

THE PROBLEMS OF TEACHING FRENCH LANGUAGE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ADAMAWA STATE: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

This paper examines the problems that hinder effective teaching and learning of French language in secondary schools in Adamawa state. The paper focuses on the need for integrating French language in to the school curriculum ,the government efforts, and the major problems militating against proper teaching and learning of French language .The paper therefore, concluded that all government efforts to effect full teaching and learning of French as Nigeria's second official language has in fact failed. However, some of the recommendations include the following: The Government should embrace a more positive attitude towards the French language learning.

Learning of French language should be made compulsory right from the primary schools to secondary schools (both public and private) in the country. Passing French language at credit level must be made compulsory for all the Arts students (as English language is in many francophone countries). This will go a long way in imposing more seriousness in the students.

Keywords: *French language; Teaching and learning, Secondary schools, problems and prospects.*

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Background of the Study

In Nigeria, the French language is a foreign language. Nigeria is surrounded by French speaking countries: like Niger Republic in the North, Benin Republic in the West, Cameroon in the East and Chad in the North-East. Therefore the importance of the language in Nigeria for social, political, economic and international relations cannot be overemphasized. The use of language is to facilitate communication, to promote understanding between language originator and language recipient and to enable useful, appropriate and efficient action to take place Moody(1970).According to Adekunle (1976),the language policy of every country should make provision for the policy areas of communication; internal communication, internal and scientific or technical communication. French is one of the international language which is most widely used in commerce, scientific and technology research, administration, education, literature etc. With the gained knowledge of French language, Nigerians and francophone countries will be able to work hand in hand in areas of science and technology. This cannot be achieved if French teachers are not employed or if those employed are not encouraged to be teaching the language. French language was introduced into the education system of Nigeria just after English. The French language native speakers from France and other francophone countries were brought into the country to come to teach the language in the Nigerian secondary schools throughout the country.

In recent, the Nigerian government began chasting out the teaching of French language in secondary schools. Today, French language native speakers teachers are no more found in and the already existing ones were made to teach other subjects like English , social studies, literature in English, History to mention but only few. The attitude of Nigerians towards the study of French language in our schools is that most of these people are not well informed about the important of French in our educational system as an international language. This is because they assume that people should not waste time going to school to study French language. The assumption has misled some of the students and parents that they do not pay interest in studying the language.

The above problems and a lot of others were researched into. Nigeria, though an Anglophone country is surrounded by francophone countries as it has been earlier mentioned. Ogunkeye,(2007),stated while pointing out the importance of French language in Nigeria, which is surrounded by francophone countries. Onyemelukwe and Adie-Offiong (2004):38) described Nigeria as: “an Anglophone country in a sea of francophone”.

Though, the geographical location of Nigeria as a country has made French language necessary in the country. Onyemelukwe (1995) has observed that Nigeria needs the knowledge of French so as to have a healthy relation with the francophone neighbors. Igonor (2011) opined that “-----for Nigeria to enter a relation of mutual benefits with these nations , it is imperative, at least to some extent, for her to communicate with these countries in their own official language- French. “French language in fact promotes global communication in all spheres of life-education, commerce religion and politics”. Ogunkeye (2007) gave about four reasons for takeoff of French in Nigeria:

- a. Nigeria is surrounded by francophone countries therefore French as an official language will facilitate communication and interaction with the country's neighbours.
- b. In a world that is fast becoming a globalized village, French can only be an advantage. There will be access to foreign materials and other opportunities available in terms of communication, technology, and international politics.
- c. There will be also job opportunities for individuals in organizations such as African union, United Nations, UNESCO and other multinational companies who require their employees to speak French especially at various embassies.
- d. The seat of ECOWAS is in Abuja, Nigeria; there are nine (9) francophone and five (5) Anglophone countries in ECOWAS. French therefore is the natural choice being the language of the majority.

Ogunbiyi (2012) also backed the opinion of the others by claiming that "Since Nigeria is surrounded by French speaking countries, the importance of the language in Nigeria for social, political, economic and international relations cannot be overemphasized". Despite the stated fact above mentioned importance of French to Nigerian citizens, still the language is yet to be taken so serious. The general objective of this study is to assess the problems on the way of teaching and learning of French language and to find solution in the secondary schools in Adamawa state.

The Nigerian Government Effort to Introduce French Language

The government of Nigeria has on many occasions expressed their needs to adopt French language as Nigerian's second official language. At the end, the adoption setup has turned to be a political linked. While in the 70^s and 80^s, most of secondary schools in Nigeria were offering French as a subject-at least for the first three years. But today, in this country even after the so called adoption as a second official language, most of the public schools are no more offering French as a subject.

Before 1997, French was an optional foreign language in schools. But: late in 1997, the Nigerian government gave new status of French language as the nation's second official language which was affirmed by late General Sani Abacha, former head of state in Ouagadougou Burkina Faso in 1996. Binbo Fisayo, an educationist, speaking to the Daily Champion African News (2005), stresses the importance of speaking and also understanding a second international language, especially the French language. From the above accounts so far given, the desire for French language in Nigeria according to Emordi (1986), in Nigerians geographical, economic, political, and diplomatic as well as her educational research, makes it imperative for her to give enough attention to the teaching and learning of the French language. Therefore Nigeria become officially, an English/French bilingual and this was documented in the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1998 (Ogunkeye, 2007). Still 2016, the Federal government re-stated the new status of teaching French language across the country that "all levels of the country's education system, from primary up to tertiary, must offer courses in French language". (Daily Trust, 2016). This paper endeavours to identify some of the problems that militate against effective teaching of French language in schools in Nigeria.

Benefits of the French Language

In spite of all these plights, French studying and speaking can be of vital benefits to Nigerians because French and English are the official working languages of the United Nations, UNESCO, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), International Labour Bureau, the International Olympic Committee, the 31-Member Council of Europe, the European Community, the Universal Postal Union, the Union of International Association (UIA), Interpol, Amnesty International, and World Health Organization (W.T.O) amongst others (Nathan, 2007 & Shryock 1997 -2008). Furthermore, French is the dominant working language at the European Court of Justice, the European Tribunal of First Instance and the Press Room at the European Commission in Brussels, Belgium (Shryock1997-2008).

Also, French plays a crucial role in the official lives of most African states. This is because 22% of the world's French is in black Africa alone (Ajiboye, 2002). Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco account for 11% of the world's official use of French, Africa as a whole account for 33% of the French used for official or administrative purposes in the world. In relative terms, it could be argued that outside France, which in any case, does not constitute more than 50% of the total output of French, Africa is the most important center of French practice in the world.

In Nigeria during the eight All African Games of October 4, 2003 which had delegates from 52 African countries physically present, the reporting of events was done in English and French. In fact the welcome address by the Nigerian former President Olusegun Obasanjo was in English but interpreted in French. It is also used in conferences, seminars and presentation of academic papers in various forms that its vital needs cannot be neglected.

Furthermore, Aja Nwachukwu during his speech on the occasion of the signing of the funding agreement for the "Fonds De Soidarite Prioritaire" ; Project No. 2006 - 89, Abuja summarized the benefits of French language as follows:

1. Promotion of inter-cultural tolerance and cooperation
2. Provision of additional opportunities for employment
3. Access to a larger market within the West African sub region land outside it, given the fact that seven out of sixteen ECOWAS countries are francophone
4. Offer a means of belonging to the organization like francophone and other Anglophone countries;
5. Help the unification process in the West African sub-region and ultimately in integration of the African continent
6. Offer a means of competing more favorably with the other countries
7. Provide access to varied source and quality of information needed for general development f Nigeria

Provide accelerated access to such developments in science and technology and other areas of knowledge in the francophone world that will be of benefit to the Nigerian citizens and nation Aja Nwachukwu, (2008).

The Objectives of Teaching and Learning French at the Secondary School Level

The objectives of teaching and learning French at the secondary level is, to facilitate interaction with our neighbours French-speaking countries like Cameroun, Chad, Niger and Benin. The National Policy on Education however, the précised objectives of French at the Junior Secondary School level, as been outlined in the *National Curriculum for Junior Secondary School* (2001). That at the end of their three year, learners should be able to:

1. Understand French expressions necessary for seeking and obtaining solutions to his/her immediate personal problems and or satisfying his or her needs such as, attracting peoples' attention, asking for information etc.
2. Understand verbal narration of events, within their range of experiences that have already taken place.
3. To understand simple verbal introductions of events, plans and projects yet to take place.
4. To read correctly and with understanding including oral and written French, appropriately to the situations outlined in (i-iii) above.
5. To use intelligently and appropriately, oral expressions structure that is related to the situation outline (i-iv) above.
6. To be good in conventional letter writing, French language activities in the situation outlined in (i-iv) above.

However, the general objectives of French at the senior secondary school level as stated in National Curriculum for senior Secondary Schools French (2001) are as follows:

- i. To teach the learners to communicate in French language through the systematic use of the lively communicative method.
- ii. To widen the scope of the learners' knowledge about the French and French speaking world.
- iii. To assist the teacher in his presentation of the subject in the simplest possible manner, in order to sustain the interest of the learners.
- iv. To encourage teachers to lead the learners to use French language as a tool for enhancing technological excellence in whatever discipline they may choose in future.
- v. To encourage the innovative capacity of the teacher who should be able to improve on materials in order to enhance effective delivery.
- vi. To be the synthesis of past Nigerian syllabuses as well as those of other countries and benefit from the experience of the past in order to fit into the present modern Nigerian context.
- vii. To help textbook developers to produce teaching materials that will adequately reflect the communicative method approach in modern language learning.

The Importance of French in Nigeria

The geographical location of Nigeria as a country has made French language learning necessary in the country. Onyemelukwe (1995) observed that Nigeria needs the knowledge of French so as to have a healthy relation with the francophone neighbours. Igonor (2011) opined that "... For Nigeria to enter a relation of mutual benefits with these

nations, it is imperative, at least to some extent, for her to communicate with these countries in their own official language - French" Onyemelukwe and Adie Offiong (2004) buttressed the point by claiming that "Bilingualism is relevant to communication not only with our francophone neighbours but with other French speaking countries of the world. In short, it promotes global communication in all spheres of life- education, commerce, religion, and politics". Ogunkeye (2007) gave four reasons for adoption of French in Nigeria. He is of the opinion that since Nigeria is surrounded by francophone countries the knowledge of French will facilitate communication with the citizens of the neighbouring countries.

He also asserted that since the francophone countries form majority in ECOWAS, it will be better for Nigerian citizens to understand French. The third reason he advanced is that the knowledge of French is necessary since French is now gaining more ground in the world. The last reason the knowledge of French can guarantee job opportunities for Nigerian citizens in foreign organizations. Ogunbiyi (2012) also joined the opinion of the others by asserting that "Since Nigeria is surrounded by French speaking countries, the importance of the language in Nigeria for social, political, economic and international relations cannot be overemphasized." In spite of the above-mentioned importance of French language to Nigerian citizens, the language is yet to be taken serious.

The importance of the French language cannot be over emphasized because Nigeria is surrounded like an island by these francophone countries that speak French. Therefore, knowledge of the French language will not only be of social, economical, political, and cultural benefit to Nigeria but also help in conflict negotiation and resolution at the international forum. Furthermore, it will enhance Nigerians academic and professional capabilities and potentials apart from enhancing good friendliness with our neighbours. There will be large employment opportunities for our youths and graduates that room about the streets and corners of Nigeria in search of greener pastures.

Most importantly, knowledge of French will widen ones horizon especially now that the world is becoming flattened as a result of globalization. To Aje, 2008 "proficiency in French would definitely open the horizon and prepare the individual for a better future". Another importance of French could be seen in the recruitment exercise carried out by International Organization which showed that in the various types of professional positions, five required French, two Spanish, one Portuguese and one Arabic (Shryock, 2006 cited the UN Employment Information and Assistance Unit Bureau Release Paper Dec. 1, 2000). He further cited the recent listing of International jobs (7/03/08) distributed by the US State Department as follows: 125 preferred French; while 31 Spanish, 25 required a UN language (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish); 10 Preferred Portuguese, 7 Arabic, 4 Russian and 2 German. In the same vein, Aje (2008) as reported by Tunde Ogunsola in Education times (March-April 2008) recalled with pains how a Nigerian lost the job of the General Secretary of the United Nations because of his inability to speak French. And up till today, Nigeria has not gotten that seat. All these show the great importance of the French language which makes it imperative that Nigerians should learn how to speak and write French. This paper therefore, endeavours to discuss the problems affecting the teaching of French language in Adamawa state in secondary schools.

Problems Affecting the Teaching of French in Secondary Schools

Several problems that have been identified as factors hindering the proper teaching and learning of French language in Adamawa state secondary schools. However, the paper will discuss only major ones. The problems among others include:

- a. lack of enough teachers,
- b. ineffective implementing of French particularly at the junior secondary school level,
- c. Finance Economic problems,
- d. Learners problems,
- e. Lack of infrastructure,
- f. Learning environment.
- g. Inadequate period

Lack of Enough Teachers

The shortage of French teachers has indeed contributed to the ineffective teaching and learning of French language in secondary schools in Adamawa state. On 12 February, 2016 the government has made French language a compulsory subject at all levels of the country's education system, from primary to tertiary students must offer courses in French language (Daily Trust, 2016). Several schools that do not teach French language at all, this is because teachers are not available. In some schools, where the language is taught, only one or two teachers are found handling the entire arms of junior secondary school and the senior secondary section in the case of those offering the subject at that level. In some cases, the teachers teaching French language are not well trained, probably; perhaps they are University graduates who do not possess professional qualities or skills to effectively teach the language. Some teachers who are trained, for instance the NCE and BA(Ed) or B.ED degree holders in French do not have the competence to impact. Some cannot therefore, even speak the language well, the question is that, how then can they impact the knowledge effectively? And also, it is observed that some of the teachers cannot motivate their students to learn French, this is because, and they themselves are not motivated due to poor pay and condition of service.

Ineffective Implementation of French

The ineffective implementation of French teaching and learning in particular at the junior secondary school level due to inadequate teachers and lack of political will on the part of the government have seriously hindered the effective teaching of French in secondary schools in Adamawa state.

Several schools have not been teaching French language at the junior secondary school level as stated in the National Policy in Education (2004), and yet the government has done nothing to remedy the situation by engaging more French teachers. Even though some of the private schools have fully implemented the policy, but they are very few in number. However, the teaching is effective it is only that, the few teachers that are available to teach the course are surely over worked. Consequently, they cannot deliver quality teaching since they cannot properly evaluate all the students due to their large number.

A Nigerian child learning French language has a lot of problems to face with. There is the problem of mother tongue interference to the second language. The Nigerian child first thinks in his mother tongue before translating it into the second language which is the English language, and finally re-translates his thoughts from the English to the French language. This adds to the child's inability to learn the language effectively. The child needs a patient and dedicated teacher who will help him overcome all his language defects.

Obanya (1976) talked about the drop-out rate of senior secondary school students in Nigeria. At the senior secondary school level, French curriculum at this stage involves more of analysis of language rather than the conversational aspects which are taught at the junior secondary level. At the senior secondary level the teacher's knowledge of the contents as well as the teacher-student rapport is very crucial for effective learning.

Finance Economic Problems

In the early sixties, scholarships were given to both students and French teachers to go France. This was to encourage them to study the language. At this time more people were attracted to teach French, but nowadays most French teachers are leaving the job of teaching for industries. If therefore, teachers are enough enumerated and granted appropriate motivation most of them would prefer teaching than to go for other jobs.

Learner Problems

The Nigerian child learning French has a lot of problems to cope with. There is the problem of mother tongue interference to the second language. The Nigerian child first of all thinks in his mother tongue language before translating it into the second language which is the English language, finally he has to re-translating his thoughts from the English language to the French language. This adds to the child's inability to learn the language effectively. Indeed, the child of nowadays needs patient and dedicated teacher who will help him.

According to Obanya (1976), that the rate of drop-out at the senior secondary school level in Nigeria, is that, French curriculum at this stage involves more of analysis of the language rather than the conversational aspects which taught at the junior secondary school. At the senior secondary school the teacher's knowledge of the content as well as the teacher-student rapport is very crucial for the effective learning of French language.

Lack of Infrastructures

Lack of the necessary infrastructures like language laboratory, internet facilities and textual materials are not been provided for secondary schools in Nigeria. Therefore, the absences of these materials have caused a lot of problems to secondary schools. And the result is half nakedness' on the part of the students produced. To suggest a solution to this problem, Igonor (ibid) observed that: "If the curriculum is to be well implemented, then the schools have to be well equipped with the necessary materials.

Learners Attitude

The negative attitude of secondary school students towards French language is also a major setback militating against qualitative teaching and learning of French language. The negative attitude is seen through their nonchalant attitude or show of no interest in the subject. The reason for this negative attitude is informed by their ignorance of the importance of French to them. It is because of the individual and the nation that Ahukana (1987), has this to say;

Les étudiants qui abandonnent
L'étude du Français le font parce
Qu'ils ne savent pas l'importance de
Cette langue au Nigéria.

Those that offer it, do so for the purpose of passing examination since the system has imposed the subject on them. Since there is no willingness, there is surely an enthusiasm to study the language beyond JSS or SSS levels.

Learning Environment

The linguistic environment where students are learning the French language is purely Anglophone. This makes it very difficult for them to be able to learn the language effectively. To make up for this, the Federal Government has established a French village at Badagry where the students of institutions of higher learning are going for acculturation. Meanwhile, the goal of the French village has not been achieved; this is because the students are now speaking either vernacular or Pidgin English right there in the village. It should however be noted that, the reason for establishing the centre is to have a place where the students will be kept for some time in an atmosphere which similar to that of francophone countries. Apart from the lecturers, majority of the administrative workers in the village do speak French language fluently. . This paper tries to identify some of the important factors that are necessary for the effective teaching and learning of the French language in Adamawa State.

Inadequate Period

There is also another problem of inadequate periods allocated to French in the schools timetable. In most of the schools visited except federal colleges, French is allocated only one period per week. Only a few schools allocated two periods to French. It is again, observed that most of the periods given to French are in the afternoon (i.e after short break) when both the students and teachers are all tired. As a matter of fact, no effective teaching and learning can take place in this kind of situations.

Professional and Practical Problem

French teachers are difficult to come by in most of the secondary schools in Adamawa State. Most of the teachers available are not trained to teach the French Language. Since teachers are very vital to the implementation of any curriculum, their preparation should be considered essential in any meaningful educational implementation strategy. It is a known fact that teachers in our schools avoid teaching some sections of the curriculum for example, Oral drills) on the pretext that our students have not attained the necessary

intellectual levels. Since it is the teacher who interprets the objectives and contents in the curriculum plans and manages the learning situation; their quality, quantity, willingness, self-motivation, interest, commitment and use of methodology are very essential for the success of the programme. The teacher interprets the objectives and content in the curriculum plans and manages the leaning situations. In order to have dedicated, competent and well trained French teachers for effective teaching, French teachers should be given pre-service and in-service training. Conference and workshops should also be organized for them. The teacher-pupil ratio should not be more than thirty students to a teacher. A cane where a French teacher teaches forty-five to fifty students in a class is not appropriate. When the classes are large, the curricula cannot be fully implemented Curriculum implementation in Adamawa State Schools is that which will be essentially beset with uncertainties, prejudice, fantasy, imprecision, limited resources and a high risk of probabilities (Adegoke, 1984), since its schools are congested to the extent that three or more schools are established in the same compound. Material/Infrastructural Resources Lack of material/infrastructure resources is a major constraint in the implementation of the French curriculum. Unavailability of teaching aids and language laboratory hinders effective teaching of the French language. The language laboratory is very essential in the teaching and learning of the French language. In the language laboratory the teacher is able to teach the students the basic skill with the help of tape recorders, video and radio cassettes.

Prospects

The problems identified perhaps give a ray of hope in terms of the teaching of French language in the secondary school French. The teaching of French language should provide the following situation as earlier identified are properly addressed. For instance an increased in time allocated from the present 35-40 minutes duration per week to about one to two hours per week would be more desirable. This will enable learners to attain mastery of the language. Surely, this would give brighter future prospects for the teaching and learning of the French language in Adamawa State Secondary Schools. Drills and practice are means of overcoming linguistic problems of mother tongue or first language interference. If emphasis is laid on drills and practice starting from the junior secondary school level, it would facilitate the future learning and teaching of French as a social language.

In order to alleviate the problem of shortage of qualified French teachers, it is advisable that the Adamawa State Ministry of Education should look towards for French teachers in Adamawa State Schools. If there are enough qualified French teachers, it may ginger the students to have more interest in the subject. Modern teaching aids like video films, tape recorders, films and projectors should be provided along with modern language laboratory to encourage the learning and teaching of French effectively.

Conclusion

The paper has identified and discussed those problems that are militating against quality teaching and learning of French language at the secondary school level in Adamawa state education system. The teaching and learning of French language at the secondary school

level should be taken seriously in order to arrest the situation. If these mentioned problems degenerate, we may not be able to actualize our dream of qualitative French language teaching and learning in Adamawa state. It is very important that Nigeria should study French language for international mutual understanding and cooperation. It is also essential for socio-economic and technological development of both Anglophone and the Francophone neighbours. Re-training of French teachers through seminars, workshops and in-service programmes would be necessary for the effective teaching and learning of the language. Equally, French language educationists should be invited to prepare textbooks for the students' integration of their learning experiences and their everyday activities.

Recommendations

The researcher is hereby making the following recommendations so as to improve upon the teaching and learning of French language in Nigeria. The Government should embrace a more positive attitude towards the French language learning. Learning of French language should be made compulsory right from the primary schools to secondary schools (both public and private) in the country.

Also, passing French at credit level must be made compulsory for all the Arts students (as English language is in many francophone countries). This will go a long way in imposing more seriousness in the students. Also, it will settle the problem of unemployment of the French graduates as majority of them will be employed as French teachers in the primary schools secondary schools. This will also increase the number of students enrolling for French language in the tertiary institutions. Both the teachers and the students of French language in the colleges of education should be motivated through scholarships to francophone countries. Also, modern French laboratories and libraries should be sited in all colleges of Education to facilitate the teaching and learning of the language. Government should as a matter of urgency, recruit French teachers in large number and deploy them to various secondary schools across the state. This can be done through the national teachers' scheme. Government needs to produce and provide schools with adequate infrastructural facilities such as desks, tables, chair etc. more classrooms should be constructed. The existing ones which are in bad condition should be renovated. Equally, good quality chalkboards be provided to enhance functional teaching and learning. The government should also subsidize the amount needed for the linguistic immersion programme in French Village Badagry Lagos. The government should also sensitize the authorities of Nigeria French language village, Badagry on the need to enforce the students to be speaking French in and outside the environment. If this is done, the students will have a francophone feeling in the society rather than speaking different mother tongues or Pidgin English. If all these recommendation could be followed, Nigeria will soon be a model among the other Anglophone nations in term of French language.

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