
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Addressing Global Challenges from a Linguistic Perspective

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| ABSTRACT

Globally, human beings have always faced numerous problems, such as drought, floods, wars, etc. At this dawn of the twenty first century, the world is experiencing unprecedented challenges which may likely get worse. Climate change, wars with their millions of refugees, natural and man-made disasters, epidemics, food security, deforestation, and political disturbances are among the most recurrent problems. Many solutions have been tried with little or no success, leaving many of the problems intact. Important decisions are generally taken without enough discussions and the participation of all the stakeholders. Huge funds are sometimes spent by non-experts of the situation with no concrete solutions. From a theoretical perspective, this paper draws examples from Cameroon and Africa to highlight the importance of language and dialogue as means to solve some of the global challenges.

| KEYWORDS

Global challenges, language, discussions, wars, disasters, politics, education

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1. Introduction

In the early years of the twenty first century, the world was affected by many challenges. Since the Great Depression of 1929-32 (due to the worldwide economic depression which began in the USA) and the Second World War, man has never been so unhappy. The quick reconstruction of the global economy after the war and its rapid growth led to some excesses in goods consumption. This forced the food and equipment industries, as well as the car industries, to put excessive pressure on land, forest and natural minerals around the world. For example, food industries, through excessive exploitation of land, have destroyed many soils across the planet; equipment industries have depleted the forests; car industries and other technological industries have led to wars, suffering, and depletion of many minerals. Thus, the global challenges that man has created himself, coupled with natural disasters, are now numerous world-wide. Before examining some of those challenges, it is important to define the concept of 'global challenges' and review some literature on the issue in the section below.

2. Literature Review

It is really hard to define the term global challenges as there is no exact definition of it. Gelsdorf (2010) sees global challenges as any major trend, shock or development that has the potential for serious global impacts. Ludwig *et al.* (2021) say that global challenges such as climate change, food security or public health have become dominant concerns in research and innovation policy. They argue that appeal to global challenges can give rise to a solution strategy that presents the responses of dominant actors.

To George *et al.* (2016), global challenges are becoming more complex and sophisticated and demand a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach. Therefore, research management can make useful contributions to understanding and tackling global grand challenges. Karaduman (2014) listed some global challenges and proposed some solutions to them. He opined that cooperation is the most important solution and that humanity should be the caretaker of the challenges with collaboration from state and non-state actors.

Gelsdorf (2010) holds that global challenges are already exacerbating vulnerability and increasing humanitarian needs. He remarks that the outskirts of Harare, Mogadishu and Port-au Prince have already experienced rapid urbanization and that climate related disasters, environmental degradation and the high price of fuel can dangerously combine to severely undermine the economy, food and the health of communities. He also maintains that countries, regions and even the global community may lack the capacity, financial resources and governance systems to respond to multiple and competing challenges. Kaul *et al.* (2003) point out that global challenges call for co-operation on a global scale in order to create a public good or protect the global commons. For example, a stable climate is a global public good. It can be endangered by the global warming that comes from the emission of greenhouse gases due to the group actions of many individuals and society. McMichael *et al.* (1996) noted that many global challenges are interrelated across regions and disciplines. Global climate change is believed to have both direct and indirect impacts on human health, malaria, yellow fever and hantavirus. Before proposing some possible solutions, it is important to list the major global challenges facing the world today.

3. The major global challenge facing the world today

Among the numerous challenges striking the world today, Hutt (2016) lists the following ones:

Food security: By 2050, the world will have to feed 9 billion people. So, the demand for food will be 60 percent greater than today.

Inclusive growth: The present social, political and economic systems are exacerbating inequality rather than reducing them. For example, the many wars in Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe are causing unprecedented migration and displacement of people.

Future of work employment: In 2016, the International Labour Organisation estimated that more than 61 million jobs had been lost since the start of the global economic crisis in 2008, leaving more than 200 million people jobless globally. This situation, which in 2016 was already not so good, is now aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic and its recurrent lockdown. Richter (2021) indicated that the pandemic caused 114 million people to lose their jobs in 2020. The International Labour Organisation estimates that the working hours lost in 2020 compared to pre-pandemic levels were equivalent to 225 million full-time jobs, leading to 3.7 trillion US dollars in lost labour income.

Future of global finance: Two billion people do not have access to high quality affordable financial services. Additionally, 200 million small and medium size enterprises worldwide have no access to formal financial services.

Future of the Internet: By 2025, it is expected that 10 per cent of people worldwide will be wearing clothes connected to the Internet, and the first implantable mobile phone will be sold. It can be said that this is already somewhat operational through the vaccine against Covid-19.

Future of gender equality: According to Global Gender Gap Report, at the current rate, it will take the world another 118 years to achieve gender equality.

4. Other world challenges

In addition to the challenges listed by Hutt (2016) above, there are many others plaguing the world, among which are *urbanization and food security, migration, oceans conservation, water crisis, girl child education, and all sorts of disasters*. Ibrahim *et al.* (2009) note that urban areas are hit with the problem of increasing population, and consequently, there is an inadequate supply of food items. The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) 2012 estimated that the global population is expected to reach over 9 billion by 2050, and as such, there will be a continuous demand for food production and buffer stock. With an *urban growth rate of percent per annum*, it is expected that over 300 million new residents will be added to urban areas in the African subcontinent between 2000 and 2030 (Kessides, 2005). Urban dwellers and households are generally *food buyers* who depend on their income for food security. They spend a large proportion of the household budget on food.

Africa is often regarded as a continent of *mass displacement and migration* caused by poverty and violent conflicts. The portrayal of Africa as a '*continent on the move*' is linked to stereotypical ideas of Africa as a continent of poverty and conflict. In recent years, clandestine migration from Africa to Europe and America has been a serious cause for concern. This irregular migration from sub-Saharan Africa and the Maghreb has also been associated with international crime, trafficking and terrorism (Castles *et al.*, 2014). According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the system of migrant smuggling has become nothing more than a mechanism for robbing and murdering some of the poorest people in the world (UNODC, 2006).

The earth is mostly covered with water, and people depend on the ocean to maintain the rainwater systems. Many populations rely on it for food and income. The oceans also absorb carbon dioxide and produce more than half of the oxygen on Earth. Despite their importance, they are under threat. *Overfishing and unsustainable fishing* practices are causing the endangerment and

extinction of many marine species. Industrial fishing takes too much fish out of renewable capital, just like withdrawing more money out of a bank account than the savings can generate annually. Overfishing can be seen as direct pressure and a major risk to the marine environment and ocean health, which drastically reduces fish biomass in the ocean (Halper *et al.* 2015).

The water crisis is often used to describe the lack of access to water throughout the world and the resulting consequences. The development of civilization would not have been possible without the earth's water coverage, as it has provided a means for transportation and power sources (Atteberry, 2010). However, pollution has rendered some waters unsafe for consumption. It is estimated that 4 percent of all death could be attributed to water related diseases (Pruss *et al.*, 2002). According to CDC (Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention), approximately 11 percent of child deaths worldwide are attributed to diarrhoea diseases, and of these cases, 88 percent are caused by unsafe water or improper sanitation (CDC, 2013).

In many Arab and some African countries, young girls are sent to early marriage, thereby *denying them their fundamental right to education*. BBC News (2006) reported that the African patriarchal societal viewpoint favors boys over girls because boys maintain the family lineage. Another reason for the deprivation of the girl child's education in Africa is because some of their mothers were not educated too. Mwangi (2004) remarks that poverty, diseases and backward cultural practices continue to deny the girl child the right to education. The low literacy level of girls is one of the world's challenges, particularly in Africa.

Hutt (2016) *mentions ecological collapse, the nuclear holocaust, pandemics, molecular nanotechnology, and long term investment* as other global challenges. Of all the problems listed above, Coronavirus and climate change are the most urgent. According to World Health Organisation, as of 7th November 2021, more than 249 million cases and 5.05 million deaths were recorded, making the coronavirus the deadliest pandemic in history.

Since 2015, with COP 21 Summit held in Paris on 12 December 2015, the fight against climate change has always been the order of the day, with little agreement among the leaders of the world on how to reduce pollution and deforestation. For example, the US, one of the world's largest polluters, left that movement some years ago. At COP 26 in Glasgow recently, only 23 new countries promised to abandon their coal industries between 2025 and 2040. But this should be taken with a lot of caution because, at the same time, huge amounts of money are continuing to be invested in fossil energy such as oil. The demonstrations observed left and right clearly express the disappointment of many people around the world about the issue. Although few leaders of the world sincerely believe in the various solutions proposed, some are achievable, as discussed below.

5. Some possible solutions

This section discusses language and dialogue as possible solutions to a number of global challenges.

5.1. Use of appropriate language

Used in an adequate way, language can be a useful instrument in the search for solutions. It can help in addressing some of the challenges highlighted above. Concerning *food security*, for example, in Cameroon and Africa, many farmers are illiterate and ignorant. Good use of home languages by agriculture technicians to translate some new agricultural techniques can help farmers understand what to do on their farms and what not to do. In their farms, many African farmers spend a lot of energy doing wrong things because of a lack of information. Some agriculture technicians are sent to areas where they do not understand anything in the local language. Those technicians can explain to farmers the risk of deforestation on their various lands in their indigenous languages. If this is clearly done in a language that farmers understand, they will adopt new farming techniques, and some change can take place.

Globally, there is a serious lack of *job opportunities* in the world. ILO (International Labour Organisation) Report (2022) indicates that all regions face severe downside risks to their labour market recovery that stems from the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. As the report continues, "all key labour market indicators in all regions –Africa, the Americas, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia- have yet to return to pre-pandemic levels. For all regions, projections to 2023 will remain elusive" (ILO Report 2022, p.13). World Bank Report (2021) points out that "Covid-19 impacts could leave an entire generation behind, and that 'Covid 19 Generation' includes recent graduates, first-time job seekers, and workers who have lost their jobs due to the pandemic. They are likely to be scarred from this crisis the longer they are out for work or unemployed" (World Bank Report, 2021, p.13). Thus, the younger generation of Africans should *be advised to be job creators and not job seekers*, as has been the case until now. But the current educational programmes do not enable this. New programmes need to be designed in clear language and with clear curricula and objectives (see Safotso, 2020). This can effectively work only if all the stakeholders work hand in hand through nationwide discussions on the issue. While waiting for this to happen, young Africans trained in the bureaucratic way of looking for jobs should know how to compete. The few available opportunities on the job market are highly competitive. Yet, in Africa, many young school graduates do not know how to adequately write a job application, a curriculum vitae or a personal

statement, which are the basic requirements to get any serious job. These elements should be included in all language programmes of African universities and should be taught by experts in the domains. Their knowledge can be a way out for some job seekers.

Flauhaux & de Hass (2016) pointed out that Africa is often seen as a continent of mass *migration and displacement* caused by poverty, violent conflict and environmental stress. Such perceptions are based on stereotypes rather than informed empirical research. It would be necessary to conduct large scale studies to determine the number of Africans who migrate to Europe. The stereotype language or perception will thus be wiped away. A suitable language should be used to address migration issues. If this could be done through vast campaigns across Africa, it would permit those who are willing to embark on a migration trip to understand the realities of the myth of Europe and America, often seen as an '*El Dorado*'.

With regard to *scamming*, it is imperative that social media users know some of the tactics that forgers use to get to them. One of these tactics is the language used. Many scammers use flattering, sweet and convincing language to trap their victims. In Cameroon, some scammers send messages to people to tell them that they have been selected as winners of a competition in which they did not take part or assure them that they are money multipliers. When naive people send their pin code or money to them to be multiplied, it is swept out and the account blocked. Being updated on the new scamming methods can help. Other scammers create fake profile pictures on Facebook with beautiful women's faces. Men who are looking for attractive women easily fall into their trap. It is thus important that society be educated on their various tricks, mainly made of convincing, sweet and flattering language.

5.2. Use of sincere dialogue

In *politics*, people in developing countries are generally used to lies and violence (Höglund & Jarstad, 2010; Ezeibe, 2020). Ezeibe points out that an entrenched culture of hate speech is an off-neglected major driver of election violence in Nigeria and remarks that the implementation of anti-hate speech laws presents an opportunity for protecting the rights of minority groups, promoting inclusion and preserving election violence in Nigeria and beyond. Pant (2020) reports that in Cameroon, hate speech against particular linguistic groups (commonly interlinking) has often been deliberately employed for political ends. "In September 2017, the prominent TV journalist Ernest Obama publicly encouraged the government to take violent measures against Anglophone protestors" (Pant 2020, p.1). In Africa and Cameroon, in particular, there are so many unfulfilled political promises made by politicians. Some wars and uprisings are due to political deadlock. Yet, trust in politicians can however lead to peace, hard work and development, as is the case with many Western countries. The National dialogue, which took place in Yaounde from 30 September to 4 October 2019, and whose outcome later exacerbated rebellion in the North West and South West Regions, is an example of political failure. Peace Security Report (2020) on Cameroon indicates that key separatist leaders refused to attend the dialogue since their demands had not been met. Among others, they demanded that the dialogue take place on a neutral ground and in the presence of an international mediator, which the government obstinately refused. As the report projects, "the worst case scenario would be for the Anglophone crisis to escalate into a protracted civil war and/or eventually lead to secession of the Anglophone regions from the rest of the country" (p.14). If in Africa in general and Cameroon in particular, politicians could tell the truth to their people and discuss all the sensitive social and political issues with them through a language of sincerity and dialogue, confidence and development will begin. In the present state of lies, verbal confrontation and wars, achieving change are quite difficult.

Our everyday life is inundated with all kinds of *disasters*, which have enormous consequences on the community. The media is generally at the centre of reporting them. Very often, depending on their editorial policies, some media tend to reassure the victims or exaggerate the gravity of the situation. However, the kind of language used is very important in those types of situations. Objectivity in reporting the number of casualties can help in assisting the victims. For example, using soft, comforting or healing language in reporting the events can console those affected. A sincere dialogue with the victims can also help determine their urgent needs. In Cameroon, for example, after certain disasters like that of Lake Nyos in 1986, it has often been observed a lot of controversy over the urgent needs of the victims. After the Lake Nyos disaster, the Minister of Territorial Administration of that period said that all the table oil received as aid relief from international donors was not useful to the victims as they 'ate only palm oil'. That statement received heavy criticism from the victims and the donors.

The controversy surrounding the *coronavirus pandemic* is a typical example of what divides the world in some situations. Since the outbreak of the disease in 2019 in China, a lot of information and counter-information has been given on it, even by WHO (World Health Organization), which is supposed to hold the absolute truth in that domain. The various demonstrations observed around the world by the *anti-vaccines* testify to the degree of doubt about what the leaders of the world say about it. In France, for example, they are already envisaging a 4th dose of the vaccine, whereas, in previous speeches, the officials said that a single dose would save any vaccinated person from all the trouble. In Cameroon, the situation is almost the same. Few people trust what the government says about the pandemic, and those who accept to receive the vaccine are rare. Yet, sincere dialogue with the various

communities and all the actors involved in the fight against the disease, as well as clear information on the situation, can reassure the population.

6. Conclusion

This paper set out to discuss the importance of language in tackling global challenges. To conclude, it has shown that language and dialogue can help in solving some of the global issues the world faces today if it is used appropriately. People need to know the truth about the various global problems plaguing the world, such as food security, inclusive growth, Covid 19, work employment, migration, water crisis, climate change, and pandemics. They need to be involved in the various talks on global issues to better understand their impact /effects on their lives. They should be informed on issues that affect their lives by the government using reliable sources of information that are verifiable. This should be done in a language full of truth and sincerity. This study is important in that it has highlighted the role of language in solving global issues that plague the world today. It is generally a neglected component in the search for solutions. Governments and non-governmental organisations usually count on huge funds, which at times lead to no concrete results because of a lack of dialogue and consultation among the people concerned. This paper is somewhat limited in that it has just focused on some major global issues. Another study could, for example, extend it to conflicts and wars, genocides, and man-made disasters, among others.

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