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## FROM THE DESK OF LEAD EDITOR

The Centre for General Nigerian Studies had the second summit held from 4th – 7th December, 2024. The theme of the summit was aptly coined, Fostering Integrity and Peace: Tackling Corruption and Promoting Ethical Leadership in African Education. The summit attracted participants drawn from universities within and outside Nigeria. The summit was declared open by the management team of Lagos State University, ably led by the Vice Chancellor, Prof Ibiyemi Ibilola Olatunji Bello mni NPOM GCGNS inside the main bowl of the Makanjuola Lecture Theatre, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos State, Nigeria. It was a 4 day of academic and cutting-edge activities. Scholarly papers were presented, and thereafter, the papers were subjected to peer review. In all, more than 52 presentations were made, but only 20 articles scaled through the hurdles. Ladies and gentlemen, the volume 4 of the journal of Contemporary Issues in Nigerian Economy (JCINE) is highly recommended to scholars, researchers, policy makers, and other stakeholders in the field of education.

**Prof. M.O.B Mohammed FNAEAP**  
*Lead Editor*

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## LANGUAGE AS A STRATEGIC TOOL FOR CURBING CORRUPTION AND ENCOURAGING ETHICAL LEADERSHIP IN THE NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SECTOR

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### ABSTRACT

*Corruption remains a significant challenge in Nigeria's educational system, lowering educational standards and fostering unethical practices. This paper explores the strategic use of language as a tool to combat corruption, and foster moral leadership within the education sector. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from linguistics, ethics, and leadership studies, it examines how language, through policy documents, official discourse, public speeches and social media can influence behaviour, encourage accountability and shape public perception. This paper also examines how well ethical language works to encourage transparency, honesty, and responsibility among stakeholders and educational leaders. The paper highlights ways language is utilized as a tool for social change in addition to being a communication medium by looking at case studies of language-driven projects in Nigeria and other similar contexts. The findings reveal that effective governance, combined with a proactive language strategy, can significantly contribute to reducing corruption and fostering moral leadership, in educational institutions. This paper provides insights for policymakers, educators, and activists striving to address corruption through strategic communication in Nigeria's education sector.*

**Keywords:** Language, Corruption, Ethical Leadership, Accountability, Governance

### Introduction

Every element of human existence in society is impacted by language, which can only be comprehended when viewed in the context of society. Any explanation of language must take into consideration both the fact that each language is a functioning system of communication in the time and community in which it is employed, as well as the result of its history and the source of its future development. Without language, human life as we know it now would be unthinkable and impossible. People have long understood the power and importance of language. Naming is just one aspect of language use, but it is a vital one. Naming is the application of a word to identify and refer to a fellow person, an animal, an item, or a class of such beings or objects. Beginning with infancy and continuing all through life, language acquisition is an active process. Students learn the language as they express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, form relationships

with peers and family, and attempt to make sense of and arrange their surroundings (Frey, Fisher, & Smith, 2019). When kids get to school, they may speak more than one language or pick up a second language. It is essential to honour and improve each student's original tongue. You can learn other languages more easily if you become proficient in one. In their early years, children pick up language informally. Even before infants understand formal language rules and conventions, they reproduce and use language to generate and convey new meanings in novel ways Douglas, (2013).

Later, language acquisition takes place in certain settings for particular objectives, like learning about a certain subject, engaging with the community, and pursuing Moeller (2015). One of the many distinctive characteristics of the national language is that it plays two roles in the most well-known official educational system. As a result, it is included in the school curriculum as a subject, allowing students to study language instruction like that of physics, science, economics, and other subjects. However, it also serves as the global medium of instruction for all topics, including itself, and is entirely different from any of the courses on the curriculum. The term "language in education" perfectly captures this latter function. Therefore, the two different functions that natural language serves in education are referred to as language education and language in education (Powers, & Turk, 2012).

Like many other facets of the country's government and administration, corruption, poor management, and unethical behaviour have posed serious problems for Nigeria's educational system. Student outcomes, general institutional integrity, and educational quality have all suffered because of these problems. However, language is a frequently disregarded yet effective instrument in resolving these systemic problems. As a tool for behaviour modification and communication, language has enormous power to change attitudes, promote moral leadership, and prevent corruption in educational institutions. Nigerian leaders, educators, and legislators may create an atmosphere of openness, responsibility, and moral behaviour that can eventually help the industry by carefully choosing their wording (Trevino, & Nelson, 2021). While existing studies have highlighted the prevalence of corruption in Nigeria's education sector, there is limited research on the specific role of language in combating these challenges. This paper seeks to address this gap by examining how linguistic strategies can be employed to promote ethical leadership and integrity within educational institutions.

## **Literature Review**

### **Concept of Language and Its Role in Society**

Language is central to human interaction and the functioning of any society. It is not only a means of communication but also a tool for shaping thoughts, influencing behaviours, and creating societal norms. According to Woolard, (2020). language embodies power dynamics and ideologies, making it a critical instrument for social change. This is particularly relevant in addressing corruption and promoting ethical leadership, as these societal issues often stem from deeply entrenched cultural norms and behaviours communicated and reinforced through language. In governance, language serves as a medium for articulating policies, enforcing laws, and building public trust. Effective communication can ensure that policies are understood and accepted by the populace, while poor communication may lead to misunderstanding, mistrust, and resistance (Yule, 2016). In education, language plays a dual role: first, as a vehicle for transmitting knowledge and ethical principles, and second, as a means of fostering dialogue and critical

thinking. This makes it an invaluable tool for cultivating a culture of integrity and accountability within educational institutions.

### **Corruption in the Education Sector**

Corruption in education has far-reaching consequences, including compromised educational quality, inequity in access, and erosion of trust in institutions. Transparency International (2022) highlights that education sector corruption in Nigeria manifests in the following forms:

1. Resource Mismanagement: Funds allocated for infrastructure, teacher salaries, and learning materials are often misappropriated, leaving schools underfunded and ill-equipped.
2. Examination Malpractice: Students, teachers, and even administrators sometimes engage in bribery and cheating, undermining the credibility of academic qualifications (UNESCO, 2020).
3. Unethical Recruitment Practices: Nepotism and favouritism in hiring teachers and administrators result in underqualified personnel managing schools.

The systemic nature of corruption in education requires targeted interventions. Ethical leadership, which emphasizes integrity, accountability, and transparency, has been identified as a critical factor in addressing these challenges (World Bank, 2021). By modelling ethical behaviour, leaders can influence the broader educational community to adopt similar values.

### **Ethical Leadership in the Education Sector**

Ethical leadership involves guiding individuals and institutions based on values such as honesty, responsibility, and equity. In the education sector, ethical leaders can influence policies, curricula, and teaching practices to promote integrity. For example, schools can incorporate lessons on civic responsibility and the consequences of corruption, helping students develop a strong ethical foundation (World Bank, 2021). Teachers, as key role models, can also play a significant role in shaping students' values. By using language that reinforces honesty and accountability, they can instill these principles in the next generation of leaders (Yule, 2016).

### **Language and Cultural Relevance**

Indigenous languages play a significant role in promoting inclusivity and cultural resonance in anti-corruption efforts. In Nigeria, where over 500 languages are spoken, the use of local languages can bridge communication gaps and foster greater understanding and engagement. Research has shown that messages delivered in a person's native language are more likely to elicit an emotional response and drive behaviour change (Yule, 2016). Additionally, indigenous proverbs and idiomatic expressions often carry moral lessons that can be leveraged in advocacy campaigns. For instance, Yoruba proverbs such as "Àgbà kì í wa l'ojà, k'ori ọmọ tuntun wó" (Elders cannot be present in the marketplace and watch a child's head go awry) emphasize the importance of leadership and accountability. Incorporating such culturally significant expressions into anti-corruption messaging can enhance its impact and resonance.

### **Theoretical framework**

Language is an essential communication tool that shapes social behavior, cultural conventions, and thought. Language is strategically important in the Nigerian educational system for influencing leadership behaviors and ethical standards in addition to disseminating content. The relationship between language and society is emphasized by sociolinguistics, which focuses on

how language both reflects and shapes societal norms, values, and ideologies. By incorporating moral values into instructional materials, school regulations, and classroom interactions, language can be used as a vehicle for advancing anti-corruption norms in Nigeria's educational system. Incorporating moral values such as literature, proverbs, and historical narratives that emphasize integrity and accountability into the language curriculum. Promoting multilingualism helps lessen ethnocentric prejudices that frequently support corruption by fostering inclusion and an understanding of culture (Maher, 2017). Encouraging the use of morally and positively charged language in schools to deter unethical behavior like bribes and exam cheating. Training teachers to get comfortable in a way that encourages pupils to collaborate, trust, and think ethically. Language is a strategic tool for influencing behaviour, culture, and idea in addition to being a means of communication and the Nigerian educational system can establish a model for more extensive social change by intentionally using language to encourage moral leadership and fight corruption.

## Discussion

### **Challenges to Using Language Effectively in the Educational Sector**

While language has a lot of potential to change education, several challenges stand in the way of its efficient application. Among these are: Linguistic Diversity/Access, Resistance to Change and The Need for Consistency/Leadership Commitment

**Linguistic Diversity:** Nigeria is a multilingual country with over 500 languages spoken in its many regions. This linguistic diversity is a challenge when attempting to disseminate moral leadership ideals and anti-corruption messaging throughout the school system. Language barriers might make it difficult to communicate about campaigns and policies. Important documents and communications should be translated into regional languages to ensure widespread understanding.

**Resistance to Change:** The success of language-based treatments may be hampered by the pervasive corruption culture in some educational institutions. Adoption of ethical standards may be hampered by institutional and cultural opposition to change. Therefore, leaders must use language strategically, addressing worries and concerns about the reform process while highlighting the long-term advantages of moral behaviour and public trust.

**The Need for Consistency and Leadership Commitment:** The dedication of leaders in the educational sector at all levels is essential to the effectiveness of language as a weapon against corruption. Language that supports honesty, equity, and openness must be used consistently by individuals in positions of authority. If rhetoric is not supported by concrete actions, language-based reforms may not be as successful.

## Recommendations

### **1. Language in Combating Corruption**

Nigerian society, especially the educational system, is overflowing with corruption in all of its manifestations. Corruption has had a disastrous effect on everything from exam misconduct to the theft of money intended for infrastructure development. Redefining how people in the educational sector think and speak about integrity and accountability is one way that language may aid in the fight against corruption (Rose-Ackerman, & Truex, 2012).

## **2. Framing Corruption as Unacceptable**

Language can influence cultural norms and beliefs. Leaders and educators may present corruption as bad conduct by using language. Leaders may change the conversation around corruption by continuously denouncing it as immoral and harmful to the future of the country. This change is crucial since corruption is frequently accepted or even justified in society. People can be deterred from participating in corrupt activities by a well-organized discussion against corruption that is supported by moral arguments. Similar strategies can make integrity a core value in the educational field, motivating teachers, administrators, and students to act morally.

## **3. Educating through Language**

Additionally, language can be used to directly inform stakeholders in the education sector, students, and the general public about the negative effects of corruption. Language can be used to emphasize the negative impacts of corruption on the educational system, individual lives, and the advancement of the country through textbooks, seminars, public announcements, and curricular integration. Students are more inclined to oppose unethical behaviour when they are aware of the long-term harm that corruption causes. Educators and legislators can also use language to discuss how integrity shapes effective leadership. School administrators can mentor future leaders who are dedicated to ethical conduct by emphasizing the value of ethical behaviour in the classroom. This will finally stop the corrupt practices that are prevalent in the system.

## **4. Creating a Language of Accountability**

Establishing a common language of accountability is another facet of employing language as a strategic instrument. This entails creating a language and conversation that prioritizes openness, truthfulness, and accountability. By employing concepts such as "due process," "transparency," "ethical conduct," and "responsibility," organizations can foster a culture in which corruption is viewed as a moral failure as well as a legal transgression. Accountability can be engrained in the minds of all parties involved in the educational sector by using this terminology in speeches, public addresses, official papers, and even casual conversations. Additionally, it guarantees that individuals who transgress ethical standards will be publicly identified and held accountable.

## **5. Language as a Catalyst for Ethical Leadership**

Another area in which language is crucial is ethical leadership in the Nigerian educational system. Leaders who exhibit honesty, equity, and a dedication to the common good are considered ethical. They set an example by their words and deeds, encouraging others to do the same. Promoting moral leadership in the industry can be greatly aided by language.

## **6. Encouraging Open Dialogue and close dialogue**

Promoting open discussion about ethics is an area in which language is crucial to fostering ethical leadership. Leaders who place a high value on open communication and openness foster a culture of trust and accountability. Leaders should consistently speak in a way that invites input, discussion, and involvement from staff, students, and the community at large. For example, it is important to support and arrange town halls, focus groups, and open forums where staff and students can voice their concerns regarding ethical issues. Language can be utilized in these conversations to make sure that everyone understands the significance of acting morally as well as to clarify policies. Promoting this kind of discussion creates a space where moral dilemmas can be freely discussed and resolved.

## 7. Promoting Leadership through Ethical Discourse

A vision of moral leadership in education can be expressed through language. Clear statements regarding the values that direct leadership in the educational sector should be included in public speeches, policy documents, and institutional declarations. Respect for human dignity, justice, equity, and the dedication to ensuring that everyone has access to high-quality education are a few examples of these ideals. Leaders can establish a standard for the entire industry by using language that consistently reinforces these values. The notion that moral leadership is the cornerstone of sound governance in educational institutions and that leaders are answerable to both their institutions and the country at large should be conveyed consistently through language.

## 8. Use of Language to Reinforce Policy and Legislative Frameworks

Language can be used by legislators and educational leaders to support institutional policies and ethical standards. Teachers and students can better grasp expectations when policy documents, codes of conduct, and ethical guidelines are written in plain and understandable language. Because everyone in the industry is aware of his or her duties and obligations, this clarity lowers the likelihood of corruption. Furthermore, a strong disincentive is provided by explicit language in laws and regulations about corruption and immoral behaviour. People are less inclined to commit corrupt behaviours when they are aware of the repercussions of doing so.

## Conclusion

Language is a powerful and strategic tool that can significantly contribute to curbing corruption and fostering ethical leadership in Nigeria's educational sector. By reshaping perceptions, creating accountability, educating the public, and promoting ethical conduct through communication, language can help create a more transparent and ethically-driven educational system. For these efforts to be successful, there must be sustained leadership commitment to ethical governance, consistent use of clear and inclusive language, and a focus on overcoming challenges such as linguistic barriers and institutional resistance. With the right use of language, Nigeria can build a more robust educational sector characterized by integrity, accountability, and ethical leadership, ultimately fostering national development and progress.

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