



EVALUATING THE CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN PROMOTING FREE TRADE ZONES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *Free Trade Zones (FTZs) in Nigeria attract a diverse array of workers, businesses, and management teams from various cultural backgrounds. Effective communication within these environments is crucial for facilitating idea exchange, building trust, and maintaining relationships. With the expansion of global trade, the significance of cross-cultural communication in ensuring successful business interactions is paramount. However, the convergence of diverse cultural, linguistic, and business practices in Nigeria presents challenges that impede the optimal functioning of FTZs. This study delineates the challenges and prospects of cross-cultural communication in promoting investment in Nigerian FTZs. Using a qualitative approach, it employs in-depth interviews and document analysis to comprehensively explore these issues. Engaging stakeholders from different cultural backgrounds, the study identifies key communication challenges, including language barriers, stereotypes, ethnocentrism, and non-verbal communication differences. Despite these obstacles, implementing intercultural training programs and digital communication tools can enhance business interactions. This research contributes to international business, intercultural communication, and economic development discourse, offering insights for policymakers, business practitioners, and academics.*

KEYWORDS: Cross-cultural communication, Free Trade Zones, Nigeria, Intercultural training, Economic development, Global trade.



INTRODUCTION

The growing globalisation of business necessitates the effective use of communication to manage people from different cultural backgrounds. Communication plays a fundamental role in our daily lives as well as in companies, public institutions and non-profit organisations. Good communication allows humans to achieve a good reputation and to build both corporate brands in age and product image. Organisations communicate both internally and externally to manage their business effectively. A good communication strategy will help an organisation to communicate effectively towards meeting its objectives and goals.

Free Trade Zones by their characteristics attract expatriate investors and employees from across the globe, thus calling for the proper deployment of proper communication style in managing these diverse work groups. Indeed, at both the individual and group levels of analysis, effective cross-cultural integration through communication strategies among people that operate in Free Trade Zones is now acknowledged as the most important concern in international business (Barner-Rasmussen, 2014), as it may have favourable effect on foreign and local workers' performance in such trade environments (Abugre & Debrah, 2019).

Interaction or communication between culturally diverse individuals who have distinct value orientations and communication codes within a community of work and socialisation is known as cross-cultural communication (Richard, 2006). According to this viewpoint, cross-cultural communication between multicultural team members may consequently be an emotional process involving a great deal of uncertainty and the possibility of misunderstanding (Ozcelik & Paprika, 2010). Therefore, having the communication prowess to handle cross-cultural uncertainties with cultural empathy and strong interpersonal skills is what is meant to be considered important in dealing with people in free trade zones. It is described as having the information technique, drive and abilities necessary to interact with people from a host culture in an effective manner (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997). With the help of cross-cultural communication, local and foreign workers and managers from various cultural backgrounds can collaborate and coexist while working together to accomplish company objectives (Abugre, 2016).

Various communication styles are usually employed in Free Trade Zones with a view to strengthening business operations in such multicultural areas. Gitnux (2022) states that communication strategy is a business and marketing tool that helps organisations to determine the best approach to communicating a message or information to reach all stakeholders most effectively. They are carried out based on the interests and needs of an organisation's audiences, whose mission is to achieve objectives. Victoria (2016) defines communication strategy as a written reference document against which to judge progress. A collaboration between the business/project leader(s) and the communications professionals. Communication strategy identifies clearly and measurable communications objectives with evaluation, the relevant audience and available channels, plan of activities and a timetable; communication risks and mitigation, juxtaposing with available resources; financial and people (Victoria, 2016). Communication strategies help in planning site-related communication with the relevant public, stakeholders and colleagues. Good communication strategies can improve the interactive nature of communication and help permit applicants and/or companies receive information from their target audiences. A communication strategy provides a structure for identifying events (e.g., issues, problems, and actions) that require outreach; considers potential messages and audiences; and develops vehicles to deliver information. Communication



strategies are the roadmaps designed to organise internal and external communication so that an organisation's overall strategy can be executed (Pimia, 2015).

However, while businesses in Free Trade Zones that bring people from diverse cultures thrive through effective handling of communication, this does not operate smoothly without some challenges. This grey area is brimming with opportunities that have not yet been realised, particularly in developing countries that Nigeria falls into. This is because research on the challenges and prospects of cross-cultural communication in free trade zones environments are only now starting to be exploited, despite its importance (Abugre & Debrah, 2019). To properly comprehend the significance of communication in a multicultural setting, Tung (2008) is of the view that striking a balance between cross-national and cross-cultural studies becomes paramount. More studies in cross-cultural communication techniques in global businesses are thus required due to the need for knowledge expansion. Thus, the crux of this paper is to evaluate the challenges and prospects of cross-cultural communication in promoting Free Trade Zones in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The promotion of Free Trade Zones (FTZs) in Nigeria heralds a significant step towards enhancing international trade and economic development. However, the successful realisation of the objectives of these zones is contingent upon effective cross-cultural communication. As FTZs attract stakeholders from diverse cultural backgrounds, including investors, business partners, government officials, and local communities, the intricacies of intercultural communication become apparent. The existing literature acknowledges the importance of cross-cultural communication in international business contexts (Hofstede, 1980; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997). However, there is a dearth of comprehensive research addressing the specific challenges and prospects of cross-cultural communication within the context of promoting FTZs in Nigeria. The problem lies in the complex interplay of cultural, linguistic, and business practices within Nigerian FTZs, which often lead to misunderstandings, inefficiencies, and even conflicts. Language barriers, differing negotiation styles, cultural biases, and varying communication norms present formidable obstacles to effective cross-cultural communication (Rosenhauer & Groza, 2016; Omojola, 2019).

Moreover, Nigeria's historical and socio-economic context adds another layer of complexity to these challenges. The country's colonial legacy, ethnic diversity, and socio-political dynamics influence communication patterns and interpersonal relations within FTZs (Adebayo, 2018; Kachru, 1992). Without a thorough understanding of these challenges and prospects, stakeholders involved in FTZs may struggle to harness the full potential of these zones for economic growth and development. Therefore, there is an urgent need for empirical research that systematically evaluates the dynamics of cross-cultural communication within Nigerian FTZs, identifies key challenges, and explores opportunities for improvement. This research seeks to address this gap by examining the challenges and prospects of cross-cultural communication in promoting FTZs in Nigeria, thereby contributing to scholarly discourse and informing practical strategies for stakeholders involved in international trade and economic development.



Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

1. To investigate the challenges of cross-cultural communication strategies used in promoting Free Trade Zones in Nigeria; and
2. To evaluate the prospects of cross-cultural communication strategies in promoting Free Trade Zones in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

Communication Strategies

These strategies are fundamental in articulating, explaining and promoting a vision and a set of well-defined goals. Kibe (2014, p. 22) asserts that effective communication strategies establish a consistent and cohesive "voice" that unifies diverse activities and objectives, thereby appealing to an organization's stakeholders. Similarly, Sackey (2014, p. 34) contends that these strategies also shape the nature of relationships and collaborations with key constituents of the organization, such as investors, who are crucial for the successful implementation of the program. According to Skinner and Rampersad (2014), communication strategy is a well-orchestrated set of actions to achieve specific objectives through the execution of a blend of communication methods, techniques and approaches. Tarone (1980) as cited by Huang (2010) iterates that communication strategies are used to close the gap between the knowledge of the targeted party and that of the sender in real communication situations in order to avoid communication disruptions (Huang, 2010). Strategic communication is deliberate and the emphasis is on designing appropriate messages, processes and outcomes of message delivery (Rhee, 2008). Thus, the meaning of communication used in this paper refers to the deliberate and planned methods employed by individuals, groups, or organisations to convey messages effectively and achieve specific communication goals. These strategies involve the thoughtful selection of communication channels, formats, and styles to ensure that information is transmitted, understood, and received as intended. Communication strategies may vary depending on the context, audience, and purpose of the communication.

Communication Barriers

Communication problems arise from the ways in which people talk to one another, causing the sender's message to be perceived by the receiver as distorted. Communication barriers are commonly divided into two categories: *verbal and nonverbal*. The first group includes differences in language and interpretation, inappropriate use of expressions, over abstraction, ambiguity and polarisation. As it may be that the same meaning is attributed to different words, different meanings can also be attributed to the same one: such differences in interpretation often lead to miscommunications between the sender and the receiver of the message. Every word has a denotative and a connotative meaning: denotation refers to the literal meaning of a word while connotation refers to its subjective and emotional meaning. For instance, the denotative meaning of the word plastic is "a synthetic material that can be easily moulded into different forms". For some people, the word also has a negative connotative meaning: "cheap or artificial substitute", or they associate the term with its environmental impact".



Language differences can also cause big communication problems, causing companies to even hire translators and interpreters to ensure that the meaning of their intended message is not lost in translation. Such communication difficulties arise even among native English speakers: just consider how the English language is spoken and interpreted in the UK as opposed to Australia, the US, the Caribbean, and many other places. The inappropriate use of expressions can trigger problems in the understanding of the sender's intended meaning.

What is culture?

Culture is an extremely complex and multidimensional concept, drawing its many definitions from lots of different disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, linguistics and management. With this expression, and in this specific context, we are not referring to what is commonly known as high culture, which includes the arts, literature, architecture or theatre; instead, we refer to culture as something less tangible, but deeper and elaborate. 'Culture' is used to refer to an integrated system of values, beliefs and behaviours that are learned and shared by a group of people. A group's typical ways of thinking, believing, behaving and living are shaped by culture.

One of the most common definitions has been supplied by the Dutch anthropologist Geert Hotstede, stating that culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another. The concept of cultural programming translates into various groups of people sharing the same beliefs, habits and values. For instance, Italians are internationally known for 'talking with their hands' and gesticulating a lot. Also, in many African countries, there are plenty of people who eat with their hands, simply because this behaviour is deeply rooted in their culture.

Numerous scholars have researched this matter, providing various definitions of culture. For instance, Tylor (1871) suggested that culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (as cited in Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952, p. 47).

Cross-Cultural Communication

Cross-cultural or intercultural communication can be seen as a field of study that specifically focuses on the way people from different cultural backgrounds communicate with a view to breaking the cultural barriers that exist between them. Intercultural communication means communication across different cultural boundaries. This means that, when two or more people with different cultural backgrounds interact and communicate with each other or one another, intercultural communication is said to have taken place. For example, communication between Fulani and Tiv cultural groups, communication between a Nigerian and a Spanish are intercultural communication, because it occurs across cultural boundaries. Intercultural communication can thus be defined as the sharing of information on different levels of awareness and control between people with different cultural backgrounds, where different cultural backgrounds include both national cultural differences and differences which are connected with participation in the different activities that exist within a national and international unit (Jens Allwood, 1985 cited in Auwalu & Yunusa, 2016).

Further, cross-cultural communication is also defined as the comparison of communication across cultures (LeBaron, 2003). Cross-cultural communication in an organisation deals with understanding different business customs, beliefs and communication strategies. Cross-cultural



communication refers to the communication between and among people who have differences in any one of the following: styles of working, age, nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, and sexual orientation, among others. According to Hilton (2007), cross-cultural communication can also refer to the attempts that are made to exchange, negotiate and mediate cultural differences by means of language, gestures and body language. It is a discipline that studies communication across different cultures and social groups, or how culture affects communication. It describes the wide range of communication processes and problems that naturally appear within an organisation or social context made up of individuals from different religious, social, ethnic, and educational backgrounds (Marsh, 2004). In this sense, cross-cultural communication seeks to understand how people from different countries and cultures act, communicate and perceive the world around them. Simply put, it is how people belonging to different cultures communicate with each other.

Cross-cultural communication is aimed to improve and facilitate the interaction between partners, employees, clients and managers representing different nations or cultures (Adler, 1991). Cultural differences might "lead to miscommunication, which can and does cause conflict" (Triandis, 2012, p. 102), but they might also become a competitive advantage for global companies (Luo, 2016, p. 134). According to Barker et al. (2017, p. 89), "sensitivity to diversity now demands a strategic understanding of the importance of cross-cultural communication competence in every action in organizations, communities, and nations throughout the world."

The efficiency of cross-cultural communication depends on many factors. Glover and Friedman (2015, p. 76) note that "functioning successfully within different cultures can be a struggle for many professionals and, as the world changes, it is becoming clear that dealing with other cultures, both domestic and international, requires competence in both identifying and transcending cultural boundaries." Language barriers, differences in values and standards of behaviour, lack of experience, lack of trust, and lack of knowledge about other cultures or stereotypical thinking are among the most widespread obstacles to cross-cultural communication (Lifintsev, 2017, p. 51).

The role of digital competence in organizations is widely acknowledged by scholars (Malekifar et al., 2014; Vieru et al., 2015; Shahlaei et al., 2017). Digitalisation can be defined as "the adoption or increase in the use of digital or computer technology by an organization, industry, or country etc." (Kreiss, 2014, p. 214). Colbert, Yee, and George (2016, p. 150) emphasize that digitalisation reduces authenticity in terms of less face-to-face communication and interactions characterised by less fully present participants. On the other hand, Hesse (2018, p. 132) discovers that "digitalisation moderates the influence of contextual and conditional changes on the outcome of leadership, and facilitates leaders' communication practices and thus affects the outcome of leadership." Google's chief economist, professor H. Varian (2005, p. 97), noted, "information technology is a great leveller." He widely popularised the term "micro-multinationals" to describe small companies operating globally. Great example of such "equality" (with large companies) is the ability of micro-multinational businesses that successfully export their goods and services.

In today's multicultural society, it is essential to understand and respect cultural differences to avoid misunderstandings, conflicts, and stereotypes. Doing business is not just an economic activity, it also draws its fundamental principles from social sciences such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, linguistics and communication. To put it in another way, the act of



doing business implies interacting with people and also managing them, so the understanding of human nature and behaviours to communicate effectively become essential. The manager's position is especially tied to this kind of knowledge and skills, as the role requires the constant building of relationships with foreign partners and clients.

Elizabeth Tuleja (2016, p. 45) highlights the distinctions among intercultural, cross-cultural, and international communication, noting that each term bears a unique meaning. Nevertheless, Tuleja points out that 'intercultural' and 'cross-cultural' communication are often used interchangeably, despite their slightly different emphases. Intercultural communication is specifically defined as "the exchange between two people who are different culturally" (Tuleja, 2016, p. 46). Its role is to examine how the interactions in which people engage are affected and influenced by cultural differences, since communication strategies vary based upon a person's cultural background. *International communication* is very similar to the previous one, but it prioritises the analysis of macro issues such as the government's political influence on the process of communication among people from different countries. *Cross-cultural communication* does not focus on the interaction between people but on the comparison of cultural differences: for instance, the level of economic development, the form of government or the local language.

Cultural Elements Affecting International Business Practices

In today's global marketplace, since every marketing strategy is built on the satisfaction of the needs and wants of a business' customers, which are very much culturally based, understanding cultural dynamics has never been more important. This is not only to establish solid business deals but also to help employers and human resources managers avoid taking adverse action against individuals based on cultural misunderstandings.

Many studies have shown the capacity of cultural values to predict consumer behaviours based on the tendencies of individuals to consume luxury goods, switch between brands, use word of mouth communication, buy impulsively, and so on. Each culture perceives advertising and marketing campaigns differently according to its principles, so managers need to properly research their target before even discussing a strategy.

Each culture is defined by many elements that have a direct impact on the way business is done in a specific geographic area, causing issues to marketers when trying to launch a product overseas. These elements include language, customs and manners, religious beliefs, time and space, business norms, nonverbal behaviours and even food preferences. A country's language is the key to its culture because it expresses its thinking patterns.

Language differences have caused many problems in marketing and advertising history resulting from mistranslation, lack of slang understanding and use of the wrong dialect, since only their understanding can lead to proper communication and avoid unnecessary misunderstandings.

For instance, in 1987 the well-known brand KFC was working on expanding its market towards China, so the 'Finger Lickin' Good' campaign was exported to the Chinese market as a part of the brand's multilingual marketing strategy. What the marketing team did not consider was that their slogan's literal translation from English to Chinese carried a very different meaning: 'Eat Your Fingers Off'. Not only was the message far from appealing, but KFC's marketing



department did not properly research Chinese manners, since cultural studies clearly show that the Chinese do not lick their fingers as a sign of appreciation of tasty food.

Colours also have different meanings depending on the target culture. There are many examples of how different colours are interpreted in different cultures: for instance, goods in Japan cannot have black or white packaging because they are the colours of mourning. Also, in Hispanic nations, purple packages are banned since that colour is associated with death. Furthermore, blue represents masculinity in many countries like the US, but in other places such as France and Britain, red takes its place instead.

Every culture has distinct customs and behaviours that are deeply rooted in its traditions. What is really curious is that what is considered good manners in some places may be considered the opposite elsewhere.

Time is another crucial aspect characterising every culture and affecting people's work and lives in different ways. As Kaynak and Herbig state in their book *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Marketing*, a culture's attitude towards time also expresses how much the development of personal relationships in business is considered important. In many cultures it seems like there is no time to get things done and people are always very busy, so they do not spend time building long-lasting and valuable relationships, especially between work colleagues or partners. For instance, American businessmen are deadline oriented and expect meetings to respect the stated timetable since everything has been previously organised, while Latins usually show up later than the time previously established and are willing to keep the meeting going beyond its end-time, even if it is only to chat about non-related work topics. A similar concept is deep-rooted in Indonesia, where there is the so-called 'rubber time', meaning that time is elastic and if something considered more important than business comes up, such as a wedding or work, meetings easily get postponed.

Every culture also has a defined way of communicating without speaking. Managers need to understand how to correctly interpret other countries' nonverbal communication patterns and behaviours not only to understand how their foreign partners feel about their transactions but also not to appear rude or disrespectful.

Nonverbal behaviours include facial expressions, gestures and body movements, eye contact, posture and touch and they are also used independent of verbal communication.

Free Trade Zones: Free trade zones (FTZs) promote increased trade and exports by offering favourable conditions for businesses, leading to a boost in GDP. These zones attract foreign direct investment (FDI) and facilitate job creation, stimulating economic activities and enhancing overall productivity. Furthermore, the infrastructure improvements associated with FTZs, such as better roads and ports, not only benefit the zones but also host communities and adjacent regions, contributing to economic growth on a broader scale. In the realm of economic development, FTZs play a pivotal role in skill enhancement and technology transfer. Companies operating within these zones provide training, improving the expertise of the local workforce. Additionally, the transfer of advanced technologies from multinational companies fosters innovation and knowledge dissemination (Ndibe, 2007). FTZs also encourage diversification of the economy by attracting a variety of industries, reducing dependence on specific sectors and enhancing the nation's economic resilience.



Therefore, the definition of free trade zones adopted in this work is a designated geographic area within a country where goods can be imported, manufactured, processed, and exported with fewer restrictions and benefits from certain advantages aimed at reducing the cost of production and promoting economic activities. These zones are established by governments to attract foreign investment, boost exports, create jobs, and stimulate economic growth.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Free Trade Zone

Free trade zones (FTZ) have been on the policy agenda for a considerable time, but have increasingly attracted attention over the past two decades. Most low- and middle-income countries have introduced FTZ policies, leading to a 20-fold increase in the number of FTZs since the late 1980s. Estimates put the number at more than 5300 (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development UNCTAD, 2019), making them one of the dominant economic development interventions of our times.

The primary purpose of establishing FTZs is to stimulate economic growth by facilitating and promoting trade, manufacturing, and export activities. Within these zones, businesses enjoy several key benefits, including reduced or eliminated customs duties and tariffs, simplified customs procedures, and the ability to defer import duties until goods are sold in domestic markets. FTZs often attract foreign direct investment (FDI) by offering a favourable environment for business operations, which, in turn, leads to job creation, technological advancements, and the development of local industries (Stein, 2017).

The fundamental concept of Free Trade Zones (FTZs) encompasses several distinctive characteristics: (a) they are geographically bounded areas, typically secured physically; (b) they have a unified management or administrative body; (c) they provide benefits to investors located within the zone; and (d) they feature a separate customs area with duty-free advantages and simplified procedures (Foreign Investment Advisory Service, 2008). In addition, an FTZ normally operates under more liberal economic laws than those typically prevailing in the country. In general, as stated above, FTZs confer two main types of benefits, which in part explain their popularity: “static” economic benefits such as employment generation, export growth, government revenues, and foreign exchange earnings; and the more “dynamic” economic benefits such as skills upgrading, technology transfer and innovation, economic diversification, and productivity enhancement of local firms, among others (Zeng 2010).

Scholarly attention on FTZs has grown recently. Their impact in terms of employment generation, institutional reform, spill overs and investment has been extensively covered (e.g., Ambroziak & Hartwell, 2018; Ciżkowicz et al., 2017; FIAS, 2009). However, gaps remain in our understanding of the influence of FTZ policies on firms’ locational decisions. Research on the topic mostly reports aggregate employment or investment within the zones as evidence of zone impact (FIAS, 2009), but it typically does not disentangle the specific contribution of FTZs from other factors.



Investment Promotion

Countries around the world compete fiercely to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Policy makers, especially those in developing countries, hope that FDI inflows will bring much-needed capital, new technologies, marketing techniques and management skills. FDI is expected to create jobs and increase the overall competitiveness of the host economy (Torfinn & Javorcik, 2007). Promotion involves disseminating information about a product, product line, services or company. It is one of the four key aspects of the marketing mix. The other three elements are product, pricing, and place (distribution). It is generally sub divided into two parts: “above the line” and the “below the line.” The former is when it is through the media such as TV, radio, newspapers, Internet and Mobile Phones in which the advertiser pays an advertising agency to place the advert. The latter uses other promotion methods and mostly is intended to be subtle enough for the consumer to be unaware that promotion is taking place. Examples of the latter include sponsorship, product placement, endorsements, sales promotion, merchandising, direct mail, personal selling, public relations, and trade shows.

Investment promotion practitioners believe that the most effective way of attracting FDI is to focus on a few priority sectors or targeting rather than attempt to attract all types of foreign investors. Thus, an agency not engaged in targeting will promote its country as a good place to do business, while an Investment Promotion Agency (IPA) targeting particular sectors will emphasise why its country is an ideal location for investors operating in these industries. Similarly, the former IPA will attend many different types of fairs and conferences while the latter will be present only at events specific to the industries it aims to attract. (Harding & Javorcik, 2007).

The main purpose of investment promotion is to reduce the costs of FDI by providing information on business conditions and opportunities in the host economy and by helping foreign investors cut through bureaucratic procedures. Investment promotion activities encompass: advertising, investment seminars and missions, participation in trade shows, one-to-one direct marketing efforts, facilitating visits of prospective investors, matching prospective investors with local partners, helping obtain permits and approvals, preparing project proposals, conducting feasibility studies and servicing investors whose projects have already become operational (Harding & Javorcik, 2007).

It covers a wide range of areas, all with the ultimate focus on allowing investment to flow efficiently and for the greatest benefit. Investors look for an investment environment that is stable, and that offers international best practice standards of protection, including the swift and equitable resolution of investment disputes. A sound investment facilitation strategy ensures that all investment applications are dealt with fast, fairly and equitably. It also requires creating and maintaining transparent and sound administrative procedures that apply for the lifetime of the investment, including effective deterrents to corrupt practices.

Challenges Affecting Cross-Cultural Communication in Free Trade Zones

Upon listing the many ways in which cross-cultural communication has an impact on business practices all over the world, it is possible here to consider its effect on promotional activities on free trade zones.

Firstly, cross-cultural communication allows companies to engage with diverse audiences through tailored messages for specific cultural preferences and values.



Secondly, it helps with the process of building trust and credibility based on how much a free trade zone can show respect and understanding for a target culture, spreading trust and credibility throughout its community and establishing a positive brand image among prospective investors.

Thirdly, cross-cultural communication also stimulates the overcoming of language barriers: as previously stated, language is a crucial aspect of culture, so to effectively communicate across cultures not only are accurate translations of the marketing messages fundamental but also peculiar communication techniques are needed to resonate with specific cultures.

Furthermore, cross-cultural communication allows enterprises to adapt to local preferences since each culture has unique preferences and consumption patterns. Promoters are indeed called to create strategies which align with local preferences to make a zone as appealing and relevant as possible in the eyes of the target audience. This adaptability enhances the likelihood of success in international promotion. An implemented knowledge of cross-cultural communication also helps free trade zones avoid creating cultural misunderstandings. Promoters who do not research their topics enough often end up offending their audience. Crafting messages that are culturally sensitive is a key step in the process of building an effective campaign while ensuring that the zone's intentions are effectively communicated and perceived. By embracing cultural diversity and tailoring the messages accordingly, zones can maximise not only their reach, but also their impact and success in the international market of investors.

Humans are fundamentally able to communicate through the use of language, which enables them to put across their ideas, opinions, and thoughts. According to the Sapir-Whorf supposition, language affects how we think about the world and how we perceive reality (Hussein, 2012). Language functions are a medium through which cultural concepts are expressed, according to Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf. Within Nigeria's Free Trade Zones, multilingual communication plays a crucial role in fostering the growth and prosperity of commerce and economic integration. Successful trade agreements and negotiations depend on effective communication. However, there are advantages and disadvantages to linguistic adversity due to its global presence. The impact of language barriers on trade integration within Nigeria's Free Trade Zones must be acknowledged and addressed, as they can impede efficient communication and cooperation between investors and other stakeholders.

Due to the increased likelihood of businessmen and women meeting and interacting with speakers of foreign languages, language barriers are the most prevalent issue in promoting Free Trade Zones (Jenifer & Raman, 2015). It is undeniable that English is the official standard language for business worldwide and that it is the lingua franca of the modern economic world. Nevertheless, this has led to many non-native English speakers being disregarded and undervalued due to their inability to communicate and understand English and thus express themselves. Even occasionally, there is a chance that managers step aside because they can't communicate effectively across boundaries. This results in resistance and ongoing anxiety over time, and it undoubtedly lowers the productivity of Free Trade Zones (Sudhiir & Sudhiir, 2016).

Another difficulty in cross-cultural communication is stereotypes. Stereotyping is the idea that we have preconceived notions about a particular group of people and their culture, as well as value judgements, exaggerations, or overestimations. These stereotypes are the primary causes



of disagreements regarding the opposing cultures, which results in misunderstandings (Jenifer & Raman 2011; Sudhiir & Sudhiir, 2016). Some common examples of stereotypes are that Chinese people consider work to be their religion, Swiss people value precision, Nigerians are constantly late, Japanese people are forward-thinking, and Spanish people are racially insensitive and short-tempered. All of these notions are stereotypes that are harmful to a nation and its citizens and may have an impact on current or potential workers (Heyman, 2017).

Ethnocentrism and cultural relativism can also pose difficulty in promotion of businesses to operate in Free Trade Zones. A cultural superiority complex, or ethnocentrism, is the justification that one's own culture or group behaviour is superior to that of all other groups. It's a mindset wherein we unknowingly believe that our culture is unique because of our personal cultural experiences. This sensation intensifies anxiety levels, which impacts the working culture's productivity (DuPraw & Axner, 1997). The theory known as "cultural relativism" holds that one should evaluate the norms of what is right and wrong by comparing the standards and behaviours of target cultures. This becomes problematic when people assume that cultural norms, traditions, and customs that differ from those of the other culture are incorrect (Singh, 2018).

In Free Trade Zones, communication is impacted by cultural shock. When an employee unintentionally comes into contact with an unfamiliar or unexpected cultural practice, it is known as cultural shock. When workers are posted to a new country or region, they frequently experience cultural shock, which is the uncertainty and confusion brought on by encountering a foreign culture. They might not know how to behave, worry about looking foolish and losing their confidence, or experience emotional disappointment. Some people isolate themselves, and some even choose to take the next flight home. Cultural shock occurs almost everywhere, even during migration from developed to developing countries (Singh, 2014).

The mindset surrounding conflict resolution is another obstacle. A person's attitude toward conflict is very important in the global business world. Conflicts are settled differently in every culture on the planet. Americans, for instance, view conflict positively and prefer to resolve it directly and in person; in contrast, Easterners view conflict as having a negative undertone and prefer to resolve it peacefully or without allowing others to know about it (Kiss, 2005).

A productive free trade zone environment is cognizant of how various cultural decision-making styles differ. The roles that people play in making decisions differ greatly among cultures. For instance, in the US, people typically follow the rule of majority when making decisions in groups, but in Japan, reaching a consensus is the preferred method (Kiss, 2005).

Overcoming Cross-Cultural Communication Obstacles in Nigeria's Free Trade Zones Promotion

Knowledge is important to successful cross-cultural communication in a Free Trade Zone, and consequently, avoiding the pitfalls. As a result, it's critical that individuals working in Free Trade Zones recognise the potential issues that might affect communication flow in such areas, and actively work toward addressing the challenges. According to Shanthi (2014), businesses operating in Free Trade Zones have several options for addressing communication challenges. These include cautious recruitment, teaching people different languages, cross-cultural knowledge training, sustainable communication channels, and tasks allocation based on know-how and interest.



Engaging promoters for Free Trade Zones in Nigeria ought to be thoroughly examined. This can be done verbally or in writing, assessing an applicant's level of ethnocentrism before hiring them. Going further to have knowledge of how the applicant feels about the task is also very important in making sure that serving overseas is strongly supported. Further, those working in the country's Free Trade Zones should be considered for second language training, as this is the practice at the global level.

Additionally, those working in Free Trade Zones in Nigeria must acknowledge and recognise the diversity of cultures relating to values, beliefs, views and how they react to issues. To help them understand the differences in cross-cultural work environments, they ought to receive basic cross-cultural training. This closing of the gap in knowledge is pivotal in helping them to overcome communication obstacles such as cultural shock, ethnocentrism, stereotyping, and cultural relativism.

Theoretical Foundation

This research is anchored in the theories of linguistic relativity and linguistic determinism, which provide valuable insights into the complexities of cross-cultural communication within Free Trade Zones (FTZs) in Nigeria. The concept of linguistic relativity, often associated with Benjamin Lee Whorf, originated in the early 20th century. Whorf, building upon the ideas of his mentor Edward Sapir, proposed that language shapes our perception of the world and influences our thought processes. Whorf's seminal work in the 1920s and 1930s, including his essays and lectures, laid the groundwork for linguistic relativity theory. Specifically, his paper "Science and Linguistics" (1940) elucidated the impact of language on cognition and behaviour.

Conversely, linguistic determinism, another theory closely related to linguistic relativity, posits that language not only influences but also determines thought patterns and behaviours. Edward Sapir, a prominent linguist and anthropologist, introduced the idea of linguistic determinism in his writings in the late 1920s. Sapir's work emphasised the powerful role of language in shaping individuals' beliefs, attitudes, and cultural practices. His influential essay *The Status of Linguistics as a Science* (1929) laid out the foundational principles of linguistic determinism theory.

Linguistic relativity highlights the significance of linguistic diversity within FTZs, stressing the need for inclusive language policies to facilitate effective communication and mutual understanding among stakeholders. By recognizing the impact of different linguistic structures and lexicons on the transmission and comprehension of ideas, policymakers can implement language-sensitive strategies that promote transparency and integration within FTZs. On the other hand, linguistic determinism underscores the role of language in shaping laws, regulations, and trade policies. Policymakers must ensure that trade laws and regulations are accessible and comprehensible to all individuals engaged in the business activities of FTZs, regardless of their linguistic backgrounds. This approach fosters greater inclusivity, reduces miscommunication, and enhances trade efficiency in Nigerian FTZs promotion. By incorporating insights from linguistic relativity and linguistic determinism theories, this research offers a robust theoretical framework for understanding and addressing the challenges of cross-cultural communication within Nigerian FTZs. By acknowledging the influence of language on perception, cognition, and behaviour, policymakers and stakeholders can develop



more effective communication strategies and promote inclusive practices within FTZs, thereby fostering economic growth and development.

METHODOLOGY

Basically, this is a conceptual work, which provides an overview on the challenges and prospects of cross-cultural communication strategies in promoting free trade zones in Nigeria. To achieve the thrust of the paper, the researcher employed the qualitative research strategy. Data were obtained from secondary sources such as hard copies and online journals, books, newspapers, magazines, speeches and the Internet.

Discussion of Findings

From the literature reviewed on challenges and prospects of cross-cultural communication in promoting Free Trade Zones in Nigeria. The challenges include language barrier, stereotype, ethnocentrism, cultural shock, and differences in decision-making styles. This finding aligns with DuPraw and Axner's (1997) statement, which explains that international investment and business areas are usually confronted with obstacles such as differences in communication patterns, different attitudes towards conflict, diverse approaches to completing tasks, difference towards disclosure, approaches to knowing and differences in decision-making methods. This finding also agrees with the provision of linguistic relativity and linguistic determinism theories adopted in the work, which state that language shapes our perception of the world and influences our thought processes, and this is usually visible when we come in contact with people whose languages are different from ours. Linguistic determinism also applies to this paper in the sense that language not only influences but also determines thought patterns and behaviours, and this negatively affects business destinations that attract people from different places.

Further findings showed that to overcome the challenges of cross-cultural communication in Nigeria's Free Trade Zones promotion, the first thing to do is that people who work in free trade areas need to be aware of the nature of the problems that could impede communication in these settings and take proactive steps to resolve them. In view of this, hiring or recruiting in Nigerian FTZs should be carefully thought out before selection is made. A method of evaluating an applicant's degree of ethnocentrism, either orally or in writing, ought to be established prior to engaging such a person. Candidates may be considered for the position if they scored lower on tests pertaining to ethnocentrism and other potentially troublesome characteristics. In addition, findings revealed that individuals employed in Nigeria's FTZs have to be aware of the diversity of cultures in terms of values, beliefs, and perspectives, as well as how those cultures respond to problems. They should undergo basic cross-cultural training in order to better understand the distinctions between cross-cultural work environments. Also, in a diverse workplace like Nigeria's Free Trade Zones, efficient top-down and bottom-top communication is crucial. The country's trade zone owners are expected to ensure that there are open channels and avenues where people can voice news ideas, grievances, suggestions, and feedback. Warford's (2016) assertion concurs that strengthening communication that accommodates the perspective of all categories of people who transact businesses in Nigeria's Free Trade Areas through capacity building is critical to boosting activities in such zones.



CONCLUSION

The paper examined the challenges and solutions to cross-cultural communication in promoting Free Trade Zones in Nigeria, using a qualitative approach, which sourced data from hard copies and online journals, books, newspapers, magazines, speeches and the Internet. From the data obtained, the paper concludes that the challenges confronting cross-cultural communication in Nigeria's Free Trade Areas include language barrier, stereotype, ethnocentrism, cultural shock, and differences in decision-making styles. This conclusion is in line with objective one of the papers, which set out to investigate the challenges of cross-cultural communication strategies used in promoting Free Trade Zones in Nigeria. In order to address cross-cultural communication challenges in Nigeria's free trade zones, recruitment of promoters should take into cognizant those who have fewer tendencies for practising ethnocentrism. Also, training and retraining of workforce in the zones on cultural diversity is critical. This conclusion is linked to the paper's second objective, which is to evaluate the solutions of cross-cultural communication in promoting Free Trade Zones in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this research on evaluating the challenges and prospects of cross-cultural communication in promoting Free Trade Zones (FTZs) in Nigeria, the following recommendations are proposed for policymakers, businesses, and academics:

1. **Implement Language-Sensitive Strategies:** Policymakers should prioritise the development and implementation of language-sensitive strategies in promoting Nigerian FTZs. This includes adopting inclusive language policies that cater to the linguistic diversity present among stakeholders. Providing translation services, multilingual signage, and language training programmes can help bridge communication gaps and foster mutual understanding.
2. **Invest in Intercultural Training:** FTZs should invest in intercultural training programmes for their employees for promotion. These programmes should focus on using cross-cultural competence, improving communication skills, and promoting cultural sensitivity. By equipping staff with the necessary tools to navigate diverse cultural contexts, businesses can mitigate misunderstandings and build stronger relationships with partners and clients.
3. **Implement the Use of Digital Communication Tools:** Embrace digital communication tools and platforms tailored to accommodate diverse linguistic and cultural preferences. This includes utilising translation software, multilingual websites, and culturally sensitive messaging strategies. By leveraging technology, businesses can facilitate smoother and more effective communication exchanges within FTZs.
4. **Promote Collaboration and Inclusivity:** Foster collaboration among stakeholders from diverse cultural backgrounds within FTZs. Encourage dialogue, cooperation, and mutual respect among government officials, business leaders, workers, and community representatives. Emphasise the value of inclusivity and diversity in driving innovation, creativity, and economic growth within FTZs.



5. Continued Research and Evaluation: Encourage research and evaluation efforts to monitor the effectiveness of communication strategies used in promoting Nigeria FTZs. Academic institutions, research organisations, and government agencies should collaborate to collect data, identify emerging challenges, and assess the impact of interventions. This will enable stakeholders to adapt and refine their approaches to cross-cultural communication over time.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can overcome the challenges and capitalise on the prospects of cross-cultural communication within Nigeria FTZs, ultimately fostering a more inclusive, collaborative, and prosperous business environment.

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