The Role of Language Diversity in Climate Action Participation in Bayelsa State

Dr. Teibowei, Marie Therese
Institute of Foreign Languages and
Biomedical Translations (IFL-BT)
Bayelsa Medical University,
Yenagoa, Nigeria

Abstract

In the quest for sustainable development and climate resilience, the global community has recognized the urgency of collective action to address the challenges posed by climate change. The study examined the role of language diversity in climate action participation in Bayelsa State. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consist of all 167 staff in the communication studies department in the seven tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State. A census survey which involves the use of all the respondents in the population. The instrument for data collection was a "Language Diversity in Climate Action Participation Questionnaire (LDCAPQ)" developed by the researcher. The content and face validity of the instrument was done by communication experts. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha Formula and a coefficient value of 0.72 was obtained, which was considered appropriate for the study. The research question was answered using mean and standard deviation. The study revealed that the influence of linguistic diversity on communities' awareness of climate change in Bayelsa State was low. The study has affirmed that the extent to which different dialects in Bayelsa State convey climate-related information in Bayelsa State is low. Finally, the study identified speaking minority languages, limited access to government services and economic opportunities for individuals and ignorance are major potential barriers created by language-related exclusion in Bayelsa State. The study recommended that stakeholders should continuously develop and disseminate educational materials on climate change and sustainability in multiple local languages.

Keywords: *Role, Language Diversity, Climate Action, Participation*

Introduction

In the quest for sustainable development and climate resilience, the global community has recognized the urgency of collective action to address the challenges posed by climate change. As countries, organizations, and communities endeavour to formulate and implement effective climate action initiatives, it becomes paramount to understand the intricate interplay between language diversity and participation in these environmental endeavours (Teibowei, 2022). This exploration delves into the role of language diversity in climate action participation, aiming to unravel how linguistic variations within communities' influence engagement in environmental projects. Moreover, the study seeks to scrutinize whether inclusive language policies can act as catalysts for broader participation and collaboration, while simultaneously examining the potential barriers erected by language-related exclusion.

The impetus for this investigation stems from the recognition that language, as a powerful medium of communication and identity, can significantly shape the dynamics of community engagement in climate action (IPCC, 2017). Language serves as both a facilitator and a potential obstacle, influencing the dissemination of information, the understanding of environmental issues, and the inclusivity of participation. The importance of engaging diverse communities in climate action is underscored by the fact that the impacts of climate change are unevenly distributed, and often marginalized or minority groups bear a disproportionate burden.

Language diversity, reflecting cultural richness and historical legacies within communities, is an integral aspect of human identity. However, its influence on environmental engagement is a nuanced and underexplored area. Federal Ministry of Environment Climate Change Department (2011) disclosed that understanding how language diversity interacts with climate action initiatives is crucial for designing policies and strategies that not only acknowledge but also leverage linguistic variations for more effective and inclusive environmental outcomes.

Aim and Objectives to Study

The study examined the role of language diversity in climate action participation in Bayelsa State. Specifically, the study achieved the following:

   i.   To examine the influence of linguistic diversity on communities' awareness of climate change in Bayelsa State.
   ii. To examine the extent to which different dialects in Bayelsa State convey climate-related information in Bayelsa State.
   iii. To assess the potential barriers created by language-related exclusion in Bayelsa State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide:

   i.   What is the influence of linguistic diversity on communities' awareness of climate change in Bayelsa State?
   ii. What is the extent to which different dialects in Bayelsa State convey climate-related information in Bayelsa State?
   iii. What are the potential barriers created by language-related exclusion in Bayelsa State?

Conceptual Review

Language Diversity

This refers to the variety of languages spoken and used within a specific geographical area, community, or population. It encompasses linguistic differences arising from historical, cultural, and regional factors, resulting in a rich tapestry of languages. Language diversity involves the coexistence of multiple languages, dialects, and linguistic variations within a given context. This diversity is a fundamental aspect of human culture, reflecting the unique identities, histories, and traditions of different communities.

In the context of language diversity, it is essential to recognize the presence of both major languages and minority languages. Major languages often have broader usage and influence, while minority languages may be spoken by smaller groups within a community (Okafo & Noah, 2014). Language diversity extends beyond spoken languages to include sign languages, written scripts, and various forms of communication that contribute to the linguistic mosaic of a given region or society.

Climate Action Participation

This refers to the engagement, involvement, and contributions of individuals, communities, organizations, and governments in activities and initiatives aimed at addressing and mitigating

the impacts of climate change. Participation in climate action involves a range of actions, from adopting sustainable practices in daily life to actively supporting policies and projects that promote environmental sustainability.

Salawu (2022) disclosed that climate action participation is multifaceted and can include activities such as reducing carbon footprints, advocating for environmentally friendly policies, supporting renewable energy initiatives, participating in conservation efforts, and promoting climate education and awareness. It encompasses both individual and collective efforts to address the challenges posed by climate change, recognizing the interconnectedness of global and local environmental issues.

Olatumile (2014) submitted that the effectiveness of climate action participation is often influenced by factors such as awareness, education, social norms, and inclusivity. Inclusive climate action participation recognizes the importance of engaging diverse communities, considering different perspectives, and fostering collaboration across various demographic, cultural, and linguistic groups.

Intersection of language diversity and climate action participation

The intersection of language diversity and climate action participation acknowledges that language is a crucial factor influencing how individuals and communities perceive, understand, and engage with environmental issues (Oyero, 2017). In a linguistically diverse context, effective communication becomes paramount for mobilizing diverse populations towards sustainable practices. Inclusive language policies, multilingual communication strategies, and an understanding of linguistic nuances contribute to fostering broader and more effective climate action participation across different linguistic communities. Recognizing and addressing language-related barriers is essential for promoting equitable and inclusive environmental initiatives that resonate with diverse populations and contribute to global efforts to combat climate change.

Methods and Materials

Descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. Charles-Owaba (2018), referred to descriptive survey design as a design in which a group of people or item is studied by collecting and analysing data from only a few individuals or items considered to be representatives of the entire group. The population of the study consist of all 167 staff in the communication studies department in the seven tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State. A census survey which involves the use of all the respondents in the population. The instrument for data collection was a "Language Diversity in Climate Action Participation Questionnaire (LDCAPQ)" developed by the researcher. It consists of four (4) sections, namely; Section A, B, C and D. Section A measured the demographic variables of the respondents, Section B consist of 7-items on the influence of linguistic diversity on communities' awareness of climate change. Section C consist of 7-items on the extent to which different dialects in Bayelsa State convey climate-related information and section D consist of 7-items on the potential barriers created by language-related exclusion. The content and face validity of the instrument was done by communication experts. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha Formula and a coefficient value of 0.72 was obtained, which was considered appropriate for the study. The research question was answered using mean and standard deviation. Online mode of questionnaire distribution was adopted through the approved WhatsApp platform of various medical class. In all, 100% return rate was achieved.

Research Question 1

What is the influence of linguistic diversity on communities' awareness of climate change in Bayelsa State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of responses on the influence of linguistic diversity on communities' awareness of climate change in Bayelsa State

S/N	STATEMENT	X	SD	REMARK
1.	I am aware of the concept of climate change	2.57	0.61	Agreed
2.	I understand the causes and consequences of climate change	2.34	0.61	Disagree
3.	Information about climate change is more accessible in my native language	2.23	0.57	Disagree
4.	I believe that language barriers affect the spread of information about climate change in my community	2.31	0.59	Disagree
5.	I feel that individuals who speak languages other than the majority language are actively involved in climate action initiatives	2.34	0.60	Disagree
6.	Inclusive language policies enhance the participation of linguistic minorities in community environmental projects	2.23	0.63	Disagree
7.	I prefer receiving information about climate change in my native language	2.17	0.65	Disagree
8.	Grand Mean	2.37	0.59	

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

Table 1 above shows the mean and standard deviation of responses on the influence of linguistic diversity on communities' awareness of climate change in Bayelsa State. The grand mean value was 2.37 which was less than the cut-off value of 2.50, indicating low influence. Hence, the influence of linguistic diversity on communities' awareness of climate change in Bayelsa State was low.

Research Question 2

What is the extent to which different dialects in Bayelsa State convey climate-related information?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of responses on the extent to which different dialects in Bayelsa State convey climate-related information in Bayelsa State

S/N	STATEMENT	X	SD	REMARK
15	I am aware of climate change and its impact on the environment	2.29	0.59	LE
16	I believe that climate change is a significant issue affecting Bayelsa State	2.40	0.59	LE
17	I believe that different dialects effectively convey information about climate change	2.37	0.62	LE
18	Climate-related information is easily understandable in my dialect	2.39	0.59	LE
19	In my community, climate-related information is shared in various dialects	2.21	0.61	LE
20	I feel that the use of different dialects enhances community discussions on climate change	2.60	0.61	HE

21	I believe that using diverse dialects increases the accessibility of climate-related information, encouraging more people to engage	2.34	0.63	LE
	Grand mean		2.43	

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of responses on the extent to which different dialects in Bayelsa State convey climate-related information in Bayelsa State. The grand mean value of 2.42 was lower than the cut-off value of 2.50, indicating that the low extent. Hence, the extent to which different dialects in Bayelsa State convey climate-related information in Bayelsa State is low.

Research Question 3

What are the potential barriers created by language-related exclusion in Bayelsa State?

Table 4: Mean and standard deviation of responses on the potential barriers created by language-related exclusion in Bayelsa State

S/N	STATEMENT	X	SD	REMARK
8.	I believe that individuals who speak minority languages in Bayelsa State face exclusion in social and community activities	2.60	0.61	Agreed
9.	I think language barriers hinder effective communication in educational institutions and workplaces in Bayelsa State	2.54	0.63	Agreed
10.	I believe that language-related exclusion limits access to government services for speakers of minority languages	2.69	0.59	Agreed
11.	Language barriers affect economic opportunities for individuals who speak minority languages in Bayelsa State	2.50	0.59	Agreed
12	Minority language speakers in Bayelsa State often feel excluded from cultural events and celebrations due to language differences	2.77	0.62	Agreed
13	I think there is a need for initiatives to promote cultural and linguistic diversity in Bayelsa State	2.69	0.59	Agreed
14	Language-related exclusion has a negative impact on the overall well-being and mental health of minority language speakers in Bayelsa State	2.61	0.61	Agreed
	Grand mean		2.42	

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

Table 4 above shows the mean and standard deviation of responses on the potential barriers created by language-related exclusion in Bayelsa State. All items had mean values above the cut-off mean value of 2.50. Hence, speaking minority languages, limited access to government services and economic opportunities for individuals and ignorance are major potential barriers created by language-related exclusion in Bayelsa State.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that the influence of linguistic diversity on communities' awareness of climate change in Bayelsa State was low. The result from research question 2 revealed that the

extent to which different dialects in Bayelsa State convey climate-related information in Bayelsa State is low. Finally, the study identified speaking minority languages, limited access to government services and economic opportunities for individuals and ignorance are major potential barriers created by language-related exclusion in Bayelsa State. These findings support Cherotic (2022) who accessed climate Change Information and Support Services by the Vulnerable Groups in Semi-Arid Kenya for Adaptive Capacity Development and reported that classification of language as minority is a major barrier to language-related exclusion in Bayelsa State. The findings also align with Mba and Ayegba (2023).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Language policies stand as pivotal tools in the realm of climate change mitigation, adaptation, education, and policy-making. Their role in fostering inclusivity, communication, and engagement at local, national, and international levels cannot be overstated. This study has established that the influence of linguistic diversity on communities' awareness of climate change in Bayelsa State was low. The study has affirmed that the extent to which different dialects in Bayelsa State convey climate-related information in Bayelsa State is low. Finally, the study identified speaking minority languages, limited access to government services and economic opportunities for individuals and ignorance are major potential barriers created by language-related exclusion in Bayelsa State. Based on these findings, the study presents the following recommendations:

i. Stakeholders should continuously develop and disseminate educational materials on climate change and sustainability in multiple local languages. This would ensure that diverse communities in Bayelsa State have ongoing access to relevant information.

ii. Stakeholders should strengthen efforts to incorporate indigenous knowledge, embedded in local languages, into climate-related policies and educational curricula. This would enrich strategies with time-tested practices and enhance resilience.

Conclusion:

The role of language diversity in climate action participation in Bayelsa State is crucial and multifaceted. Language is a powerful tool for communication and community engagement, playing a significant role in raising awareness, fostering understanding, and promoting active involvement in climate initiatives. The linguistic diversity in Bayelsa State reflects the rich tapestry of its communities, each with its unique cultural and environmental challenges. Language acts as a bridge between policymakers, environmental organizations, and local communities, facilitating effective communication and collaboration. Moreover, it contributes to preserving traditional ecological knowledge passed down through generations. As climate change increasingly impacts the region, harnessing the potential of language diversity can enhance the effectiveness of climate action efforts.

Policy Recommendations:

1. **Promoting Inclusive Communication:**
   - Develop and implement communication strategies that cater to the linguistic diversity of Bayelsa State. This includes translating climate-related materials into local languages and using local media outlets to disseminate information.

1. **Community-Based Climate Education Programs:**
   - Establish community-based climate education programs that incorporate local languages. These programs should focus on raising awareness about climate change, its impacts on the region, and individuals' role in mitigation and adaptation.

1. **Supporting Indigenous Knowledge Systems:**

- Recognize and integrate indigenous knowledge systems related to climate resilience into policy frameworks. This involves working closely with local communities, elders, and traditional leaders to understand and incorporate their sustainable practices.

1. **Capacity Building for Local Language Advocates:**
   - Provide training and support for individuals within communities who can act as language advocates. These advocates can translate climate policies, facilitate workshops, and bridge the communication gap between policymakers and residents.

1. **Cultural Sensitivity in Climate Policies:**
   - Ensure that climate policies and interventions are culturally sensitive and respect the diversity of traditions and practices within Bayelsa State. This involves conducting thorough cultural impact assessments before implementing any climate-related projects.

1. **Collaboration with Local Language Experts:**
   - Engage local linguists, scholars, and language experts in developing climate-related materials. Their expertise can enhance communication materials' accuracy and cultural relevance, making them more accessible to a broader audience.

1. **Investment in Technological Solutions:**
   - Leverage technology to facilitate communication in diverse languages. Develop and promote mobile applications, voice-based platforms, or other digital tools to deliver climate information in local languages.

By implementing these policy recommendations, Bayelsa State can harness the power of language diversity to strengthen climate action participation, build community resilience, and foster a more inclusive and sustainable future for all residents.

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