Language of Wider Communication as a Propeller of Early Warning and Early Response in Yobe State

Clifford Irikefe Gbeyonron
Yobe State University, Nigeria
erykh01@yahoo.com
https://doi.org/10.24071/ijels.v11i2.9969
received: 6 October 2024; accepted: 27 March 2025

ABSTRACT
This work aims to establish the efficacy of language of wider communication (LWC) in coordinating early warning and early response in emergencies in Yobe State, a seemingly fragile state recovering from a fleeting insurgency. To achieve this, a researcher-made questionnaire and a semi-structured interview schedule were respectively administered to 110 and twenty-two 22 respondents who have been participating in Community Peace and Safety Partnership (CPSP) meetings – platforms supported by the British Council and funded by the European Union (EU) in 11 out of the 17 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the state – to ascertain the use of Hausa language (which is an LWC in the state) in the coordination of the meetings and the implication of that in emergency and conflict management. Similarly, participatory observation was utilized by the researcher to find the language(s) used on the platforms to coordinate the meetings. It was found that the use of the LWC has not only made emergency and conflict management inclusive but also helped in reducing conflicts and risks in the LGAs the platforms are active. This work recommends that for early warning and early response to be effective in a fragile state, the LWC should be prioritized. However, other languages should be developed to enable them to actualize their linguistic rights to participate in public discourse and emergency management.

Keywords: early response, early warning, language of wider communication, peace, safety

INTRODUCTION

Conflict becomes evident when persons or groups of persons hold incongruent positions, interests, and beliefs, to demand scarce physical and non-physical resources. Conflict occurs among individuals and within families, communities, and various domains in society and at regional levels. Conflict is a recurring human activity. However, when not well-managed, it can degenerate into violence and become endemic to human societies (United States Agency for International Development, 2012), thus affecting progress. This is because substantial economic improvements are linked to improvements in peace (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2021). For this reason, human energy and changes in policies and practices at all levels of human endeavors should be channeled to strengthen peacefulness. Thus, all attempts should be made to manage conflicts.

One of the strategies for managing conflicts is the optimal deployment of early warning systems. Early warning is characterized by the capacity of actors to initiate and diffuse timely and useful warning information to enable persons, community members, and corporate entities threatened by a hazard–conflict to imbibe readiness and be proactive in using available space and time to curtail or mitigate the possibility of harm or loss. The early warning communication is packaged into actionable messages in such a way that it would be understood by the intended recipients to inform prompt action. Early warning communication provides a basis for detecting

This work is licensed under CC BY-SA.
Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

various security hazards that may occur in isolation, simultaneously, or cascade; consequently, empowering the relevant actors to respond promptly. In a conflict and security situation, early warning informs intelligence sharing. Intelligence is any evaluated and reliable information with added value that is capable of being understood (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011). An intelligence capability is critical to the operations of security agencies. This is because intelligence capability guides security actors as they perform their duties in the identification of crime "hot spots" in various locations and the analysis of emerging violent conflicts. This is necessary because to effectively contain criminal elements and vectors of conflicts, security actors must increase their capacity through specialized training for effective monitoring and early detection of acts that pose a threat to security (Office of the National Security Adviser, 2015). It should be noted that intelligence gathering is not restricted to inter-security agencies' collaboration. In recent years, law enforcement agencies have increased outreach efforts with the civilian population to open channels of communication to address issues around security threats to counter their occurrence (World Organization for Resource Development and Education, 2016). This can be seen in community-oriented policing and networks of faith-based, community-based, and security sector collaboration that deliberate and identify early those individuals at risk of being threatened and thus engage in preventive interventions to mitigate grievances, promote alternative opportunities, and highlight the costs of pursuing violent tendencies (National Counterterrorism Center, 2014). Thus, there is a need for conflict assessment. Conflict assessment is analytically undertaken to identify and establish the dynamics of violence and instability (United States Agency for International Development, 2012). In analyzing the intelligence sourced from the early warning system, the receiver should establish the potential sources of conflict that can arise following a threat, identify possible options for avoiding or reducing these potential conflicts, and suggest actions that can address the potential conflicts envisioned. Thus, when intelligence is gathered through early warning, it must be followed up with a timely, proactive response (International Crisis Group, 2014).

In Yobe State, the outreach efforts involving community members have, in principle, strengthened effective early warning systems. Effective early-warning messaging is assured by involving communities in the development of messaging and using different communication channels to transmit messages. Actors should, however, note that to achieve success, the use of different languages – especially the language of wider communication – ensures early warning language and messages are accessible to security actors, decision-makers, and communities (UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2021). The use of language of wider communication is very important in the early warning system because the globalization of communications has provided conduits for cross-border and cross-cultural communication (Lynn II, 2019). It should be noted that the language of wider communication in a context and how it is utilized in a discourse has implications for how a particular threat is framed (Tang, 2022). Therefore, the language of wider communication should be used to create public awareness about security threats and drivers of conflicts, and the responses expected from individual and collective efforts to reduce exposure and vulnerability to the security threats. The media can be encouraged to use the language of wider communication in this direction. This is because findings from evidence-based research indicate that radio and television have played significant roles in positively changing public attitudes and behaviors on issues around identity, reconciliation, and tolerance (Ferguson, 2016). It is given that this work was conceived to establish the role of the language of wider communication in propelling early warning and early response to security threats in Yobe State.

Conflict dynamics in Yobe

Yobe State was created on 27th August 1991 from the former Borno State. There are 17 local government areas (LGAs) in the state, viz.: Bade, Bursari, Damaturu, Geidam, Gujba, Gulani, Fika, Fune, Jakusko, Karasuwa, Machina, Nangere, Nguru, Potiskum, Tarmuwa, Yunusari and Yusufari. Damaturu is the state capital. Yobe State shares borders with three states in northeast Nigeria, namely Bauchi, Borno, and Gombe, and one state in northwest

Nigeria (Jigawa), as well as the Diffa and the Zinder Regions of the Niger Republic. Despite the aridity of the northern part of Yobe State, the state is agrarian with rich fishing grounds and grazing areas. The state has mineral deposits like gypsum, kaolin, and quartz.

Yobe State is one of the disadvantaged states in Nigeria. A lot of indices seem not to favor the state. Reports from commissioned research, outcomes of the 2008 Yobe State Economic Summit, and data from the National Bureau of Statistics (2015, 2020) reveal that Yobe State has one of the lowest Gross Domestic Products in Nigeria. Even at the time of its creation, Yobe State was facing security challenges. For example, conflicts related to land and natural resources in the local government areas (LGAs) that became Yobe State predate the creation of the state. Hopes that Yobe State would develop rapidly after its creation have been eroded as successive regimes baulked at the challenges of developing a predominantly rural state. Dwindling revenue sourced from the center, environmental problems, inadequate leadership, inter-ethnic rivalries, illiteracy, lack of adequate manpower, and lack of infrastructure that would drive positive change continued to hinder development and serve as drivers of conflict. Deindustrialization, a high level of subsistence farming, and the inability of state actors to create a facilitating environment for the extraction of mineral resources continue to inhibit the development of robust and viable sources of internal revenue for the state. The result is a high rate of unemployment and under-employment. What this implies is that Yobe State, which has a poverty rate of 72.3 percent, thus, the seventh highest in the country, is underdeveloped, making youths vulnerable to being recruited into groups using violence. Deficiency in formulating and implementing a strategic socio-economic plan has made youth empowerment and overall development elusive in Yobe State. Thus, the underdevelopment and inequalities evident in the state have been triggers of youth restiveness and the concomitant conflicts generated by it. Even though gains have been made in narrowing the gender gap in access to education, social conditions, economic realities, political and governance deficits, illiteracy, environmental factors, and weak security architecture, in addition to cultural or ideological manipulations, contribute to low human development in the state. Despite the evident youth restiveness, state and non-state actors appear to be insensitive to the effect of youth restiveness on violence. Conflicts generated by youth restiveness are suppressed to engender political correctness and portray the state as 'conflict-free'.

One of the challenges the civilians that took over governance in Yobe State in 1999 inherited was banditry perpetrated by local and cross-border non-state armed groups. Even though the activities of the firearms and non-firearms-wielding bandits were contained, livestock theft, burglary, and violence by political thugs continued. Yobe State is recovering from the activities of violent non-state armed groups, which started in 2003. The first was the so-called 'Taliban'. In 2003 and 2004, some non-state armed persons who called themselves The Taliban settled in Yunusari LGA and later launched coordinated attacks on Kanamma, Geidam, Dapchi, Babbangida and Damaturu. However, their activities were curtailed by the military. By 2009, the state began to be challenged by the violent activities of members of *Jama'atulahl al-sunnah li da'awatiwal jihad* (JAS). The loose English translation JAS depicts it as a *group of Sunni people for the actualization of Jihad* (reformatory [armed] struggle).

The JAS conflict became violent in northeast Nigeria in July 2009, when non-state armed groups launched coordinated attacks on locations in Bauchi, Borno, and Yobe States. The weakness of state actors, especially the political institutions, security and intelligence apparatuses, and their failure to act proactively and/or decisively can result in threats to stability (Umar et al., 2019). Given that there is a seeming suppression of conflict instead of intensifying it, it is evident that youth restiveness because of institutional inadequacies will grow in the state. Even though the military claims that JAS has been degraded, and despite the resilience of most of the citizens of the state, there are still apprehensions among citizens of Yobe State that JAS may re-arm and make life unbearable for the citizens of the state once again. Overall, homicide, cattle rustling, rape, gender-based and domestic violence, kidnapping, burglary, drug-related offences, farmer-herder clashes, political conflicts (modern and traditional);

conflict generated by ideological differences between Islamic sects; Muslim-Christian conflict; conflict caused by rivalry among illicit drug users; indigene-settler conflict; conflict between individuals over land and property, debt and breach of agreement, conflict over land and water resources, social and political discontents; and other interpersonal conflicts define the conflict dynamics and attendant security challenges in the state.

METHOD

The study used a survey method as its research design. Surveys allow participants to express their actual behaviors or opinions through their responses to research instruments (Leedy & Ormrod, 2021). The population of the study was all the security and non-security actors that participated in Community Peace and Safety Partnership (CPSP) meetings – a platform supported by the British Council's Managing Conflict in Nigeria (BC/MCN) and funded by the European Union (EU) in 11 out of the 17 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the state, viz.: Bade, Damaturu, Geidam, Gujba, Gulani, Fika, Fune, Jakusko, Nguru, Potiskum, and Tarmuwa. It should be noted that the CPSP was conducted in the 11 LGAs mentioned. As such, the researcher used a random sampling technique in the selection of participants for the study. Researchers may wish to use a random sampling where everyone in the population has an equal chance of being asked to participate (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010).

A researcher-made questionnaire and a semi-structured interview schedule were administered to 110 and 22 respondents, respectively, who have been participating in the CPSP meetings in the LGAs. The interviews were conducted after obtaining the contents of the key informants. The five-item questionnaire and interview schedule attempt to ascertain the efficacy of using Hausa language (which is the LWC in the state) in the coordination of the meetings and the implications of that in stimulating early warning systems. Similarly, participatory observation was utilized by the researcher to find the language(s) used in the platforms for the coordination of the meetings. A simple percentage was used to analyze the data collected from the questionnaire, while qualitative analysis was used to describe the data collected from the interview schedule and participatory observation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Representation of the findings of the study

S/No.	Item	A	U	D
1.	Using language of wider communication makes the reporter confident in sending early warning message	107	3	0
2.	Using language of wider communication in the dissemination of early warning enhances timely accessibility to credible intelligence information	108	2	0
3.	Using language of wider communication in the dissemination of early warning enhances need-based and participatory counter-conflict actions	106	4	0
4.	Using language of wider communication in the dissemination of early warning facilitates social reforms	87	10	13
5.	Using language of wider communication in the dissemination of early warning enhances community ownership of conflict management mechanisms	101	6	3

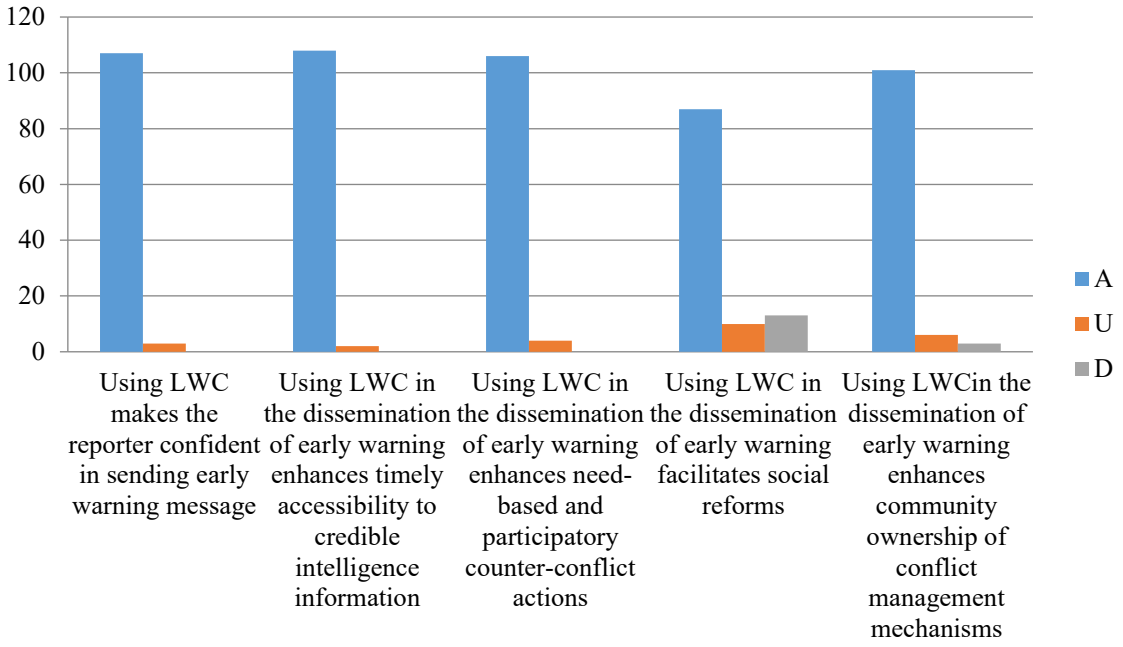


Figure 1. Graphical representation of the findings of the study

The data in Table 1 reveal that 107 respondents representing 97% of the respondents agreed that using the language of wider communication during the CPSP meetings makes the reporter confident in sending early warning messages. Conversely, 3 respondents were undecided on the subject matter. The study also shows that 98% (108) of the respondents agreed that using the language of wider communication in the dissemination of early warning enhances timely accessibility to credible intelligence information, while 2% of them were undecided. Table 1 also shows that 106 (96%) of the respondents agreed that using the language of wider communication to disseminate early warning enhances need-based and participatory counter-conflict actions, while 4% were undecided. The table also indicates that while 87 (79%) of the respondents agreed that using the language of wider communication in the dissemination of early warning facilitates social reforms, 10 (9%) were undecided, and the remaining 13 (12%) disagreed that using the language of wider communication in the dissemination of early warning facilitates social reforms.

While 92% (101) of the respondents agreed that using language of wider communication in the dissemination of early warning enhances community ownership of conflict management mechanisms, 5% (6) were undecided, and the remaining 3% (3) disagreed that using language of wider communication in the dissemination of early warning enhances community ownership of conflict management mechanisms.

Discussion

An overwhelming majority of the respondents agreed that using the language of wider communication makes the reporter confident in sending an early warning message. This agrees with the position of the key informants interviewed during the study. The respondents to the interview asserted that using any other language than the LWC would have dampened the confidence of the participants at the meetings where the early warnings were raised. Scholars agree that a lack of competence in a particular language exacerbates high communication anxiety. A person with high communication anxiety lacks confidence in communicating in a particular language and therefore manifests low self-concept (Barnes, 1977; Petry, 2016) because of the fear of making mistakes, being laughed at, being exposed to negative evaluation, and the focus of attention (Dung & Hung, 2020).

The respondents also agreed that using the language of wider communication in the dissemination of early warning enhances timely accessibility to credible intelligence

information. The key informants interviewed also confirmed that, given that the LWC is the medium of communication at the meetings, credible intelligence information is accessed promptly. It should be noted that the old notion that national security is chiefly the responsibility of formal security actors has given way to the existing reality that postulates that national security is beyond the formal security actors (Okeke, 2012). This informed the CPSP platform. Had the services of interpreters been utilized, the source information may have been distorted. For instance, given that Nigerian pidgin is an LWC, it should be recognized by the Nigerian Army as a resource for intelligence gathering and peacebuilding (Mensah, 2019).

Similarly, almost all the respondents agreed that using the language of wider communication in the dissemination of early warning enhances need-based and participatory counter-conflict actions. Counter-conflict actions that are not need-based and participatory exclude the target beneficiaries. Language can enhance exclusion when the participants at the meeting lack dexterity in the language used at the meetings (Ahumaraeze & Agwuocha, 2019). This can make the participants feel alienated from others who can understand the language used at the meetings and erode their trust in the project (Barnes, 1977).

Most of the respondents agreed that using the language of wider communication in the dissemination of early warning facilitates social reforms; 23 disagreed or were undecided. Security challenges are a recurring decimal in Nigeria. These challenges include clashes between herdsmen and farmers, banditry, kidnapping for ransom, etc., thus the need to restructure the security load on the federal government in a way that will enhance security in the entire nation (Pally, 2021). When the citizenry is allowed to provide early warning in a language they have comparative competence, the government will be able to interpret the message in such a way that the drivers and triggers of conflict can be understood to mitigate the escalation of conflict.

Most of the respondents agreed that using the language of wider communication in the dissemination of early warning enhances community ownership of conflict management mechanisms. Nine (9) of them disagreed or were undecided. The use of LWC has a significant impact on taking ownership of the conflict management mechanism because it minimizes distrust and enhances adherence to the terms of the agreement. Thus, when LWC is used based on the principle of emotional empathy, clarity, good command of language, and listening skills, it would lead to an early response that will resolve the conflict in a win-win manner.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to reveal the efficacy of using the language of wider communication in enhancing early warning and early response in conflict and fragile situations in Yobe State. Conflicts escalate when they are not addressed at their budding stage. With early warning, relevant stakeholders are alerted to take proactive measures against conflict instead of reacting to it after it has occurred. In Yobe State – a state recovering from the effects of the activities of non-state armed groups – the Managing Conflict in Nigeria (a British Council program funded by the European Union) supported the convening of a monthly Community Peace and Safety Partnership which served as a platform for formal and non-formal security actors and representatives of different interest groups in the community to meet and discuss issues around security, stability and safety thus enhancing the gathering of intelligence around early warning that could inform early response. Given the primacy of security to development, the meetings were held in the language of wider communication – Hausa language – in all 11 locations where the meetings were held. Using the language of wider communication makes the reporter confident in sending early warning messages and breeds timely accessibility to credible intelligence information. In addition, using it in the dissemination of early warning enhances need-based and participatory counter-conflict actions, facilitates social reforms community ownership of conflict management mechanisms. Given the impact of using LWC on the platform, this study concludes that LWC is a veritable tool for enhancing early warning and early response to conflict-related issues in cosmopolitan settings.

REFERENCES

Ahumaraeze, C. I., & Agwuocha, U. A. (2019). My tongue seems to have failed me: Language as an exclusion parameter in trans-national migration. *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*, *2*(3), 148–165. https://acjol.org/index.php/jassd/article/view/2718/2678

Barnes, R. E. (1977, May 29–June 4). *Communication anxiety: A psychotherapeutic perspective* [Paper presentation]. International Communication Association Conference, Berlin, Germany.. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, ERIC. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED137861.pdf

Dung, L. Q., & Hung, T. L. (2020) Speaking anxiety and language proficiency among EFL at a university in Vietnam. *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*, *3*(9), 124–133. https://doi.org/10.47191/ijsshr/v3-i9-01

Ferguson, K. (2016). *Countering violent extremism through media and communication strategies: A review of the evidence*. Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security Research. https://cve-kenya.org/media/library/Ferguson_2016_Countering_violent_extremism_though_media_and_communication_strategies.pdf

Institute for Economics and Peace. (2021*). Economic value of peace: Measuring the global economic impact of violence and conflict*. Vision of Humanity https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/EVP-2021-web-1.pdf

International Crisis Group. (2014). *Curbing violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram insurgency*. https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/nigeria/216-curbing-violence-nigeria-ii-boko-haram-insurgency

Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. E. (2021). *Practical research: Planning and design* (12th ed.). Pearson Education Limited.

Lynn II, J. A. (2019). *Another kind of war: The nature and history of terrorism*. Yale University Press.

Mensah, E. (2019). The new language policy of the Nigerian Army: National integration or linguistic imperialism? *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, *54*(3), 331–345. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909618812912

Mitchell, M. L., & Jolley, J. M. (2010). *Research design explained* (7th ed.). Wadsworth.

National Bureau of Statistics. (2015). *Nigerian gross domestic product report: Quarter two 2015* (Issue 06). https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/elibrary/read/315

National Bureau of Statistics. (2020). 2019 *poverty and inequality in Nigeria: Executive summary*. https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/elibrary/read/1092#:~:text=In%20Nigeria%2040.1%20percent%20of,below%20137%2C430%20Naira%20per%20year.

National Counterterrorism Center. (2014). *Countering violent extremism: A guide to practitioners and analysts*. Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services. https://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/sites/dcjs.virginia.gov/files/cve_guide_for_practitioners_and_analysts.pdf

Office of the National Security Adviser (2015). *Policy brief: Understanding the complex causes and processes of radicalization, violence and conflict*. ONSA.

Okeke, F. A. (2012). Language can: Ensuring national security through effective use of language. *African Research Review*, *6*(4), 216–233. https://doi.org/10.4314/afrrev.v6i4.15

Pally, A. E. (2021). Restructuring, national security and Nigeria's relationship with the external world. *UJAH: Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities*, *21*(4), 34–52. https://doi.org/10.4314/ujah.v21i4.2

Petry, A. C. (2016). *Communication apprehension affects performance* (Master's essay). John Carroll University. https://collected.jcu.edu/mastersessays/49/

Tang, C. (2022). 'Amber alert' or 'heatwave warning': The role of linguistic framing in mediating understandings of early warning messages about heatwaves and cold spells. *Applied Linguistics, 43*(2), 227–248. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amab020

Umar, A., Mohammed, A. A., & Sayed, U. M. (2019). Post-conflict peace-building and the way forward: The impact of insurgency of Boko Haram on the people of Yobe State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 9*(6), 393–406. https://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v9-i6/5959

UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. (2021). *Inclusive and accessible multi-hazard early-warning systems: Learning from women-led early-warning systems in The Pacific.* UNDRR. https://wrd.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Inclusive%20And%20Accessible%20Multi-hazard%20Early-warning%20Systems.pdf

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2011). *Criminal intelligence: Manual for analysts*. UNODC. https://www.unodc.org/documents/organized-crime/Law-Enforcement/Criminal_Intelligence_for_Analysts.pdf

United States Agency for International Development (2012). *Conflict assessment framework*. USAID.

World Organization for Resource Development and Education. (2016). *Developing a community-led approach to countering violent extremism (CVE): An instructor's manual*. WORDE. https://www.cvereferenceguide.org/sites/default/files/resources/Developing%20a%20Community-Led%20Approach%20to%20Countering%20Violent%20Extremism%20%28CVE%29%20by%20WORDE.pdf