

# LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION SUSTAINABILITY, GROWTH, AND RESILIENCE IN ENTREPRENEURIAL VENTURES ACROSS ANGLOPHONE AND FRANCOPHONE WEST AFRICAN BUSINESS CONTEXTS

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## Abstract

*This paper examines language proficiency and strategic communication sustainability, growth, and resilience in entrepreneurial ventures across Anglophone and Francophone West African business contexts. Language is conceptualised as a functional and strategic resource that facilitates regulatory compliance, stakeholder engagement, marketing effectiveness, negotiation processes, and internal organisational coordination. Language and communication skills constitute critical instruments for sustainable entrepreneurship within dynamic and competitive business environments. Core communication competencies - listening, speaking, reading, and writing - are identified as essential capabilities that enhance trust formation, customer retention, partnership development, and adaptive responses to market changes. In contrast, inadequate communication practices are associated with operational inefficiencies, reputational risks, and increased likelihood of business failure. Sustainable entrepreneurship is positioned as encompassing financial, relational, ethical, and institutional dimensions, all of which are mediated through language practices. The paper concludes that the integration of structured communication training into entrepreneurship education and capacity-building programmes is necessary to strengthen long-term enterprise sustainability. The study contributes to entrepreneurial competence literature by establishing language and communication skills as foundational tools for sustainable enterprise development.*

**Keywords:** Language Proficiency, Strategic Communication, Sustainability, Growth, Resilience of Entrepreneurial Ventures

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Language Proficiency and Strategic Communication Sustainability, Growth, and Resilience in Entrepreneurial Ventures across Anglophone and Francophone West African Business Contexts

## Introduction

Language is the ethnocultural artifact that reinforces the bond of relationships within a particular society, as well as the linchpin of communication between a society and its neighbours. In the Franco-anglophone or Anglo-francophone contexts, effective use of language, usually by way of translation and interpretation, is the lifeblood of communication between both the Anglophone and Francophone worlds. Language functions as a fundamental tool for operational processes in business. In small-scale enterprises, language supports regulatory compliance, instruction delivery, stakeholder engagement, learning, creativity, and representation (Adeyemi, 2020; Eze & Okonkwo, 2019). Effective communication facilitates navigation of business processes, operational clarity, and regulatory adherence. Inadequate or incorrect communication can limit business growth, reduce customer engagement, and increase the risk of operational failure (Owolabi, 2021; Nwankwo, 2018). Language and communication skills are foundational and indispensable tools for sustainable entrepreneurship, acting as the lifeblood that enables business transactions, fosters relationships, and drives innovation. Effective communication, particularly in a dominant language like English, allows entrepreneurs to navigate risks, attract investment, and maintain business operations, even during challenging economic periods. An entrepreneur is expected to possess proficiency in multiple languages to enhance business competence and expand operational effectiveness. Effective communication - encompassing listening, speaking, reading, and writing - is critical for managing human resources, persuading stakeholders, building customer relationships, and navigating competitive markets.

Entrepreneurship is widely acknowledged as a central driver of economic growth, innovation, and employment generation. However, escalating global challenges - climate instability, youth

unemployment, environmental degradation, and social inequality - have necessitated a shift from conventional entrepreneurship toward sustainability-oriented enterprise development. Sustainable entrepreneurship integrates economic performance with environmental and social objectives, emphasising long-term value creation. Global policy frameworks, particularly those advanced and implemented by the United Nations, underscore education as a mechanism for achieving sustainable development objectives. Similarly, the UNESCO emphasises competency-based education that fosters communication, collaboration, and sustainability literacy.

This paper first clarifies key concepts, then outlines the theoretical framework, reviews relevant literature, presents a conceptual model, and concludes with practical implications for bilingual entrepreneurship education.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite these global policy frameworks implemented at national and sub-national levels, entrepreneurship education within vocational and business institutions often prioritises accounting, marketing, operations and innovation management, while structured entrepreneurial/business communication training remains peripheral. However, entrepreneurial practice is inherently communicative. Venture creation requires articulation of vision, negotiation of contracts, persuasion of investors, mobilisation of human capital, engagement with communities and transparent sustainability reporting. Inadequate communication competence may therefore undermine otherwise viable sustainable ventures. This paper examines the role of language proficiency and strategic communication in promoting the sustainability, growth and resilience of entrepreneurial ventures.

### **Customer Engagement and Interpersonal Communication**

Effective communication influences customer relations in many ways. Precise and structured interactions contribute to customer retention and satisfaction (Bello & Musa, 2021). Miscommunication can result in dissatisfaction, negative reviews, and decreased business engagement (Nwankwo, 2018). Evidence indicates that structured interpersonal communication correlates with higher levels of customer satisfaction and repeat business (Owolabi, 2021).

### **Marketing and Promotional Communication**

Language use in marketing and branding affects business outcomes either positively or negatively. Clear and accurate promotional messages increase customer engagement, whereas ambiguous messages may misinform consumers and reduce credibility (Eze & Okonkwo, 2019). Small enterprises with limited marketing resources benefit from strategic communication in advertising, social media, and other promotional channels, enhancing visibility and market differentiation (Bello & Musa, 2021).

### **Creativity, Learning, and Representation**

Effective language acquisition and effective usage facilitate knowledge acquisition, networking and representation. Effective communication supports learning from industry developments, adoption of best practices and stakeholder engagement (Adeyemi, 2020). Structured and creative language use enables the development of distinct marketing strategies and business positioning (Eze & Okonkwo, 2019).

### **Consequences of Ineffective Communication**

Inadequate or incorrect communication can lead to operational errors, regulatory penalties and reduced customer engagement (Owolabi, 2021). Persistent communication failures are associated

with stagnation, reduced market share and potential business closure (Nwankwo, 2018). Language competence serves as a strategic operational tool essential for business sustainability and growth.

### Conceptual Clarifications

#### Communication Competence as a Function of Language Proficiency and Efficiency

Language proficiency refers to the capacity to effectively employ spoken and written language in professional and intercultural contexts. Within entrepreneurial settings, effective language competence encompasses clarity of expression, persuasive business writing, report preparation, intercultural adaptability and strategic audience alignment (communication stratégique) (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972). Communication competence extends beyond linguistic accuracy to include what may be described in professional communication studies as maîtrise de la communication professionnelle (mastery of professional communication). The scope of communication competence include:

- i) Oral presentation capability (puissance de la présentation orale)
- ii) Interpersonal interaction skills (interaction interpersonnelle)
- iii) Negotiation and persuasion proficiency (compétence de la négociation et de la persuasion)
- iv) Non-verbal communication awareness (conscience de communication non-verbale)
- v) Digital communication literacy (communication numérique)
- vi) Conflict management capability (capacité gestion des conflits communicationnels)
- vii) Cross-cultural communication adaptability (adaptabilité de la communication interculturelle)

Competence, as exemplified in the above-listed competences, is defined by both contextual appropriateness and communicative

effectiveness, sometimes referred to in communication scholarship as pertinence communicative and efficacité discursive (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984).

### Sustainable Entrepreneurship

Sustainable entrepreneurship involves opportunity recognition and venture creation that simultaneously generate economic value and address environmental and social challenges (Dean & McMullen, 2007; Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011). In entrepreneurship scholarship this integrated approach is often conceptualised as *entrepreneuriat durable*. It emphasises resilience, ethical responsibility, stakeholder inclusion and long-term strategic viability (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011). *Entrepreneuriat durable* emphasises resilience, ethical responsibility (*responsabilité sociale*), stakeholder inclusion (*inclusion des parties prenantes*) and long-term strategic viability (*viabilité à long terme*) (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011).

In this wise, sustainable entrepreneurship is a function of both communication competence and opportunity recognition, (*reconnaissance des opportunités entrepreneuriales*), coupled with availability of venture capital (*capital d'investissement*) for venture creation (Baron & Shane, 2008). The absence of effective communication or communication competence (*communication stratégique*) is an indication of entrepreneurial inconsistency and failure *ab-initio*, as no entrepreneurial venture can survive or achieve *pérennité organisationnelle* (organisational sustainability) without adequate and effective communication (Hisrich, Peters, & Shepherd, 2017).

### Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by the Social Marketing and the Communication Competence Theories which are found apt for this study. Collectively, these frameworks explain the relationship between capital humain, innovation entrepreneuriale, and

communication stratégique within contemporary  
entrepreneurial ecosystems.

### **Social Marketing Theory**

Social Marketing Theory (SMT) is the application of commercial marketing principles and techniques to influence voluntary behaviour change in target audiences to improve their personal welfare and that of the society. It involves the marketing mix, that is, 4Ps which are;

- i) Product: The desired behaviour change
- ii) Price: Non-monetary costs like time, effort or embarrassment
- iii) Place: Channels where the new behaviour is supported and
- iv) Promotion: Communicating the benefits

It focuses on how socially beneficial information and behaviours can be promoted or communicated in order to influence behavioural change (changement de comportement social) through strategic communication (Kotler Zaltman, 1971). It addresses the communication skills required to create audience awareness and stimulate interest in new ventures. This theory is particularly relevant in developing economies where communication functions as a powerful tool for awareness creation, behavioural change and wealth generation (Kotler & Lee, 2008). Within entrepreneurial contexts, the theory highlights the role of (communication persuasive and marketing social) in creating public awareness and stimulating interest in new ventures. In developing economies particularly, communication functions as a powerful engine of economic mobilisation (mobilisation économique) and wealth creation (création de richesse) (Kotler & Lee, 2008).

Social marketing is not a science, but rather a professional craft which relies on multiple scientific disciplines to create programs designed to influence human behaviour on a large scale.

Commercial marketing targets purchase behaviours, product choice behaviours and product promotion behaviours. People are asked to buy products, switch brands and talk favorably about a company's product. Social marketing typically targets complex, often socially controversial behaviours, with delayed and distant benefits to audiences who often do not recognize they have a problem, much less are looking for a solution (Smith, 2006).

Social Marketing Theory (SMT) is highly relevant to entrepreneurial ventures in West Africa, acting as a strategic framework to blend profit-driven motives with social behaviour change, thereby driving sustainability and resilience. In the diverse Anglophone and Francophone West African contexts, it facilitates effective communication, improves language proficiency requirements. (English/French/Local Languages), and fosters cross-border business growth.

### **Communication Competence Theory**

Communication Competence Theory emphasises contextual adaptability (adaptabilité communicationnelle) and strategic message design (conception stratégique du message) (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Entrepreneurs operate within complex institutional, cultural and digital ecosystems requiring audience-sensitive communication (communication adaptée au public cible). Sustainability-oriented ventures must simultaneously navigate: regulatory discourse (discours réglementaire) investor expectations (attentes des investisseurs) consumer values (valeurs des consommateurs) community engagement (engagement communautaire) Communication competence therefore functions as a structural enabler of sustainable enterprise integration (intégration entrepreneuriale durable) (Keyton, 2017). Communication competence therefore functions as a structural enabler of sustainable enterprise integration (Keyton, 2017).

Communication Competence Theory constitutes a foundational

framework for examining the conditions under which communication is considered effective and appropriate within specific contexts. The theory conceptualizes communication competence not merely as linguistic ability, but as the capacity to utilize language strategically in a manner that aligns with situational, social, and cultural expectations while achieving intended objectives (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980).

Within this framework, communication competence is evaluated based on two principal criteria: effectiveness and appropriateness. Effectiveness refers to the extent to which communicative acts accomplish predetermined goals, whereas appropriateness denotes conformity to contextual norms, including cultural, social, and professional standards (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). In entrepreneurial settings, these dimensions are critical, as the success of business interactions is contingent upon both clarity of message and contextual alignment.

The theory is underpinned by three core components: communication knowledge, communication skills, and communication appropriateness.

Communication knowledge encompasses an understanding of linguistic structures, discourse conventions, and sociocultural norms governing interaction. This includes proficiency in grammar, vocabulary, and institutional communication practices, as well as awareness of culturally embedded expectations. In multilingual environments, such as those characterizing Anglophone and Francophone West Africa, such knowledge extends to cross-linguistic and cross-cultural competencies (Canale & Swain, 1980).

Communication skills refer to the operational ability to encode and decode messages effectively. These include verbal and written expression, listening proficiency, and the interpretation of non-verbal cues. Within entrepreneurial contexts, these skills are essential for negotiation processes, stakeholder engagement, market communication, and network formation (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Linguistic proficiency in dominant regional languages,

particularly English and French, enhances the execution of these communicative functions.

Communication appropriateness involves the adaptation of communicative behavior to situational variables. This includes the regulation of tone, timing, formality, and interactional style in accordance with contextual demands. In cross-cultural business environments, appropriateness necessitates sensitivity to divergent norms and expectations that shape interactional dynamics (Hymes, 1972).

The relevance of Communication Competence Theory to this study is evident in its alignment with the constructs of language proficiency and strategic communication. Language proficiency serves as a foundational element of communication competence, influencing the capacity to participate effectively in business interactions. In contexts characterized by linguistic diversity, the ability to navigate both Anglophone and Francophone systems constitutes a critical determinant of communicative effectiveness.

Furthermore, the theory provides explanatory insight into the relationship between communication competence and key entrepreneurial outcomes, including sustainability, growth, and resilience. Effective and contextually appropriate communication facilitates trust formation, strengthens stakeholder relationships, and enhances coordination, thereby contributing to organizational sustainability. In terms of growth, communication competence supports market expansion, network development, and resource acquisition. With respect to resilience, it enables the management of conflict, adaptation to environmental changes, and the maintenance of stakeholder confidence under conditions of uncertainty.

Notwithstanding its analytical utility, the theory exhibits certain limitations. Its primary focus on individual-level competencies constrains its capacity to account for organizational, institutional, and systemic determinants of performance. Additionally, the constructs of effectiveness and appropriateness present challenges in operationalization and empirical measurement, given their context-

dependent nature (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). The framework also provides limited consideration of exogenous factors, including economic constraints, regulatory environments, and infrastructural conditions, which may significantly influence entrepreneurial outcomes.

In summary, Communication Competence Theory offers a rigorous conceptual basis for analyzing the role of language proficiency and strategic communication in entrepreneurial contexts. It emphasizes the importance of context-sensitive and goal-oriented communication practices, while also indicating the need for complementary theoretical perspectives to capture broader structural and environmental influences. It also provides the foundation for understanding how language proficiency enhances entrepreneurs' ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts, thereby influencing business sustainability, growth, and resilience in West Africa.

## Literature Review

### Communication Skills, Entrepreneurial Intention and Resource Mobilisation

Empirical research demonstrates that communication competence enhances entrepreneurial self-efficacy (auto-efficacité entrepreneuriale) and entrepreneurial intention (intention entrepreneuriale) (Bandura, 1997; Zhao, Seibert, & Hills, 2005). Individuals possessing advanced compétences communicationnelles exhibit greater confidence in opportunity exploitation (exploitation des opportunités) and venture initiation (création d'entreprise). Access to venture capital (accès au capital-risque) and strategic partnerships (partenariats stratégiques) is significantly influenced by persuasive communication and effective présentation de projet entrepreneurial (venture pitching). Communication competence also facilitates networking (réseautage entrepreneurial) and exposure to information critical for opportunity recognition (Baron & Shane, 2008).

Communication effectiveness is also a determinant of access to venture capital and strategic partnerships (Chen, Greene, & Crick, 1998). Access to venture capital (accès au capital-risque) and strategic partnerships (partenariats stratégiques) is significantly influenced by persuasive communication and effective présentation de projet entrepreneurial (venture pitching). Venture pitching effectiveness, clarity of business modelling and articulation of sustainability objectives are critical determinants of investor confidence (Hisrich et al., 2017). Communication deficiencies may therefore compromise crédibilité organisationnelle (organisational credibility) and resource acquisition capacity.

### Language Proficiency, Market Expansion, and Sustainability Reporting

Globalisation has intensified the importance of multilingual competence (compétence multilingue) in entrepreneurial activities (Cavusgil, Knight, & Riesenberger, 2014). Proficiency in dominant business languages expands access to international markets (marchés internationaux), digital platforms (plateformes numériques), and cross-border collaboration (collaboration transnationale). Within multicultural domestic contexts, local language competence strengthens confiance du client (client confidence) and social inclusion (inclusion sociale) (Thomas & Peterson, 2017). Examples of this language competence manifest in bilingual and multilingual franca workplaces in countries such as Canada and the UK, where bilingual or multilingual workers and professionals are paid higher wages and have better opportunities at rising in the corporate hierarchy. Nigeria's several attempts to institute this system of rewarding bilingual or multilingual competence fell short of achieving its intended goals due to policy somersaults and government inconsistencies. Moreover, France is also at the forefront of sustainability reporting, by implementing the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), which requires strict, audited reporting on sustainability from 2025 onwards, affecting

European and large foreign subsidiaries. (Latham and Watkins 2025). These initiatives demonstrate a strong link between language competence, regional market adaptability, and robust, audited sustainability reporting in Anglo-French business environments.

Sustainable entrepreneurship also requires transparent communication of environmental and social impact, commonly described as *rapport de durabilité* (sustainability reporting) and *communication de responsabilité sociale* (CSR communication) (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011). Language competency and adaptability, therefore, contribute to sustainable competitive positioning. Sustainability reporting, ethical branding, and corporate social responsibility disclosures require structured written communication (Elkington, 1997). Enterprises that effectively communicate sustainability commitments demonstrate stronger stakeholder loyalty and reputational resilience. (*résilience organisationnelle*) (Elkington, 1997).

### **Conceptual Model of Digital Communication and Entrepreneurial Sustainability**

Digital transformation has redefined entrepreneurial communication modalities, particularly through *communication numérique stratégique* (digital strategic communication) (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media branding, online stakeholder engagement, and virtual investment pitching demand advanced digital communication literacy. Sustainable entrepreneurs leverage digital platforms to disseminate eco-friendly practices (*pratiques écologiques*) and promote ethical sourcing (*approvisionnement éthique*) and engage sustainability-oriented consumer segments (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Entrepreneurs now rely on: social media branding (*image de marque numérique*), online stakeholder engagement (*engagement numérique des parties prenantes*), and virtual investment pitching (*présentation virtuelle aux investisseurs*). The proposed

framework identifies communication competence as a multidimensional independent variable comprising:

- i) Language proficiency (*maîtrise linguistique*)
- ii) Oral communication (*communication orale*)
- iii) Written communication (*communication écrite*)
- iv) Interpersonal communication (*communication interpersonnelle*)
- v) Digital communication (*communication numérique*)

These competences influence sustainable entrepreneurship outcomes both directly and indirectly through mediating variables such as:

- i) Entrepreneurial self-efficacy (*auto-efficacité entrepreneuriale*)
- ii) Stakeholder trust (*confiance des parties prenantes*)
- iii) Resource accessibility (*accessibilité aux ressources*)
- iv) Innovation acceptance (*acceptation de l'innovation*) (Rogers, 2003).

The dependent construct - sustainable entrepreneurship performance - includes:

- i) Environmental responsibility
- ii) Social impact integration
- iii) Long-term financial resilience (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011)

The model suggests that communication competence enhances sustainability outcomes through strengthened legitimacy, stakeholder alignment and innovation diffusion.

### **Method**

A conceptual research design was adopted, involving systematic synthesis of interdisciplinary literature across entrepreneurship, communication studies, sustainability education, and vocational training scholarship (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, and theoretical contributions were analysed to identify convergent patterns linking

communication competence with sustainable entrepreneurial outcomes.

This conceptual paper employs a systematic integrative review approach (Torraco, 2016; Snyder, 2019). Literature was sourced from Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and African Journals Online (2010–2026) using keywords: 'language proficiency OR strategic communication' AND 'sustainable entrepreneurship' AND ('Anglophone' OR 'Francophone' OR Nigeria OR Cameroon OR France). Inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed articles and policy documents linking communication competence to SME outcomes. 87 sources were screened; 42 were synthesised thematically.

## Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that communication competence constitutes a structural determinant of sustainable entrepreneurship. Sustainable ventures operate within dynamic socio-economic systems requiring continuous negotiation, persuasion, and stakeholder dialogue (Keyton, 2017).

Communication deficits may impede innovation adoption, reduce investor confidence, and weaken stakeholder engagement (Rogers, 2003). Sustainability-oriented entrepreneurship often involves behavioural change advocacy. Consumers must be persuaded to adopt environmentally responsible products or services that may involve higher initial cost or altered consumption patterns (Kotler & Lee, 2008). Effective communication is therefore indispensable for market penetration. Moreover, digital ecosystems amplify the significance of communication competence. Entrepreneurs lacking digital communication literacy risk exclusion from global networks and sustainability discourse (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Vocational and business education institutions must therefore prioritise communication skill development within

entrepreneurship curricula. Competency-based pedagogical models are particularly appropriate (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Experiential learning activities - including business pitching simulations, negotiation exercises, sustainability reporting assignments, and digital branding workshops - facilitate applied communication mastery. Competency-based pedagogical models facilitate applied communication mastery by replacing time-based learning with mastery-based progression, focusing on measurable, real-world application of skills such as empathy, active listening, and technical proficiency. Examples include simulation-based training, 360-degree feedback, and scenario-based role-plays, ensuring learners can perform communication tasks in professional environments.

## Conclusion

Language and communication skills constitute foundational tools for sustainable entrepreneurship and development (entrepreneurial durable). These competences enhance human capital development (*développement du capital humain*), facilitate resource mobilisation (*mobilisation des ressources*), strengthen stakeholder trust (*confiance organisationnelle*) and promote innovation diffusion (Becker, 1964; Rogers, 2003). Sustainable entrepreneurial success therefore depends not only on technical expertise but also on the entrepreneur's capacity to communicate value propositions (*propositions de valeur*), ethical commitments (*engagement éthique*) and long-term impact (*impact à long terme*) effectively (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011). Business education institutions must therefore integrate *formation en communication entrepreneuriale*, (training on entrepreneurial communication), *communication stratégique*, (strategic communication), and incorporate professional linguistic competences (*compétences linguistiques professionnelles*) into their entrepreneurship curricula. Structured and experiential communication training will enable graduates to establish enterprises that are *économiquement viables*,

(economically viable, socially responsible, and *écologiquement durables* ecologically durable).

Ultimately, language remains a central instrument for entrepreneurial success. Without the effective use of the four language competences - listening, speaking, reading, and writing - entrepreneurs cannot achieve lasting entrepreneurial success (succès entrepreneurial durable) nor sustain viable small-scale enterprises. Communication curricula in vocational and business education institutions must therefore reposition communication competence as a strategic pillar of entrepreneurship training. Structured, experiential and sustainability-oriented communication education will enhance graduate capacity to establish enterprises that are economically viable, socially responsible, and environmentally resilient.

Language constitutes a fundamental instrument for achieving success across all spheres of human endeavour. Business activities cannot be effectively conducted without the appropriate use of language in its various forms and contexts (Hymes, 1972). The indispensability of language and the correct application of language skills by small-scale business owners are, therefore, critical to the sustainability of their entrepreneurial ventures.

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