *"modernization theory understands development and under development as a result from internal conditions that differ between economies"*. This means that the developing countries' hindrances to development are found within them. They are as a result

of their own making. The problem is internal. There is therefore the need to be re-oriented, to think out of the box and also to embrace modernity in its entirety so as to propel development. The Modernization theory further postulates that to achieve this transition to modernity, education is indispensable to the process. As Agbo (2015) puts it *“among other things, modernization theorists believe that education is the most powerful factor in bringing about modernity because it develops the individual”*. Education as a matter of fact develops the individual; so to say it is the bedrock of human capital development.

The Human Capital Theory (HCT) on the other hand believes in the development of human resources to achieve growth. The human resources development refers to human capital development. The HCT also states that the development of human resources is made possible through education as it is said that an educated population is a productive population, thus contributes greatly to the growth of the nation. Worthy of research interest is the fact that these two theories premise their vehicle of national development on education. The process of education as well as academic learning is carried out through language which means that language is very vital in national development process. In view of this, this paper seeks the interconnectedness between language, education and national development through the appraisal of these two theories. For this research, Education remains one of the key factors in propelling the wheels of national development which the proponents of Modernization and Human Capital theories assert. Language is a veritable tool of academic teaching and learning. Therefore, it is vital to the process of education acquisition. Language aids this process. In other words, if these two theories posit that national development is achieved through education, therefore, language has a bearing on national development because the propagation of education is done using language. Indeed, education through language plays a crucial role in propelling the wheel of development in Nigeria as a nation.

## **2. Review of Relevant Literature: A Brief Readings on National Development**

National development refers to the right choice made by individuals in a society which have yielded sustainable growth in that society. It indicates a positive departure from an undesirable condition to an enhanced quality of living. The index for national development cuts across positive orientation of man, success and quality living, etc. In the works of Elugbe & Omammor (1994), national development relates to the growth of a nation in terms of unity, economic well-being, education and the participation of people in government. What it entails is that a nation is developed when she has attained the zenith of her growth in its economic, political, educational sectors, etc. This paper deems it necessary to proffer one or two definitions of national development to elucidate its' conceptual framings. National development for this paper is defined as that state in which a nation is adjudged to have made positive and sustainable growth in various spheres of human endeavour which ensures the general wellbeing of her citizens. It is also seen as that change that brings about qualitative living of her citizenry. For most developing nations, Nigeria inclusive, the notion of national development refers mostly to growth in the economy of the nation. How economically liberated a nation is, becomes a major factor in the classification of such country as a developed, under developed or developing nation. Going by this, Nigeria's economy is still on the part to total emancipation, thus can be classified as a developing action.

Nevertheless, development is multi-dimensional in its concept, all depending on its contextual usage. Development according to Oni & Agbade (2015, P.164) is a “*multi-dimensional process involving changes in structures, attitudes and institutions*”. It is described in terms of the socio-economic power of a nation. However, in the actual sense of it, it covers the other spheres of life viz a viz political, technological, health, etc. opines that *More so, “development is identified with social structures found in the countries that are highly industrialized and advanced in education, science and technology”* ( Rowstows, as cited in Agbo, 2015, P.2). As earlier noted, the economy of a nation appears to be a major index of classifying a nation as being developed or under-developed. However, in its multi-dimensional context, it supersedes this; instead one can say that it is one index for measuring this growth. To keep attuned to this diversification, Nigeria, as a developing nation is not only working on her economy but on other aspects viz-a-viz education, health, politics as well as social and infrastructure. Education serves as a springboard on which every aspects of development is propelled, and language to a great extent makes the goals of education realistic.

### **2.1. The Significance of Language to Education in the Attainment of Development in Nigeria**

Here, this research will provide an overview of the theories of national development juxtaposing them with the role of education using language in the attainment of the ultimate goal of nation building. To advance this argument, it is very crucial to deduce the meaning and function of a theory in the realization of a set goal. Theories are guiding principles, built upon existing knowledge that is derivable from the past out of which we can make forecast of statements about the future. According to the Cambridge Academic Content dictionary, a theory is also a formal statement of ideas that are suggested to explain a fact or event, or how something works. The theories of national development therefore reveal indices with which the development of a nation can be explained or measured and the forecast about the future made. Through their lens, it is ascertained whether a nation is getting it right or wrong and their future predicted. They are formal statement used to explain the developmental processes and dictates of a nation.

Amongst the several theoretical perspectives on development, the theories of Human capital and Modernization will be the focus of this research. Their criticisms will be applied to the Nigerian situation while throwing light on the role of language to the process.

Language is an integral component of human’s existence. It is a true mirror of the way a human being thinks, perceives or conceives things. “*Language is so built into the way people live that it has become an axiom of human being. It is the attribute that most clearly distinguishes our species from all others; it is what makes what we think. Without language we could not specify our wishes, our needs, practical instructions that make possible co-operative endeavour*” ( Botton, as cited in Okoh, 2006, P.4). This quotation sheds light on the relationship between language and by extension education; human being and his existence. The above author further reveals that with language, much of what we do and perhaps what we think is made realistic. Therefore a person’s ability to think rightly, communicate his thoughts and achieve goals simultaneously promotes his essence of existence and develops his society. This essence of existence will be defeated if there are no measures put in place to ensure comfort and progress in life. In other words, language plays vital role in man’s quest to develop himself or his environments so as to ensure quality of life and existence.

Okoh, (2006, P.5) still has it that, *“people may consider their very humanity threatened if something goes disastrously wrong with or happens to their language”*. Language without doubt cannot be separated from man and his existence. This quest for a defining existence has come to be in Nigeria, a nation undergoing its process of development. In addition, language performs various functions. It is used in the transmission and preservation of values, culture and belief system of a people. It is used to maintain friendly relationship and peaceful coexistence as it is seen in its phatic function. Language also is a veritable tool of information dissemination. It is a tool for the transfer of learning. In this case, education also comes to mind. The medium of instruction in a classroom learning space is language. Nigerian government supported this with the provision of National Policy on Education (NPE)2004,section 4, paragraph 19(e) and (f) which talked about the use of English language as a medium of instruction in schools.(Olagbaju, 2014). In essence, education through language is an integral part of national development and Nigeria has keyed in to this process as will be exemplified.

## 2.2. Human Capital and Modernization Theories

The theories of Human Capital and Modernization centre on education as the bedrock for nurturing potentials to promote the nation’s economy. Education acquisition through language enables people to make right choices for themselves. Hence, the application of these theories to Nigerian situation critically reveals the indispensability of language to this process.

The Human Capital Theory (HCT) evolved in the 1960’s as a result of the social scientists interest in studies related to economic value of investing in education. (Agbo, 2015).The theory advocates that the most productive course to national development of a nation lies in the advancement of its population which is its human resources. This advancement of human resources is made possible through education. The theory posits that education contributes to the growth of national income by improving the skills and productive ability of people. Nigeria since her independence has viable policies on education. According to Osokoya (2008,P.96) *“Nigerian’s National Policy on Education (NPE) which evolved in 1997 and revised in 1981 and 1991 stipulate the need to institute appropriate educational system to herald the much needed development in the country”*. The NPE advances the course of every child’s attainment of education from primary through vocational, secondary and tertiary levels. Suffice it to say that this educational process in Nigeria is not without its teething problems as expected of for a developing nation; however, there is improvement in mass roll call in literacy acquisition. For this theory therefore, there is an increased reawakening of the indispensable role of education in the development of a nation, and its process is propagated through language.

Although, Walter in Osukoya (2008) argues that education does not necessarily enrich a country and improve its gross domestic product, however, this can be understood when the attitude to education goal in Nigeria is brought to fore. Most graduates clutch to the belief in ‘white collar’ jobs as the only means empowerment and development instead of the use of their potentials to create jobs for themselves and others. Be that as it may, acquiring education is still to a great extent pivotal to the process of development and labour creation. In this, we discover that the real process of being educated is that which inculcates the ability to make critical decisions so as to ensure the development of the individual and that of the nation. It is also good to reiterate that recently education is synonymous with literacy.

The evolution of literacy in Nigeria is slowly replacing the nomenclature education. UNESCO (2015) is of the view that education is the acquisition of literacy and literacy enables an individual to achieve goals, develop potentials as well as participate fully in community and wider society.

Literacy is evolving, thus a moving target and Nigeria needs to embrace it in its entirety so as to achieve growth, just like this theory encapsulates. Perhaps a critical mind might still wonder the actual relationship language, education and literacy has on national development. We should understand here that education entails the acquisition of knowledge with which to improve the existence of man and the environment. To acquire this education requires going through a formal process, a stipulated procedure which goal is to rightly re-position and equip man with the wherewithal to achieve a desired success. The formal process stipulates that the medium through which such knowledge will be transmitted is language, especially the English language as contained in NPE section 4, paragraph 19, e and f. More so, due to the diversity and change in knowledge acquisition, there is the notion of literacy which is an umbrella that encompasses the gain of formal and informal education. The notion of literacy here does not mean that account which is from the *“functionalist theoretical concept in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that perceives it to mean the ability to read, write, count and use numbers for problem solution”* (Otagburuagu, 2007, P.1).

The meaning of Literacy according to the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language is the condition or quality of being knowledgeable in a particular subject or field (cultural literacy and biblical literacy). This notion is what this article portrays. Once a person is knowledgeable in a particular thing and is able to put such to positive use to ensure modernity, development is said to have been achieved. Language as a matter of necessity has a bearing on this because the transmission of such language seldom goes without the use of language. Literacy cuts across diverse fields which includes the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills that will ensure job creation and hence move the nation forward. The acquisitions of these skills are communicated or transmitted using language which makes language indispensable in the quest for national development. There is indeed no reiterating the fact that the trio-language, education and literacy all work hand in glove to develop human capital and in turn ensure development of a nation. This ideology the Human Capital theory portends.

The modernization theory (MT) shares a close relationship with HC theory. They are of the same view that education contributes to the growth, development and modernity of a nation. The modernization theory is born out of the need for nation building after the Second World War. Judging from its keyword, it is related with the acquisition of modern values. According to McClelland (1961), the theory originated in the early 60's and it explained the difference between social and technological advancement. Of vital to this work is his assertion that some societies are more advanced than others due to differences in cultural and personality styles/traits. Nigeria belongs to the societies that are less advanced socially and technologically, and therefore is part of the traditional society. This assertion stems from Rowstow's (1990), description of a traditional society as an agrarian dependent society with limited access to science and technology. *“Members of the third world were seen to be traditional and are characterised by their emotional, superstitious and fatalistic approach to the world”* (Brobbe, 2010, P, 10). Modernization theory advocates that for a developing nation to attain optimal growth and sustain it, she has to embrace western strategies; i.e. be

modern. More so, Inkeles and Smith (1974), state that to modernize is to develop; and a society cannot develop until the bulk of its population absorbs modern values. Furthermore, they reveal that schooling (education) is a vital agent in the transformation of a society into a modern one. In other words, the Modernization Theory portrays that education plays a crucial role in the modernity and growth of a nation and by implication language is an integral part of this process of growth.

Although Modernization theory was believed to be a way of making the newly independent countries know that they need to adopt western ways of doing things for them to grow and sustain their growth. It means that there would still be dependency on the west, in other words – post-colonialism continuum. However, when applied to Nigeria as a developing nation, there are prospects to be harnessed from it in the sense that functional educational process would be entrenched in the system of education. Furthermore, in relating language to the theory of modernism, Sapir-whorf's hypothesis referred to as linguistic determinism is brought to fore. This concept believes that people from different cultures think differently because of differences in their language. It further states that a native speaker of Hopi will have a different perception of reality than a native speaker of English because of their different languages. This means that as modernization theory postulates, for development to occur, the society need to replace some of their traditional ways of thinking.

Modernism theory also advocates a change in attitude and old ways of doing things. Holmes (2013) perceives language to be a determinant factor of the choices people believe are available to them, as well as their perception and behaviour in life. This entails that the ability to maintain a positive behaviour and make viable choices in life are indicators of development for a nation. Unfortunately Nigeria has the problem of not being able to make correct choices by both leaders and those being led, and right choices breed democratic peace and eliminate corruptions which are known indices of development. Adekoya & Ajilore,( 2012,P.65) also have it that *“for there to be any laudable sustainable development within a nation, there must be communication targeted at giving the masses necessary information which will enable them participate fully in the development process”*. For these authors, probably scholars of mass communication, communication is an integral index in the process of development. Indeed, information is the key to unlock potentials. Information dissemination during literacy acquisition and education is very vital to development and the medium of this information dissemination is language. The mass communicators are right, however, for a language scholar, language is also a defining pre-requisite for development because communication is made possible through language. Information is disseminated using language and there exist language policies by the government which specify its role in the nation and by extension to national development.

### 3. Conclusion

The issue of development, developing and underdevelopment has an underlying dimension to what it is presented in relation to African countries and Nigeria to be precise. There has been a rise in tide of disillusionment towards the state of affairs in the nation. Nigeria after five decades of existence and still counting is still struggling with underdevelopment. So many factors are responsible for this. They have been explored through the lens of national development theories in other to find a solution to them. It is discovered that for Nigeria to progress in its quest for development it has to embrace the teachings of Human Capital and Modernization theories. Their application to Nigeria will greatly help to achieve sustainable

development, for instance, education as a means to an end is the central theme of these theories. Therefore, education for all which also includes the gains of literacy should be honestly pursued. It is also important at this point to state that the process of education and literacy acquisition is achieved using language. And going by this, one can situate the nexus between language, education and national development. With these foregoing, this paper states that education through language and national development are intertwined. Since education is the bedrock of national development just as the Human Capital and Modernization theories encapsulates, language, which is a means to the attainment of education, is indeed very vital in the achievement of modernity, growth and advancement in the nation Nigeria.

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